

Iris Bryce

To: <Senate Environment and Communication Committee>
Cc: <http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ec_ette/koala/index.htm>
Sent: Sunday, 6 February 2011 2:12 AM
Subject: Senate Inquiry into koalas - SUBMISSION



The Secretary
 Senate Environment and Communication Committee

Dear Sir,

I wish to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry, as follows:

Status of the Koala

The koala is one of the most easily recognizable and loved icons of Australia. It is too valuable in so many ways for it to be neglected and lost. The koala is unique to Australia and is unique in itself - in appearance, habits, its food and adaptation to its environment. Its very existence is being threatened as habitat is lost and disease makes inroads on its numbers in the wild. Koalas eat the foliage of a very limited number of trees. To attempt to replace lost habitat is a project which would take many, many years to achieve as its 'food' trees take more than twenty years to grow to maturity.

I live in Felton on the Darling Downs in Queensland where there have been koalas in the area for over seventy years that I know of as we used to sight them when, as children, we went for picnics on the slopes of the local hills/mountains around this valley. Their habitat on these slopes was the original vegetation that existed when the Downs were first settled in the eighteen hundreds. The plains in Felton were treeless but the slopes above the plain were wooded, and remained so as the area was settled because the trees gave shade for the grazing cattle/sheep of the settlers. Over fifty years ago, a bushfire killed the trees on about half of one of the local hills. The line where the bushfire was extinguished is still visible on the hill - it has taken all those years for the area to become regenerated but with fewer trees than before so the 'dividing line' between unburnt and burnt areas is still visible.

Sustainability of the Koala Population.

Koala habitat is being lost too rapidly. Urbanization and infrastructure building are making inroads on the mammals' safe environment. On the Darling Downs there is a new threat for koalas - MINING. The New Hope open-cut coal mine at Acland has already spread over known koala habitat. Felton is being threatened with an open-cut coal mine and petro-chemical plant to be located on those very hills and slopes that support a known koala population. Last Sunday two koalas were sighted on the edge of the proposed mine site, and scats and claw scratches were found on many trees in the area. Should this operation be allowed to proceed habitat will be lost and the disturbance of blasting, machinery operating, trucks moving in the area will make the area uninhabitable for shy koalas.

The proposed petro-chemical plant will release up to 10,000 tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere daily together with other gases. Blasting, loading, transporting and crushing the coal will produce enormous amounts of dust which certainly will not improve the koalas' health. Felton and Acland are not the only areas which the mining industry is focussing on - last week's local newspaper announced another area near Toowoomba, east of Acland, which may become the site of the next open-cut coal mine. Many other areas of the Darling Downs are threatened. I do not know what dangers the CSG industry poses for the koala.

Every so often there is a report in a newspaper of diseased koalas being located. Some become victims of road-kill. Other reports appear in the newspapers of koalas becoming the victims of heartless hunting. Dogs and dingoes add to the numbers of koalas being killed. Every death, however caused, decreases the population of this Australian icon.

Health of the Koalas.

I have to some extent already covered this. Koalas in the wild do not respond well to disturbance. Too much noise, human activity, proximity to traffic and confinement to smaller areas of habitat are all hazards to the health of the koala population. Every year a number of fauna species becomes extinct in Australia. May the koala not be the next one.

I commend the Government for holding this Senate Inquiry. May action follow the inquiry.

Iris I. Bryce