



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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Dear Minister Burke

Koala Protection

Writing on behalf of the Clarence Environment Centre as well in the capacity of koala coordinator for our Clarence Valley branch of the NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue, & Education Service, we are extremely concerned by the possibility that, despite prolonged work and irrefutable evidence provided by experienced koala carers to the Senate Inquiry, your Scientific Committee appears highly likely to continue to find our globally revered koala as not meeting the criteria for national protection under the EPBC Act.

The Act itself is a major cause for concern. Time and again it has been proven to the various groups who work to help sustain our vital natural environment that the EPBC Act simply does not work. Within the Clarence Valley alone during the course of the last decade, the Act has failed to protect any single species, whether it be from dam building, rural residential development, forestry practices or road construction. In every instance, our threatened species, including koalas, have been downgraded to second place in favour of human wealth and progress.

As long as the EPBC Act - which was established with a sole intent of saving our threatened species from decline and possible extinction - is shown to be failing in every instance, then yourself as minister responsible for this important piece of legislation should immediately call for another review of the Act, an immediate, genuine strengthening of species' protection, and dismantlement of those clauses that provide the many loopholes that allow for all threatening processes to continue unabated.

Regarding the Senate hearing, I find it very difficult to understand why it was that, given the extremely costly and prolonged dedicated work by the Australia Koala Foundation in research and provision of a comprehensive mapping and estimate of koalas numbers across the board, your scientific committee members in Victoria thought it appropriate to toss koala numbers around as proven fact (73,000 in Victoria alone!), while at the same time declaring no scientific information or mapping to indicate koala numbers in Australia. Clearly there is! Equally as clearly, by all reports presented at the Inquiry, our koala is in serious trouble. Because of this irresponsible ignoring of vital information, as well as through a wish by big corporations to continue their business as usual, what is a proven current \$1billion tourist industry for Australia is gradually being allowed to be overridden by other louder self-interest concerns.

As just one further example of how our koalas are being ignored by industry and the Act, a logging operation due to start today in the Boambee State Forest west of Coffs Harbour is set to destroy one of the few remaining koala strongholds in coastal New South Wales (North Coast Environment

Council/National Parks Association information). There are only three such important viable koala habitats remaining in NSW, one in the Lismore area, one around the Manning Valley floodplains and forests, and this one at Boambee, now to be destroyed by allowable overlapping legislation that rules out the EPBC Act. Even before logging started the koalas were on the move from this area, disturbed from their forest ranges by road building, resulting in three killed on the highway in as many days. Despicably, Forests NSW have even approached landholders adjoining their proposed logging sites (some even with properties zoned environmental protection) with requests for approval to log their land.

I urge you to ask yourself, how many people do you know personally who have seen a koala in the wild? Have you seen one yourself? If you had never seen a koala, would you pay to see one in another country? Answer these questions from the viewpoint of the average citizen and tourist, and you cannot fail to recognise that, unfortunately with government help, this iconic animal, which has significant ramifications for the future wealth and reputation of Australia, is slowly being eliminated from the landscape.

It remains only for us to plead with you now to provide your own personal, unbiased summary of all information gleaned by the Inquiry. We urge you in this process to take into account the undeniable experience and first-hand knowledge of those who represented the needs of the koala, and weigh it in balance with the self-interest groups, who provided only unproven and unscientific information to ensure the koala does not get in the way of their personal business agendas.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Edwards
Clarence Environment Centre