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Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

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## **The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia**

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia. I represent a local community group located in the Local Government areas of Logan and Scenic Rim in South East Queensland. Our group supports advises and auspices local community groups who unite to object to a planning / development matter which impacts detrimentally and negatively on the natural environment assets of their local area. Such community and natural environment assets include matters of national environmental significance and state bioregional corridors for biodiversity. As such LACA has made past submissions and alerted federal government of federally listed species - both flora and fauna - threatened by planning applications which fail to provide accurate environmental studies.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Logan and Albert Conservation Association (LACA) is an unfunded volunteer run community group that has been operating in the Logan and Albert Rivers catchment areas in South-east Queensland for over 20 years. Our members come from Logan City Council and the Scenic Rim Regional Councils. Our members are well qualified across several environmental, education, planning and development, natural resource management, ecology and design fields. We also have strong networks with other community groups. We are all interested in working collaboratively with councils and government towards best possible long term ecological sustainable growth management development and lifestyles.

### **OUR REQUEST**

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LACA members urge you not to hand over any power of environmental assessment to the states. Federal standards must continue to be monitored by federal agencies who will measure each process / application with a broader more global outlook. Australia is a signatory to international biodiversity treaties/ agreements.

We have seen recently the inappropriate transgressions of the Queensland government in relation to our World Heritage Great Barrier Reef. Opening National Parks to tourism without any standards relating to ecologically sound processes does nothing to support tourism long term but devalues the efforts of the many ecotourism operators.

Allowing shooters into NSW National Parks is another example of a poor decision by state government. Exploitation of place and species is not in Australia's national interests.

Over the years we have seen too many instances of poor environmental decisions being made at state level. The extra level the federal government provides is an essential additional level of control. Loss of biodiversity is a national - indeed a global - concern, and even now Australia has the worst record of biodiversity loss for a developed country. Indeed if we consider matters of national environmental significance the states would expect that federal funding would be available. In all of our submissions to two or three levels of government, most have species of national interest. Both business and state government have a vested interest to maximize their financial gain - as they do from allowing development that may not be in the country's interest.

## **OUR ACTIVITIES**

LACA has been closely involved in local state and federal government consultation processes especially in relation to the South-east Queensland Regional Plan that has led to unsustainable planning to accommodate an additional 230 000 people and more within a largely rural residential and large acreage housing. Such intensive planning includes major infrastructure upgrades to the Mt Lindesay Highway (currently being upgraded from 2 lanes to an eventual 10 lanes wide) in addition to new planning for future road and rail corridors as part of the South-east Queensland Regional Plan.

While government funds planning for built infrastructure for roads, rail, water and power there is still, even now, no state funding to establish connectivity of biodiversity corridors, no funding to establish what wildlife species are present nor flora.

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Offsets and mitigation clauses are used to appease actions that should not happen. To add to the environmental injury, such offsets have not to date contributed to local biodiversity but rather to a distant non local damaged biodiversity / ecosystem process.

Some of the current local threatening processes that LACA is / has engaged in include the following:

1. Master planned satellite city at Greater Flagstone - clear felling koala habitat
2. Master planned satellite city at Yarrabilba - infrastructure costs added to local rates
3. Local area plans at Bahrs Scrub - valued as National Park, flora and fauna - insufficient protection from housing
4. Local area plans at Loganholme - needs to be done sensitively
5. Subdivisions affecting Veresdale Scrub vegetation in Logan and Scenic Rim
6. High density at Teviot Downs - truck sewerage out - local koalas, possible quolls
7. Coal Seam Gas drilling in Scenic Rim - pipes through World Heritage
8. Park Ridge Connector - Gateway Motorway Extension Extension - all options threaten healthy local koala population and state regional biodiversity corridors
9. Lack of data relating to koala populations and their essential habitat in both Logan and Scenic Rim - compounded by lack of funding for research from state government
10. Need for more **citizen science** to establish better knowledge for quolls
11. Koala Tracker software to collate sightings - promote citizen science actions and access to inform decisions
12. Wildnet data issues - incomplete and now complexities for submitting - used as desktop for applications
13. Business as usual approach - faster is better - nothing smart or sustainable about housing options displayed.
14. Ecological sustainable development is not understood - or acknowledged
15. Valuing the natural environment for its contribution to human wellness (if not for itself)
16. TEEB concept ie The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: Making Nature's Values Visible <http://www.teebweb.org/resources/ecosystem-services/>

## CONCERNS

There is currently still no koala mapping that has been conducted in the North Beaudesert area (Logan City Council and Scenic Rim Regional Council) and consequently State

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Government departments like Main Roads do not feel that they need to provide basic features like koala fencing as part of their new road upgrades and continue to design and plan roads that fragment habitat where koalas are known to currently exist and not follow the guidelines in the existing Queensland Koala Conservation Plan because there have been no koala conservation areas surveyed or mapped in the North Beaudesert area. This is completely inconsistent with the efforts being made in wildlife movement solutions in the Koala Coast Area of Redlands Council and parts of eastern Logan City Council.

There needs to be a national standard / guideline for roads transecting areas of known national biodiversity to provide for safe passage of wildlife.

A new energy corridor has been announced much to our dismay and Logan Council - with state special conditions that '...will specifically ensure that work on the power line will be undertaken with best practice construction methods to mitigate social and environmental impacts.' Minister McArdle did not acknowledge federal conditions until reminded that Energex were required to refer this to EPBC process. Comment was made by the minister that community groups such as VETO and LACA would ensure compliance with conditions.

It is challenging to ensure state agencies or developers comply with conditions and both unreasonable and unsustainable long-term that we do so. Adequate paid compliance staff is needed and this could / should be seen as a career path for sustainable development approvals.

The following KOALA information has been summarized by Ted Fensom long-term campaigner for better environmental outcomes

The population of koalas in the Jimboomba -Logan Village Area has to be considered in context with the other populations mapped by Wildnet and LACA in Brisbane, the Koala Coast , in Logan City Council Area and the context of Bioregional Corridors mapped by the Biodiversity Unit in EHP (SEQBioregion December 2007.)

The intensity of -proposed clearing and fragmentation is disturbing. The koala populations in Logan City Council area of the Koala Coast have dropped (personal communication Logan Wildlife). Populations in BCCs Karawatha Reserve (largely land locked 1,000 ha) have dropped - Fire Impacts, See PPBio Reports, Professor Marc Hero Griffith University Gold Coast Campus. Populations in the FGK have dropped Karawatha to Greenbank from fires severance and drought. Destructive fires in November 2012 .have eliminated much of the fauna populations in 5000 ha of White Rock Spring Mountain to Oxley Creek part of the FGK Statutory and Bioregional Corridor. (South Ripley Fire Brigade map).

The advances of the Urban Footprint in the SEQ Regional Plan 2010 have predicated further clearing of Essential Koala Habitat in nearby Park Ridge and Logan Reserve and Park Ridge

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South and infill of new 900 houses in 15,000 ha of Koala Habitat, predicated between Greenbank and Jimboomba.

A viable population exists at Berrinba Sanctuary - 292 Browns Plains Road - but 9 kilometres of habitat (say 100ha) is to be smashed by the Proposed Park Ridge Connector (TMR) leaving a viable population on Chambers Creek (Munruben to Chambers Flat East). In terms of the koala habitat ULDA predicates clearing 5,000 ha of low density koala habitat in Greater Flagstone and most of the Pine Plantation and small koala habitat at Yarrabilba and unknown thousand hectares at Ripley (PMAVs and EPBC Referrals North east of the FGK) .

Further the One Network Plan (MOU between LCC and TMR) predicates upgrading 47 lowland roads in Logan City from 2 to 4 lanes or more north and west of this Logan River, Logan Village, and Stockleigh-Jimboomba Precinct. This urbanization with its 4 lane roads will eliminate koalas and most ground fauna from the Logan City Lowlands.

The protection of Koala Habitat at Bahrs Scrub with about 80 ha of habitat to be cleared and connectivity not guaranteed, with 4 applications (Stocklands, Planex) and approvals (Jordan Brothers) at Clarkes Hill without the remaining koala Habitat secured by; land acquisition, tenure and Management Plans is a perverse situation.

The Bahrs Scrub Local Area Plan is now gazetted without these protections or offsets guaranteed so subregionally LCC's Koala Coast (different genome population), Berrinba Sanctuary, Chambers Creek/Chambers Flat, and the Logan River- Stockleigh Jimboomba tract are to be the default koala refuges.

The proposed " impact is important, notable or of consequence having regard to its context or intensity". The severance is notable and of consequence in that Energex will undertake a 40 metre wide severance of a continuous tract and would be mapped as severed by Queensland Herbarium Mapping Rules.

The Energex approval would be a precedent for TMR to further sever this continuous tract with the S.I.C. Southern Implementation Corridor Jimboomba to Yarrabilba. This Energex Action "is likely to have a significant impact on the koala, now a vulnerable species.

There is a real chance that it will:

- Lead to a long term decrease in the size of an important population of the species
- Reduce the area of occupancy of an important population
- Fragment an existing important population into two or more populations
- Adversely affect habitat critical to the survival of the species
- Modify, destroy, remove or isolate or decrease the availability or quality of habitat to the extent that the species is likely to decline."

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1. The koala population on Camp Cable Road can be considered an "Important Population" re LACAs report and supporting information. The population is "a key source population necessary for breeding and dispersal" to the Birnum Range to the South East, greater Jimboomba and to Stockleigh and Chambers Flat to the North. The area is largely continuous Regrowth and some Remnant Vegetation with even distribution of large eucalypts. Koalas are increasingly observed in Regrowth vegetation (SEQ Catchments Ipswich Koala Preservation Society, LACA). The area is part of a continuous tract Stockleigh to the Birnum Range (mapped by Queensland Herbarium and SEQ Catchments) and part of a Bioregional Corridor.
2. The proposed 40 metre wide corridor has "significant impact" south of Camp Cable Road. The impacts include fragmentation of koala habitat, edge effects - loss of overhanging trees, barriers to other small ground fauna, most glider species, loss of old growth, ecosystem change and increased predation on koalas attempting to traverse the 40 metre easement.
3. The proposed 40 metre diagonal crossing of the Logan River 5 times with 7 kilometers of access tracks in the floodplain constitutes "significant impacts in the flood plain, riparian zone and on the banks. It is part of the Logan River Bioregional Corridor. The impacts include loss of vegetation in riparian tracts of 55 metres including koala habitat trees, edge effects and Riparian Zone Effects. Wires are potential barrier to water birds and Flying Fox Species (including Endangered Species) using the river as a flyway Potential Loss of power poles in 1 in 100 flood and Possible Maximum Flood (Australian Geological Survey Office Standard)
4. There is a potential vegetation and koala habitat offset of 42 ha. Energex may pursue urban exemptions under the VMAct and Community Infrastructure exemptions and not deliver any offsets.

## **HUMAN WELLBEING**

A healthy, diverse natural environment is valuable in itself; it is also essential to human wellbeing. But government and business tell us we cannot afford too much protection—it's bad for GDP. We know, though, that the wellbeing of future generations will be heavily affected if we fail resolutely to tackle biodiversity loss, pollution and waste. Climate change in particular poses a severe threat and demands immediate and far-reaching measures by government.

We can do much more than we have to date. We should increase taxes on damaging environmental activities such as burning fossil fuels and reduce taxes on socially beneficial activities such as providing fulfilling work. We should make the generation of waste very

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expensive and reward businesses and households that reduce their consumption and recycle materials.

In closing, I ask on behalf of our community for the Senate to **look for ways to strengthen environmental protection** for threatened (as well as vulnerable) species and certainly not to consider devolving powers to the Queensland State Government as they cannot be trusted to value our environment other than for development - as usual.

LACA president Anne Page is involved with a school trip to Germany at the moment and hence was unable to prepare LACA's submission.

However she would like to be considered for an interview with the Senate Committee team should that be possible.

LACA looks forward to the outcomes of this inquiry and sincerely hope that an environmentally sound future guiding policy will be the outcome.

Experiencing the natural world is a joy all Australia's children deserve as is learning connecting and respecting its natural treasures as Australia's first peoples have done for generations.

Yours respectfully and for the earth

Kathy Faldt

Vice President Logan and Albert Conservation Association

Since its inception in 1989, LACA has worked with our community, council, industry, and government to develop understanding, commitment and actions for more sustainable living.

LACA aims...

- *To play an active role in the protection and enhancement of the environment.*
- *To promote the concept of environmental sustainability as an essential criterion of planning for development.*
- *To educate and inform the community on all aspects of conservation.*
- *To research and report on current and proposed activities likely to affect the local environment.*
- *To encourage the widest possible public consultation and informed debate on matters of conservation and environmental importance to the local community.*

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