

Wild dogs and their impacts on Koala's a very real threat

A Submission to Senate Committee Inquiry into the Status, Health and Sustainability of Australia's Koala population.

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Greg Mifsud, National Wild Dog Facilitator,
Invasive Animals CRC

Wild dogs have been clearly identified as a vertebrate pest of National Significance in the Australian Pest Animal Strategy, due primarily to their impacts on livestock. Their impacts on native fauna is less understood, However despite this limited information the NSW Scientific Committee has identified predation by feral dogs (and wild dog hybrids) as a key threatening process to rare native fauna including the Koala. The threat of wild dog predation on Koala populations has not been clearly identified however anecdotal evidence from stock attacks around the country would indicate that wild dog densities and their distribution is increasing across the country and therefore possibly causing significant impacts on koala populations from range of environments. The impact of feral animals on Koala populations has been identified under section (d) of the Terms of Reference for the Senate Committee Inquiry and I would like to raise the issue that wild dogs, their hybrids and feral dogs that exist throughout the known distribution of the Koala may in fact be a contributing factor to their decline in some areas of their range.

The Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) has publicly raised concerns over declining Koala populations in Western Queensland and while drought has been considered the primary reason for this decline recently acquired information on wild dog density may indicate predation by wild dogs as a factor in their decline. The last survey for koalas in the Murweh Shire Council area was conducted by University of Queensland researchers and AKF in August 2009. This survey failed to yield the sighting of a single Koala from locations where they were once commonly observed. During the same period the Murweh Shire Council Wild Dog Committee initiated a large scale wild dog control programme across the shire including areas previously surveyed for koalas. In short over 1400 wild dogs have been trapped from the immediate areas surveyed for Koalas from August 2009 to the end January this year. This does not include wild dogs killed during the three coordinated wild dog baiting programmes held during the same period. While not previously considered a threat, the AKF and researchers involved in the Koala survey now have genuine concerns that wild dogs may in fact be impacting on these populations directly through predation, but their presence in such high densities may be modifying Koala behaviour and impacting on the health of individuals by limiting there movement on the ground between habitat trees.

In South East Queensland wild dog populations exist in bushland on the outskirts of suburbs within Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast. These dogs often go un-noticed and residents regularly mistake them for domestic dogs without collars; however their impacts are readily known amongst local governments in these areas where they are required to respond to reports of attacks by wild dogs on domestic pets and livestock. Australian Koala Foundation and Queensland parks and Wildlife data on koala deaths from these areas show that mortality due to dog attack are far more frequent in the western and northern areas of the greater Brisbane area where wild dogs are prevalent. Given the general publics ignorance of wild dogs living within some areas of Brisbane and surrounds it would be very easy to blame domestic dogs for every koala found mauled by a dog. While threats to koala habitat such as logging, land clearing, poor management, disease, roads and urban development are all contributing factors to the decline of koala populations with South East Queensland it is possible that wild dogs that occur throughout the bushland areas in the region could be impacting upon individuals and limiting recruitment and dispersal koala through predation in

addition to these already recognised threats.

I believe that wild dogs may be causing significant impacts on already struggling populations of Koalas across Queensland and eastern Australia. The information on wild dog density and distribution coming from coordinated wild dog control programmes and the subsequent decline of Koala populations and injury or death of individuals is of genuine concern to the Australian Koala Foundation. This potential threat has not been seriously considered to date however I on behalf of the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group would like to formally raise the issue with the Senate Standing Committee for consideration and believe that further investigation is required to look at practical management outcomes.