

Dear Senators,

My name is Joshua Halverson and I am the current Queensland Youth Volunteer of the Year for the Green category. I was nominated based on my efforts with the koala and the conservation of the species in Australia. Since my arrival from the United States two years ago I have made it my mission to speak out on the threats that face koalas and highlight their rapid decline in population. Through the Lions Youth of the Year and as school captain of Mountain Creek State High School I was able to reach out to a large proportion of the youth on the sunshine coast and across Queensland. I gave talks on the plight of the koala and also organized expert presentations and other fundraising efforts in order to raise money for the Australian Wildlife Hospital and Koala Action Pine Rivers. I have been volunteering at the Wildlife Hospital since I first arrived and I have developed a strong bond to the Australian icon whom I develop more and more respect for every day. However, the koala is in danger of being wiped out.

Koala numbers have been diminishing at an astonishing rate for over a decade and while there once may have been millions of koalas, there are now less than 100,000 koalas left. Once you could walk through Noosa National Park and glimpse koalas sleeping or eating eucalypt leaf overhead, however now it is a rare occurrence. Koala populations have been dropping off by up to 85% across the nation as both natural and human related threats pose risk to their lives. Amongst these threats, dog attacks and car hits seem to be responsible for the most admissions into wildlife hospitals, whilst Chlamydia and koala retrovirus destroy the immune systems of the healthy ones. Meanwhile rampant development has diminished the eucalypt forests that the koala required in order to survive, leaving only patches and corridors of appropriate food species. If this isn't enough, koalas also bear human cruelty. This year two separate incidents were recorded of koalas being purposefully shot. Its absurd that an iconic species like the koala is being shoved out and pushed to the brink of extinction, a species that is adored worldwide.

Something must be done to highlight the plight of the koala and to ensure their existence in the future. In less than ten years the koala could be gone forever in the wild. Many regions no longer have any koalas and the rate of decline is continuous. Until something is done the koala will continue to die out at an increasing rate. That is why I strongly recommend that the koala be listed and that immediate, drastic conservation measures be enacted to ensure their protection. I cannot speak for the entire Australian population, but I can speak for the youth that the koala needs to be protected to ensure its survival. I want to see koalas in ten years time and so does the youth of Australia. When I have children of my own, and subsequently when they have children, I want to know that they are able to see this animal for themselves. It would be a shame to lose the iconic koala, who for so long has stood as a symbol of Australian diversity. Like the kangaroo, the koala demands the respect of the world's population, and it should be of the highest priority to protect the species in Australia.

I would like to address the committee in Melbourne on behalf of the youth of Australia, as I feel I have insight to offer into the plight of the koala. The youth cares about the koala, and it is our future that is hanging in the balance. If the koala becomes extinct in following decades, it reflects upon the whole of the population; not just adults. We care

just as much and— speaking on the behalf of my generation— I know that we want to see koalas in future and want to know that everything possible is being done on their behalf. We still have the time to make a difference, but that time is now.

Yours sincerely,
Joshua Halverson
Queensland Young Volunteer of the year