



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the Senate Environment and References Committee report:

The Koala – saving our national icon

NOVEMBER 2014

Government Response to 'The Koala – Saving Our National Icon'

Introduction

On 17 November 2010 the Senate referred the following matter to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry and report by 1 June 2011, with effect from the first day of sitting of 2011.

'The status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population, with particular reference to:

- a. the iconic status of the koala and the history of its management;
- b. estimates of koala populations and the adequacy of current counting methods;
- c. knowledge of koala habitat;
- d. threats to koala habitat such as logging, land clearing, poor management, attacks from feral and domestic animals, disease, roads and urban development;
- e. the listing of the koala under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*;
- f. the adequacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy;
- g. appropriate future regulation for the protection of koala habitat;
- h. interaction of state and federal laws and regulations; and
- i. any other related matters.'

On 22 September 2011 the Committee presented the report 'The Koala – Saving our National Icon'. Many of the recommendations in the report relate to actions in the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy (the Strategy). The linkages between the recommendations in the report and the actions in the strategy are tabulated for ease of reference at Attachment A. The Australian Government acknowledges that it has a lead role in the strategy, and will continue to work with State partners to the strategy on its implementation and annual reporting to Ministers on progress.

Additionally, on 30 April 2012 the Australian Government announced that the koala population of Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory would be listed as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This is a significant step in the protection of the listed koala species, and will ensure that any development likely to have a significant impact on the listed koala species must be referred for assessment under national environmental law. A Recovery Plan will be developed for these koala populations to commence following the expiration of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy in 2014. The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to reduce duplication in environmental approvals while maintaining high environmental standards, through its 'One-Stop Shop' for environmental approvals.

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to this report. The response to each recommendation contains a statement as to whether the Australian Government agrees, agrees in part, agrees in principle, or notes the Committee's recommendations. The meanings of each statement are included for reference below. These statement meanings have been developed by the Department of the Environment for the purposes of this response.

Agreed - The Australian Government agrees with the recommendation and has already, or will in the future, take the recommended (or similar) action. This is not a commitment to providing additional funding.

Agreed in part - The Australian Government agrees with part of the recommendation and has already, or will in the future, take the recommended (or similar) action in relation to that part only.

Agreed in principle - The Australian Government agrees with, but is unable to implement the recommendation due to the costs involved and a lack of identified funding.

Noted - The Australian Government notes the recommendation. In some cases, the recommendation relates to State/Territory government responsibilities, not Australian Government responsibilities.

Not agreed – The Australian Government does not agree with the recommendation.

Responses

Recommendation 1

- 2.144 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into the genetic diversity of the koala including a population viability assessment of the southern koala and determining priority areas for conservation nationally.**

Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government recognises that research into the genetic diversity of the koala would be beneficial and notes that work aimed at determining priority areas for koala conservation is underway. National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 action 6.02 recognises and allows for the identification and prioritisation of knowledge gaps in koala research. The Australian Government is a partner in the Strategy. Potential research into the genetic diversity of the koala will be considered and prioritised amongst other competing research priorities. Input will be sought from the Koala Research Network (KRN) on determining priority research topics within the discipline of koala population genetics. If it is determined to be a research priority, funding may be available through funding avenues such as the Australian Research Council.

The Australian Government is already undertaking work that supports this recommendation, including:

- The Australian Centre for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (ACEAS) is a facility of the Terrestrial Ecosystems Research Network, supported by the Australian Government through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) and the Super Science Initiative. ACEAS is providing funding sourced from NCRIS and the Queensland state government to the recently-formed Koala Research Network for two workshops under the project titled Conserving Koalas in the 21st Century: Synthesising the dynamics of Australia's Koala populations. The Koala Research Network is a collaboration of over 60 highly-qualified koala researchers who aim to provide robust science to inform sustainable koala conservation and management.

The first workshop was held on 20-23 February 2012, bringing together key researchers from around Australia to share data and knowledge on current and emerging trends in regional koala populations. The second workshop held on 18-21 June 2012 focussed on areas where no data were available and where there is uncertainty regarding population trends. The outcomes of both workshops are publicly available (<http://www.aceas.org.au>) and provide guidance to determine priority areas for conservation, or further research.

- Since 2002, the Australian Research Council has awarded approximately \$3.3 million in funding under the National Competitive Grants Programme to eleven projects involving research directly and indirectly related to koala genetic diversity and koala disease. Projects relating to genetic diversity of koalas are noted below.

Project Id	Start year	Administering organisation	All Investigators	Project title	Funding over project life
LP120200630	2012	The University of Sydney	Prof HW Raadsma, Dr KR Zenger, Dr KA Leigh, Ms J Tobey	Addressing koala conservation management needs: applying novel genomic methods and assessing ecological exchangeability across the species range	\$115,218
LP0882090	2008	The University of Queensland	Dr CA McAlpine, Dr JR Rhodes, Dr GS Baxter; Dr B Price, Dr AJ Bradley, Dr DH Lunney, Dr LM Seabrook	The conservation of widely distributed species: implications of differences between western and eastern koala populations	\$459,804
LP0455785	2004	The University of Queensland	Dr SD Johnston, Dr FN Carrick Dr GW Lundie-Jenkins, Prof WV Holt	The preservation and management of Koala genetic diversity using reproductive biotechnology and molecular genetics: A model for endangered Australian marsupials	\$318,424

Recommendation 2

2.147 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund a properly designed, funded and implemented national koala monitoring and evaluation program across the full range of the koala.

Government response: Agreed in principle

There is value in monitoring the condition and integrity (for example, degree of connectedness) of known koala habitat in order to inform management and protection approaches. However, a species-specific approach to monitoring across the distribution of an entire widespread species is difficult, including in relation to unintended biases in data collection.

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 actions 1.06-1.08, 6.02 and 6.05 are consistent with this recommendation. The Australian Government is a partner in the Strategy. Jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking programmes and projects to support these Strategy actions. For example, Queensland has developed a koala population survey protocol, and a habitat assessment protocol. New South Wales is undertaking work to develop consistent protocols that enable population numbers or density to be compared between the same place at different times and between different habitats. Meetings of the Strategy's implementation team allow for knowledge sharing amongst Strategy partners.

Recommendation 3

2.153 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a nationally coordinated and integrated program for population monitoring of threatened species and other culturally, evolutionary and/or economically significant species.

Government response: Agreed in part

See also Recommendation 2.

The Australian Government is establishing a national coordinated system for monitoring of the state of the environment including biodiversity. The Department is developing a set of environmental indicators as part of the National Plan for Environmental Information initiative. This will build capacity to monitor, detect and predict change in the environment and maintain this capacity over the long-term. Monitoring of the status of biodiversity, including threatened species, will be considered as one of the environmental indicators that could be used for monitoring of the state of the environment.

The Australian Government appointed a Threatened Species Commissioner on 1 July 2014 to promote the recovery of threatened species. The Commissioner provides advice on priority actions needed to recover threatened species including identifying areas where additional research, such as population monitoring, may be needed.

Several programmes and initiatives that contribute to the overall information base for threatened species that support this recommendation are already being undertaken by the Australian Government. These include:

- The Commonwealth and state and territory governments through the former Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council agreed to establish a national long-term biodiversity monitoring and reporting system as part of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–2030. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments are collaborating to develop a monitoring system for a number of national conservation related strategies.
- A number of environmental monitoring projects within the former National Environmental Research Programme are providing a better understanding of a range of aspects relevant to threatened and other indicator species management. These projects will therefore help to establish an enhanced environmental information base, which will help address this recommendation.

- Monitoring of populations are key actions identified in national recovery plans for threatened species prepared under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- Work under the National Plan for Environmental Information (NPEI) initiative commenced in July 2010. It is a whole-of-government initiative designed to coordinate and prioritise the way the Australian Government collects, manages and uses environmental information. As such it represents a long-term approach to building and improving Australia's environmental information base.

Recommendation 4

2.155 The committee recommends that the Australian Government assist the koala research community and interested organisations to work towards a standardised set of methodologies for estimating koala populations.

Government response: Agreed

The Australian Government agrees to facilitate the development of national guidelines through the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy Implementation Team. Additionally, the Australian Government will approach the Koala Research Network to seek their input in informing the national guidelines.

The Australian government notes the Committee's statement that 'this is not an endorsement of a single methodology to be used across the entire country, but instead a proposal on an agreed set of methodologies, with each to be used in an agreed set of circumstances'.¹

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 actions 1.06 and 6.05 are consistent with this recommendation. The Australian Government is a partner in the Strategy. The jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking significant programmes and projects in line with the strategy to support these actions, and this recommendation. For example, Queensland has developed a koala population survey protocol, and a habitat assessment protocol. New South Wales is undertaking work to develop consistent protocols that enable population numbers or density to be compared between the same place at different times and between different habitats.

The Koala Research Network is a collaboration of over 60 highly-qualified koala researchers who aim to provide robust science to inform sustainable koala conservation and management. The Network has hosted two workshops in 2012 to share data and knowledge on current and emerging trends in regional koala populations.

These workshops have been funded through the Australian Centre for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (ACEAS), which is a facility of the Terrestrial Ecosystems Research Network, supported by the Australian Government through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) and the Super Science Initiative. ACEAS funding for the workshops is sourced from NCRIS and the Queensland state government.

There are already a range of well established methods published in the scientific literature on koalas. However, the applicability of the method used is dependent on the type of habitat, the

¹ Para 2.154 of the Senate Inquiry Report

objective of the study and the resources available. There has also been disagreement between researchers even where these prior requirements are known and thus there is a need for coordinating expert input to standardise the methodology to be applied in particular circumstances. It should also be noted that in the case of longer term longitudinal studies, the value of existing data can be reduced if methodological consistency is not maintained.

Recommendation 5

2.160 The committee recommends that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee provide clearer information to the Environment Minister in all future threatened species listing advices, including species population information, and that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee review its advice to the Minister on the listing of the koala in light of the findings of this inquiry.

Government response: Agreed

The Department notes that this recommendation is broader than koalas, and the complete species population data are not always available. When assessing a species for possible listing, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee considers available information relevant to the criteria for listing. Given the regulatory implications of listing a species, and the importance of being soundly based, the Committee seeks sufficient evidence to justify advice that a species should be listed.

The koala's range spans four states and the Australian Capital Territory and includes habitat from semi-arid range lands to tall, mountainous forest. Its status has been affected by a multitude of threats that vary across its range and habitats. Consequently, the initial 30 September 2010 listing advice prepared by the Committee was detailed and complex.

The then Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities wrote to the Committee requesting that it provide further advice on the listing of the koala in light of the findings of this inquiry.

In the Committee's revised advice this recommendation was taken into account and additional information on the population status of the koala was provided. The then Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities announced on 30 April 2012 that he had decided to list koala populations in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Recommendation 6

- 3.127 The committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake habitat mapping across the koala's national range, including the identification of priority areas of koala conservation, with a view to listing important habitat under the provisions of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government agrees in part with Recommendations 6. The National Environmental Research Programme project noted below addressed these recommendations in part, by providing a basis for effectively prioritising further on-ground survey work. Additional funding would be required to enable habitat mapping and identification of priority areas for koala conservation to be undertaken across the koala's national range.

The National Environmental Research Programme's Environmental Decisions Hub was given a grant of \$300,000 from the Department (with additional contributions from the University of Queensland, and CSIRO) to undertake remote sensing work to provide rapid information on the distribution of koalas across eastern Australia, as a basis for effectively prioritising any further on-ground surveys.

Listing of a species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* affords a higher level of protection for important habitat of the species. Any action likely to have a significant impact on the koala and important habitat for the species is likely to require assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Habitat considered critical for the survival of the species can be registered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* at the time of making and adopting a recovery plan. The decision takes into account the potential conservation benefit of listing the habitat. The National Koala Recovery Plan is currently being developed and will consider the whether there is a need to register critical habitat for the koala to meet the objectives of the recovery plan.

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 actions 1.01-1.09, and 6.01 are consistent with these recommendations. The Australian Government is a partner in the Strategy. Jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking programmes and projects to support these actions. An example of a significant planned project that will support both the Strategy actions and this recommendation was the National Environmental Research Programme's research as described above.

Recommendation 7

3.129 The committee recommends that the habitat maps be used to identify and protect important habitat in known koala ranges.

Government response: Agreed in part

See also Recommendation 6.

The Australian Government agrees with the intent of Recommendation 7, noting that the recommendation is linked to Recommendation 6. If habitat maps are produced in accordance with Recommendation 6, the Australian Government agrees that they should be used to help protect the koala across its known range.

Recommendation 8

3.131 The committee recommends that the Australian Government review its land holdings which contain koala habitat and consider biodiversity, and specifically koala populations, in the management and sale of Commonwealth land.

Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government agrees in part with Recommendation 8, as koala habitat is already actively considered as part of the management of Commonwealth land where it has the status of a matter of national environmental significance. As such koalas on Commonwealth land are indirectly afforded protection.

The recent listing of the koala has increased the certainty and transparency of this protection. The Australian Government does not agree to review all of its land holdings.

The Department of Defence (Defence) has custodianship of large areas of natural land, often with high biodiversity value. Potential koala habitat occurs on many areas of land under Defence management. The species has been recorded on or immediately adjacent to at least 16 larger Defence establishments and at least five smaller urban depots or bases with essentially urban habitat. Transient individuals or low density populations are likely to occur at a number of other sites.

Defence is bound by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and has a stated goal in its Environmental Strategic Plan (2010-2014) of best practice environmental management. The management of biodiversity values on Defence land is taken very seriously, and is embodied in the Defence Environmental Management System. This system implements the recommendations of numerous internal and regional management documents, including koala-specific habitat management plans where relevant. In addition, areas of Defence land with significant biodiversity values are listed on the Commonwealth, National and World Heritage Lists for their natural heritage values to ensure that the legacy of high quality natural habitats is preserved for future generations. Thus the Committee's recommendation to "consider biodiversity, and specifically koala populations" is already inherent in management of Defence land.

The recent listing of the koala under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* has increased the importance of the koala and its habitats within existing Defence planning and land management frameworks.

Where Defence land possessing natural or heritage values is surplus to requirements and is planned for sale, environmental and heritage management plans are prepared to inform and support on-going protection of these values by the new owners. These plans form part of the due diligence material provided to purchasers and where appropriate are also included in the contract of sale documentation. The Commonwealth Department of the Environment is notified, and where required to preserve specific values, binding environmental covenants also form part of the contract of sale. For listed areas of natural heritage this is a requirement under sections 324ZA *Protecting National Heritage values of places sold or leased* and 341ZE *Protecting Commonwealth Heritage values of places sold or leased* of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

In respect of airport land, any koala populations or habitat already present at the leased federal airports are most likely already identified and managed appropriately. Under the current regulatory framework, airport Master Plans need to include identification of any areas that are environmentally significant (ss71(h)(ii) of the *Airports Act 1996*). Furthermore, regulation 5.02B(2)(d) of the *Airports Regulations 1997*, require that an Airport Lessee Company must address its policies and targets regarding the identification and conservation of objects or matters that have natural value.

Recommendation 9

3.134 The committee recommends that the Australian Government actively consider options for recognition and funding for private land holders for the conservation of koala habitat.

Government response: Agreed

The Australian Government agrees with Recommendation 9, and notes that the Committee's recommendation generally aligns with the aims of existing programmes.

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 actions 1.03 and 4.03 are consistent with this recommendation. The jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking significant programmes and projects in line with the Strategy to support these actions, and this recommendation. For example, Queensland's Koala Nature Refuges Programme assists landholders to restore koala habitat on private land and protect it for future generations. New South Wales has incentive based mechanisms including voluntary conservation agreements, property vegetation plans, and biobanking.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of conserving our unique biodiversity. Environmental programmes for biodiversity conservation include the 20 million Trees programme and the Green Army initiative. The Threatened Species Commissioner consults on, and raises awareness and support for, threatened species in the community. The Commissioner works with all levels of government, scientists, the non-profit sector, industry and the community to ensure that efforts and investment to protect our native species are better coordinated, better targeted and more effective.

Recommendation 10

4.44 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into koala disease, including the viability of vaccination programs and the effect of changes in leaf chemistry.

Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government recognises the value in funding research into koala disease. Existing programmes already provide funding that support research into koala disease. In addition, future funding may also be available through the Australian Research Council should other disease projects be successful through the usual competitive grants process.

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 actions 3.03 and 6.03 are consistent with this recommendation. The jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking programmes and projects to support these actions, and this recommendation. For example, Queensland has established the Koala Disease Research fund to support high quality research into mitigating the effects of disease on wild populations of koalas. New South Wales is undertaking an assessment of the prevalence and cause of Chlamydia in koalas on the Liverpool Plains and Victoria is undertaking disease monitoring.

Since 2002, the Australian Research Council has awarded approximately \$3.3 million in funding under the National Competitive Grants Programme to eleven projects involving research directly and indirectly related to koala genetic diversity and koala disease. Projects relating to koala disease are noted below.

Project Id	Start year	Administering organisation	All Investigators	Project title	Funding over project life
DP130102066	2013	Queensland University of Technology	Prof Peter Timms; Dr Adam Polkinghorne; Asst Prof Garry Myers	Understanding the origin, epidemiology and transmission threat of chlamydial infections between Australian native animals and livestock	\$360,000
DP120104611	2012	Queensland University of Technology	Prof Dietmar W Hutmacher, Prof Kenneth W Beagley, Prof Peter Timms, Dr Timothy R Dargaville, Dr Siamak Saifzadeh, Dr Ferry Melchels, Prof Dr Juergen Groll	Convergence of biomaterials and immunology - a technology platform for delayed burst release of vaccines	\$270,000
LP120200051	2012	Queensland University of Technology	Prof P Timms, Prof KW Beagley, Dr AM Polkinghorne	Development of a safe and immunogenic anti-chlamydia vaccine for the koala	\$465,000

Project Id	Start year	Administering organisation	All Investigators	Project title	Funding over project life
LP0990147	2009	Queensland University of Technology	Prof P Timms, Prof KW Beagley	Development of an anti-Chlamydia vaccine for the koala	\$290,000
LP0989701	2009	The University of Queensland	A/Prof J Meers, A/Prof PR Young, Dr DP Higgins	Retroviral invasion of the koala genome: prevalence, transmission and role in immunosuppressive disease	\$240,000
DP0879906	2008	The University of Queensland	A/Prof PR Young, Dr J Meers	Retroviral invasion of the koala genome: Where did it come from and what is it doing now that it's there?	\$255,000
LP0560572	2005	The University of Sydney	Dr MB Krockenberger, Mr DP Higgins, Prof PJ Canfield, Dr M Govendir, Dr S Hemsley, Dr R Malik	Prevention and treatment of chlamydiosis and cryptococcosis in koalas	\$392,262
LP0453692	2004	The University of Queensland	Dr J Meers, Dr PR Young, Prof JS Mackenzie, Dr LD Bromham	Understanding the role of a newly recognised retrovirus in the induction of cancer and immunosuppressive disease in koalas	\$130,000

Recommendation 11

4.46 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund the Koala Research Network's request for a Research Liaison Officer.

Government response: Not agreed

The priority for funding is for on-ground koala conservation research rather than administrative positions of this nature.

Action 6.04 of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 requires the development of a network to support koala research. The establishment of the Koala Research Network supports this action.

Recommendation 12

4.77 The committee recommends that the Australia Government consider further wild dog control options in priority koala areas.

Government response: Noted

The Australian Government recognises that wild dogs can have a detrimental impact on Australian wildlife and notes that action 3.02 of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 is consistent with this recommendation.

The on-ground management of wild dogs is the responsibility of the relevant land manager, which will usually be the relevant state or territory government or private landholders. On Commonwealth owned or managed land, management of wild dogs is an Australian Government responsibility. The Australian Government supports control of wild dogs where the impact is having a negative effect on threatened species, such as the koala.

The research programmes of the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) includes work on the control and management of wild dogs and the CRC has provided input into the Senate Inquiry. The Invasive Animals CRC received \$29.6 million in Commonwealth funding from 2005 to 2012 to counteract the environmental, social and economic impacts of invasive pests and animals, including wild dogs, through the development and application of new technologies and integration of strategic management approaches. The CRC was awarded additional funding of \$19.7 million in the 14th CRC selection round to extend the work of the CRC to address the broad impacts of a range of invasive and pest animal species from 2012 through to 2017. The research of the CRC over this period includes work on the control and management of wild dogs.

As noted, National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 action 3.02 is consistent with this recommendation. The Australian Government is a partner in the Strategy. Jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking programmes and projects to support these Strategy actions. For example, New South Wales is undertaking a fox and dog baiting programme throughout areas sustaining koalas in Morton National Park and Bungonia State Recreation Area, Biamanga National Park, Bermagui Nature Reserve, Murrah and Mumbulla State Forests and in Nature Reserves sustaining koalas in North East Monaro.

Recommendation 13

4.90 The committee recommends that local and state governments:

- **introduce appropriate speed limits in priority koala areas; and**
- **that where appropriate, build or retrofit underpasses or overpasses for major roads in priority koala areas as well as installing koala fencing adjacent to major roads.**

Government response: Noted

The Australian Government agrees that appropriate speed limits and underpasses, overpasses and fencing around roads in priority koala areas would be beneficial, however this recommendation relates to state and local government responsibilities.

As the koala is now a listed threatened species, the actions noted in the recommendation are potential actions that may be included as threat mitigation actions, and may become conditions of some *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* approved proposals. As part of the 'One-Stop Shop' commitment the Australian Government is working with state and territory governments on a range of administrative streamlining measures, including the development of standard outcome-focussed conditions.

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 action 3.01 is consistent with this recommendation and State governments are undertaking a range of measures in line with action 3.01. For example, Queensland is trialling retrofitting of wildlife crossings and underpasses, and South Australia has developed a 'Koalas, Vehicles and Roads' factsheet.

Recommendation 14

4.92 The committee recommends where the Australian Government provides funding for roads or other infrastructure in or adjacent to koala habitat, it be contingent on the provision of adequate koala protections.

Government response: Noted

See also Recommendation 15.

While the Australian Government provides funding for roads and other infrastructure, the responsibility for planning and delivery of road and infrastructure projects is with the relevant state, territory or local governments.

While still primarily the responsibility of state, territory and local governments, as a matter of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, any action that is likely to have a significant impact on the listed koala will need to be assessed and approved under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* before it can proceed. The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to reduce duplication in environmental assessments and approvals while maintaining high environmental standards, through its 'One-Stop Shop' for environmental approvals. The policy is being implemented through bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and each state and territory which will accredit state assessment and approval processes and remove the need for a separate Commonwealth approval for those processes.

National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 action 3.01 is consistent with this recommendation. The jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking programmes and projects in line with the Strategy to support these actions, as noted at the response to Recommendation 13.

Recommendation 15

- 4.94 The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the states to develop new national guidelines to ensure that all new roads and upgrades in or adjacent to koala habitat are koala-friendly.**

Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government agrees in part with Recommendation 15. The Guide to Road design outlined below, while not koala specific, addresses this recommendation in part.

The Australian Government, working with states and territories through Austroads, the association of Australian and New Zealand road transport and traffic authorities, has participated in the development of guidelines that give consideration to fauna management around roads. Austroads publishes a Guide to Road Design, which provides guidance to designers in the production of safe, economical and efficient road designs. Part 6B of the Guide to Road Design contains guidance on fauna management within road reservations, including the protection of habitats, provision of fauna crossings (underpasses, overpasses and culverts) and provision of exclusion or guide fencing for fauna.

As noted at Recommendation 14, National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 action 3.01 is relevant to this recommendation. The jurisdictions involved in the Strategy are undertaking programmes and projects in line with the Strategy to support these actions.

As noted at Recommendation 14, while the Australian Government provides funding for roads and other infrastructure, the responsibility for planning and delivery of road and infrastructure projects is with the relevant state, territory or local governments. As a matter of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, any action that is likely to have a significant impact for the listed koala will need to be assessed and approved under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* before it can proceed. Approval for such actions would only be granted if the impacts are able to be avoided, mitigated and/or offset to acceptable levels.

Additionally, the Department provided project funding through the former National Environmental Research Programme that aimed to provide tools to better manage the impacts of human activities on koalas, including car strike. This project is being undertaken by the University of Queensland with assistance from the New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage. Final synthesis reports and peer review publications are being reviewed by the scientific community.

Recommendation 16

- 5.78** The committee recommends that the Environment Minister consider the evidence provided to this inquiry when making his final decision on listing the koala as a threatened species.

Recommendation 17

- 5.82** The committee recommends the Environment Minister consider options to improve the conservation status of the diverse and rapidly declining koala populations in New South Wales and Queensland to ensure a nationally resilient population is maintained. These options include listing the koala as vulnerable under the EPBC Act in areas where populations have declined significantly or are at risk of doing so.

Proposed response: Agreed

The former Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities wrote to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee on 31 October 2011 requesting that it provide further advice on the listing of the koala in light of the findings of this inquiry.

After receiving the revised advice, the then Minister requested further information in relation to the precise boundaries of where koala populations are dwindling. On 30 April 2012 the koala of Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory was listed as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This protection will ensure that any development likely to impact on the listed koala must be assessed and approved under the Act. Interim referral guidelines, aimed at providing proponents with a clearer understanding on how and when they should seek approval for their activities under national environmental law, have been developed. The finalised referral guidelines will be available on the Department of the Environment's website by the end of 2014.

A Recovery Plan will be developed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* for the listed koala, to commence following the expiration of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy in 2014.

Recommendation 18

- 6.46** The committee recommends that an independent external review be conducted on the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy to monitor the adequacy of progress. The review should assess and report on the progress made at the strategy's midpoint.
- 6.47** The review must include an assessment of the:
- strategy's implementation to date and prospects into the future;
 - strategy's effectiveness in stabilising koala numbers in areas of declining population, and in reducing the pressure of overabundant populations;
 - strategy's level of ambition, including whether new elements are required; and
 - adequacy of the Commonwealth's and the states' respective roles and funding commitments.

Proposed response: Agreed in part

The Strategy contains a requirement for an independent review within five years. The Australian Government agrees that an independent external review of the Strategy be conducted on the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy to include an assessment of, but not limited by the four identified criteria in 6.47. The review will be undertaken near the end of the Strategy rather than at the midpoint as it is intended that the results of the review will be used to assist in identifying the requirements of a Recovery Plan for the combined populations of Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The Recovery Plan will commence following the expiration of the Strategy in 2014.

Recommendation 19

6.52 The committee recommends that the Australian Government adequately resource the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy, and ensure that it is properly implemented through committing to a much stronger leadership role.

Proposed response: Agreed in principle

The Australian Government agrees with the intent of Recommendation 19. As identified in the Strategy, implementation is a shared responsibility of both the Australian Government and State Strategy partners and would require the contribution of State staff and resources.

The Australian Government has made significant investments in areas that support Strategy actions, and these recommendations, noted in the responses to Recommendations 1, 3, 6, 9 and 10. The Australian Government also provides secretariat support to Strategy partners, and will continue to undertake this role for the duration of the Strategy. The Australian Government acknowledges that it has a leadership role for the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy, and will continue to work with State and Territory partners on its implementation until the expiration of the Strategy at the end of 2014.

**Senate Inquiry Recommendation and National Koala Conservation and Management
Strategy 2009-2014 Interaction**

Senate Inquiry Recommendation No	Recommendation	Related Strategy Action No	Strategy Action
Recommendation 1	The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund <u>research</u> into the genetic diversity of the koala including a population viability assessment of the southern koala and determining priority areas for conservation nationally.	6.01	Develop techniques for, and undertake, broad-scale remote sensing to identify areas for further analysis of koala habitat and distribution
Recommendation 2	The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund a properly designed, funded and implemented national koala <u>monitoring</u> and evaluation program across the full range of the koala.	1.06	Develop standard monitoring/habitat assessment protocols
		1.07	Establish a national database of population distribution and density and habitat mapping data
		1.08	Establish or continue surveying and monitoring programmes
		6.02	Identify and prioritise knowledge gaps in koala research
		6.05	Develop methods for enabling comparison of disparate data on koala distribution and abundance
Recommendation 3	The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a nationally coordinated and integrated program for <u>population monitoring</u> of threatened species and other culturally, evolutionary and/or economically significant species.	N/A (broader than koalas)	N/A
Recommendation 4	The committee recommends that the Australian Government assist the koala research community and interested organisations to work towards a standardised set of <u>methodologies</u> for estimating koala populations.	1.06	Develop standard monitoring/habitat assessment protocols
		6.05	Develop methods for enabling comparison of disparate data on koala distribution and abundance

Senate Inquiry Recommendation No	Recommendation	Related Strategy Action No	Strategy Action
Recommendation 5	The committee recommends that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee provide clearer information to the Environment Minister in all future threatened species listing advices, including species population information, and that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee review its advice to the Minister on the listing of the koala in light of the findings of this inquiry.	N/A	N/A
Recommendation 6	The committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake habitat mapping across the koala's national range, including the identification of priority areas of koala conservation, with a view to listing important habitat under the provisions of the <i>Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> .	All Category 1 actions	Habitat identification and protection actions
		6.01	Develop techniques for, and undertake broad-scale remote sensing to identify areas for further analysis of koala habitat and distribution
Recommendation 7	The committee recommends that the habitat maps be used to identify and protect important habitat in known koala ranges.	All Category 1 actions	Habitat identification and protection actions
		6.01	Develop techniques for, and undertake broad-scale remote sensing to identify areas for further analysis of koala habitat and distribution
Recommendation 8	The committee recommends that the Australian Government review its land holdings which contain koala habitat and consider biodiversity, and specifically koala populations, in the management and sale of Commonwealth land .	1.02	Assess, develop and implement options for protecting priority koala habitat on public lands using legislation, covenants or agreements, or by new acquisition of koala habitat
Recommendation 9	The committee recommends that the Australian Government actively consider options for recognition and funding for private land holders for the conservation of koala habitat.	1.03	Assess, develop and implement options for protecting koala habitat on private lands
		4.03	Extend community involvement in koala conservation and engagement with government
Recommendation 10	The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into koala disease, including the viability of vaccination programmes and the effect of changes in leaf chemistry.	3.03	Assess and develop appropriate methods to reduce vulnerability of populations to disease

Senate Inquiry Recommendation No	Recommendation	Related Strategy Action No	Strategy Action
		6.03	Identify directions for research on effects of climate change on koalas
Recommendation 11	The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund the Koala Research Network's request for a Research Liaison Officer .	6.04	Facilitate development of a network to support koala research
Recommendation 12	The committee recommends that the Australia Government consider further wild dog control options in priority koala areas.	3.02	Implement strategies which minimise the impacts of dogs on koala populations in both urban and peri-urban areas
Recommendation 13	The committee recommends that local and state governments: - introduce appropriate speed limits in priority koala areas; and - that where appropriate, build or retrofit underpasses or overpasses for major roads in priority koala areas as well as installing koala fencing adjacent to major roads.	3.01	Develop appropriate national guidelines for road design in koala habitat
Recommendation 14	The committee recommends that where the Australian Government provides funding for roads or other infrastructure in or adjacent to koala habitat, it be contingent on the provision of adequate koala protections.	3.01	Develop appropriate national guidelines for road design in koala habitat
Recommendation 15	The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the states to develop new national guidelines to ensure that all new roads and upgrades in or adjacent to koala habitat are koala-friendly.	3.01	Develop appropriate national guidelines for road design in koala habitat
Recommendation 16	The committee recommends that the Environment Minister consider the evidence provided to this inquiry when making his final decision on listing the koala as a threatened species.	N/A	N/A
Recommendation 17	The committee recommends the Environment Minister consider options to improve the conservation status of the diverse and rapidly declining koala populations in New South Wales and Queensland to ensure a nationally resilient population is maintained. These options include listing the koala as vulnerable under the EPBC Act in areas where populations have declined significantly or are at risk of doing so.	N/A	N/A

Senate Inquiry Recommendation No	Recommendation	Related Strategy Action No	Strategy Action
<p>Recommendation 18</p>	<p>The committee recommends that an <u>independent external review</u> be conducted on the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy to monitor the adequacy of progress. The review should assess and report on the progress made at the strategy's midpoint. The <u>review</u> must include an assessment of the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strategy's implementation to date and prospects into the future; - strategy's effectiveness in stabilising koala numbers in areas of declining population, and in reducing the pressure of overabundant populations; - strategy's level of ambition, including whether new elements are required; and - adequacy of the Commonwealth's and the states' respective roles and funding commitments. 	<p>N/A</p>	<p>An independent external reviewer will be contracted to review and evaluate the strategy and its implementation within five years.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19</p>	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government adequately <u>resource the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy</u>, and ensure that it is properly implemented through committing to a much stronger leadership role.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>