

The Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala

Submission by Paulette Oldfield

Introduction

I am a resident of Shailer Park, Qld, south of Brisbane. I am an active conservationist and have grave concerns for the future of our wildlife. The area I live in, Logan, Sth East Qld, houses the largest urban Koala habitat in Australia. I am employed as a Manager at a major financial institution and am a mother of two teenage girls. My interest in this inquiry is due to my concern over the amount of development that has been occurring in south east Queensland and the blatant disregard of the Koala's habitat and the Koala's well being. I believe this will have a detrimental effect on not just the wildlife of South East Queensland but the biodiversity and ultimate health and well being of the community at large.

I have been heavily involved in campaigning against the destruction of the Koala's habitat for approximately 9 years and during this time it has become apparent to me that neither the federal, state or local governments have robust or clear policies or strategies to help protect the future of the Koala in south east Queensland. I believe that if we protect the Koala, the flag ship species of our country, it will have enormous benefits to the wildlife that live under and around this iconic animal that deserve just as much protection.

Purpose of this Submission

The purpose of this submission is to provide further information, evidence and observations in relation to the following terms of reference:

- The iconic status of the koala and the history of its management;
- Estimates of koala populations and the adequacy of current counting methods;
- Knowledge of koala habitat;
- Threats to koala habitat such as logging, land clearing, poor management, attacks from feral and domestic animals, disease and roads, and urban development;
- The listing of the koala under the EPBC Act;
- The adequacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy;
- Appropriate future regulation for the protection of koala habitat;
- Interaction of state and federal laws and regulations; and
- Any other related matters.

Evidence and Observations

1. The Decline of Koala Population in Logan, South East Queensland

Koalas are at risk because:

- Our government/s both Local and State do not have robust policies in place to protect the future of the Koala or it's habitat.
- They're primary focus and support has clearly been towards the development industry and the construction of high density housing developments with no regard to the environment or the Koala. Even when they have been provided proof of Koalas residing in certain areas, they (government) have totally ignored the evidence and the pleas of the community and have sided with the development industry. (see attached media articles)
- A development was approved by my local council in Daisy Hill, Qld, 2007 which sat in the middle of prime habitat. <http://thesanctuarydaisyhill.com/index.html> (See attached articles) Over 5000 residents voiced their disapproval of this decision but the council ignored their constituents and forged ahead. Illegal clearing then occurred on this site with the developer NOT being held accountable or forced to pay any recompense (RIX Developments, Gold Coast). Rix Development also did not follow council orders with regards to spotter/catcher resources on site at the time of clearing. Again, nothing was done about this. A bulldozer waited until a Koala came out of the tree before the bulldozer knocked it down. This tree was over 80 years old. The Koala had nowhere to go.
- A Mayor resigned in the midst of the decision making process for the Daisy Hill development costing the rate payers over \$200K.
- The Daisy Hill land was bought for \$7M from the landowner and I believe sold for over \$30M. Pure greed at the expense of the environment.
- The maps that were commissioned by the Qld State Govt (GHD). have been proven to be inaccurate therefore unreliable for making informed decisions about where Koalas are located.
- A super quarry is currently being considered for approval in Mt Cotton, Brisbane which has been proven to house approximately 30 Koalas. If this development application is approved by the State Government of Qld, it will have a major impact on the Koala coast population of Sth East Qld. Not only will the increased trucks movements (over 80,000 per year) put the Koala at risk, but the destruction of the Koala habitat in this area will put the Koala under more stress and sever the Koala corridor.
- Energex currently has a major development application pending which will see powerlines crossing the Logan River, Sth East Qld 11 times impacting on major Koala habitat of this area.

Above is only a sample of the developments that are currently contributing to the decline of Koala habitat in the Logan area of Sth East Qld.

In my role as a major Koala campaigner in Sth East Qld and the Koala coast, I have had many people approach me and voice their concern at the decline of Koala numbers and their anger at the lack of action by the government to do more to protect them. (I can provide written evidence of this if required).

I felt compelled to allow the community to have their voices heard and organised the largest Koala rally in Australia on Friday September 26 2009. This event saw over 1,000 people take to the streets of Brisbane in a march to Brisbane's Parliament house to let the Premier Anna Bligh know that they had had enough and wanted the government to do more to protect the Koala. The Government did nothing in response. They continue to ignore the pleas of the people and have sat by whilst Koala numbers continue to dwindle at an alarming rate.

Issues which have contributed to this risk include:

- blatant disregard for the Koala's habitat when development applications are being made and approved.
- government's - Federal, State and Local inability to accurately document and protect the Koala's habitat - inaccurate mapping and policies.
- My local council, Logan Council, have done nothing to promote the protection of Koalas despite having one of the largest populations in Australia.

As well as:

- Development in Brisbane's north, Narangba which also promoted the re-location of some animals.
<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/conservationist-says-narangba-koala-relocation-a-death-warrant/story-e6freoof-1225831969086>
Translocation is not effective and some of the animals involved in the re-locations have since perished.
- A quarry is proposed for Tallebudgera area in the Gold Coast region which will have a significant impact on the Koala population of that area.
http://www.goldcoast.com.au/article/2010/11/21/272211_gold-coast-news.html
- A development on the Tweed Coast which will impact the Koala population of that area.
<http://www.tweednews.com.au/story/2010/06/22/tweed-koalas-under-threat/>

Evidence or Observations that I have to support this position includes.....

- regular contact with numerous community groups who consistently voice their concern to their local and state members over the dwindling koala numbers. These public members generally do nothing to support their community over this issue.
- I have a database with the names of over 2,000 koala supporters who have many stories about massive development occurring in their community where Koalas live.

Recommendation for Consideration by the Committee

List what could be done to improve this situation for the future.

- The Koala must be listed under the EPBC Act immediately.
- Full protection of Koala habitat in South East Queensland.
- Not one more tree to be cut down until there is:
 - a. Rigorous mapping undertaken to identify core Koala habitat and recognition of science carried out by committed Koala conservationist and scientific organisations specialising in the Koala – the government are deemed to be impartial.
 - b. Community consultation with groups who have identified habitat and are willing to submit evidence to the government
- A full investigation into the dealings of Government in South Queensland and the development industry over past development applications that have been approved in major Koala habitat.
- A review of all current Koala Strategies and Policies and amendments made to ensure that all future development is carried out with the protection of Koalas at the forefront. This can and has been done in the past. The development industry just don't want to spend the money doing it.

Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission to you for consideration by the Committee.

I hope you have found this information valuable and you have an understanding of what the community are asking of our government. And that is, to have the Koala, our nation's iconic symbol and the animal that has a significant role to play in our country's economy, fully protected for year's to come.

I have attached a copy of footage taken at the 2009 Koala Rally through the streets of Brisbane to show you the commitment of the community of South East Queensland.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uasU_QypA8&feature=related

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0GFYIF8cas&NR=1>

I would be pleased to discuss these matters with the Committee further.