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THE INQUIRY INTO THE STATUS, HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY OF AUSTRALIA'S KOALA

on Tuesday 8th February

Submission by

Logan and Albert Conservation Association

Prepared by

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8 February 2011

Dear Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
eca.sen@aph.gov.au

Please accept this submission on behalf of the Logan and Albert Conservation Association (LACA).

Introduction

The Logan and Albert Conservation Association (LACA) is a volunteer run ,non government organisation that has been active in the Logan River and Albert River Regions in South-east Queensland. Since its inception in 1989, LACA has worked with community, local government , industry, and state government to develop understanding, commitment and actions for more sustainable living and better environmental outcomes.

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.

This Inquiry is of interest to LACA because

- Our group has been involved in organizing community education workshops about koalas
- Our group collects community sightings of koalas to report to DERM Qld Govt Wildnet data bases
- Significant development is proposed in South-east Queensland by the state government and developers under the South-east Queensland Regional Plan (eg Ripley, Greater Flagstone, Yarrabilba, Park Ridge, Bromelton) . The area of the Mount Lindesay North Beaudesert Area which currently has an estimated population of approximately 37 000 people is proposed to accommodate 262 000 people in the next 30 – 50 years (a city the size of Canberra in an area that is rural –urban fringe and currently has acreage properties and still retains significant biodiversity values and koala habitat).
- Koalas in the Koala Coast area of Redlands Council are predicted to become extinct in the immediate future.
- The current status and legislation is not effective in protecting the population of koalas in South-east Queensland. Other legislation is able to over run Koala legislation and vegetation legislation.
- We recommend that the koala be listed as endangered (eg for South-east Queensland)

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Purpose of this Submission
LACA is concerned about –

Estimates of koala populations and the adequacy of current counting methods
Knowledge of koala habitat
Threats to koala habitat eg logging, land clearing , poor management, development, disease, roads, ferals and domestic animals
The listing of the koala under the EPBC Act
The adequacy of the National Koala conservation and Management Strategy
Future regulation for the protection of koala habitat
Interaction of state and federal laws and regulations
Transparency and accountability

Evidence and Observations

EXAMPLE 1.
Koalas threatened by community infrastructure (Powerlines, road upgrades) and sateliite city of 60 000 people at Yarrabilba in Logan City Council in South-east Queensland (part of South-east Queensland Regional Plan)

A 110 kV Energex subtransmission line is proposed in koala habitat along the Logan River (at Logan Reserve) and along Camp Cable Rd at Jimboomba (part of Logan City Council) in the Mount Lindesay North Beaudesert area in South east Queensland. The proposed powerline corridor will sever 3 state government designated bioregional corridors, clear and fragment koala habitat and degrade biodiversity. Koalas will be at greater risk from the ongoing removal and fragmentation of habitat.

There is a lack of information generally about koalas and other wildlife in the Mount Lindesay North Beaudesert Area. Without appropriate rigorous fauna surveys good planning decisions cannot be made. Without fauna assessment there can be no biodiversity assessment.

i. LACA does not support the fragmenting of koala habitat areas as indicated by this proposed powerline route. Along the 23.2 km route , **approximately 4.2 km of high value koala rehabilitation area and 2.6km of medium value koala rehabilitation area** will be impacted especially along the southern section of the easement between the Jimboomba Substation and Waterford-Tamborine Rd.

ii. Not only will vegetation along these sections be cleared between 20 – 30 metres wide, but habitat connectivity will be fragmented which will result in greater risks to koalas from dog attacks and cars.

iii. Koala Offsets should only be considered as a last resort when no other alternatives can be investigated e.g. alternate route selection. In this case LACA is not convinced that Energex has considered sufficient route alternatives that minimise the loss of vegetation . The community has suggested several alternate routes , however Energex refuses to consider these options.

iv. The Final IAR for this proposed Energex route claims (p11-2) that "*the project has been planned and developed to minimise impacts on conservation values including assessable koala habitat through*

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the corridor selection, assessment and refinement of the preferred route" , .How is this possible when no dedicated detailed koala survey and habitat assessment has been conducted over the whole of the route or compared to other possible route locations?

v. No detailed koala survey or habitat assessment has ever been conducted in the area of Camp Cable Rd, Waterford Tamborine Rd or the Logan River of for the whole ot the Mt Lindesay North Beaudesert Area in South-east Queensland. This information is urgently needed for the best planning outcomes and decision to reduce impact on environmentally sensitive areas.

vi. The Final IAR by energex for this powerline proposal does acknowledge "*3 koalas were observed and anecdotal information provided by local residents confirmed that the local area has a large koala population*" and that "*Wildnet data also highlights the strong presence of the species within the project area and wider local area*". It also notes (p11-11) that "*issues associated with the impact that power easements create with respect to the koala are significant given the width of the clearing required under current Energex Electrical safety regulations for 110KV transmission lines*" which may result in increased dog attacks.

vii. COMMUNITY SURVEY AND KOALAS

A joint VETO and LACA survey of 50 local residents along Camp Cable Rd and Waterford-Tamborine Rd near Jimboomba in South – east Queensland was conducted from March to June 2010 . This survey revealed 42 property owners had seen or heard koalas on their properties **(Figure 1**). **Figure 1** shows the total of all koala observations by residents in red markers while the yellow markers show residents who reported wildlife sightings but did not report koalas.

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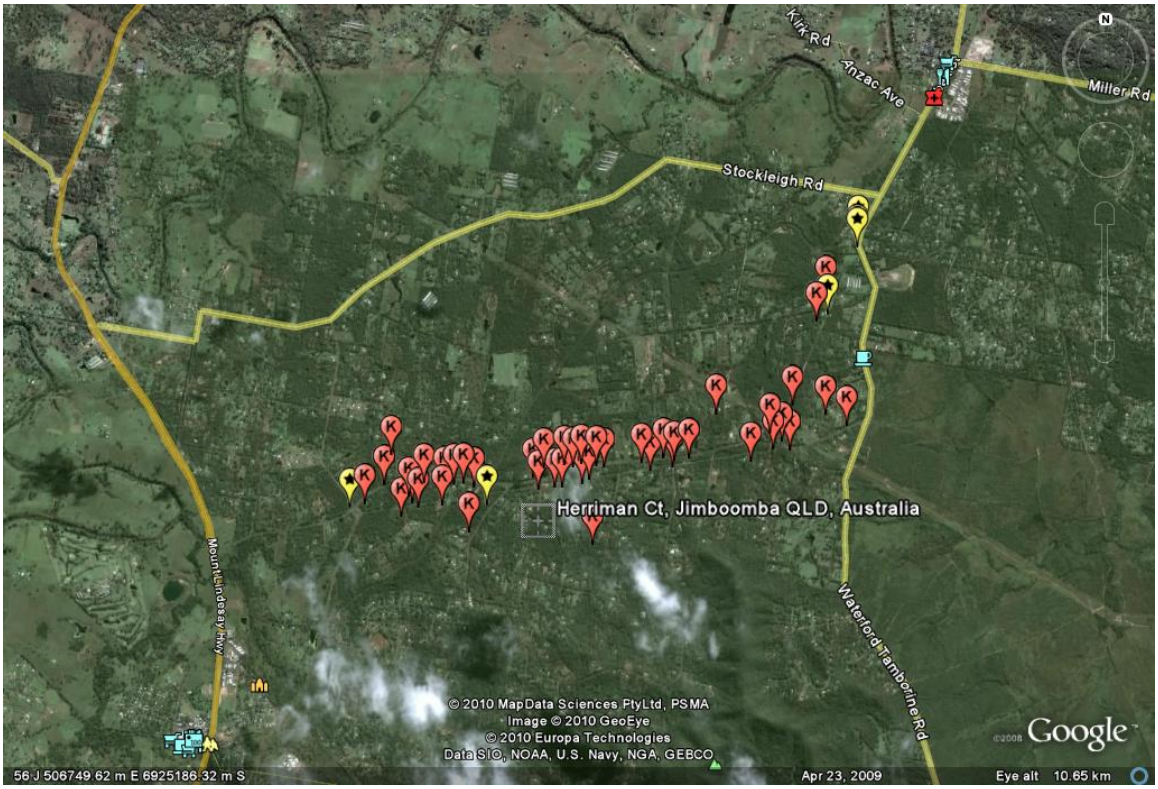
Figure 1 Total Resident Sightings of Koalas March to June 2010 (reported Camp Cable Rd and Waterford Tamborine Rd)



Source: VETO and LACA Community Survey March to June 2010

Of the 42 residents who reported having seen or heard koalas, 30 reported having seen or heard koalas on their property in the last 12 months (**Figure 2**). **Figure 2** shows red markers with stars for the koalas reported by the community in the last 12 months. The red markers with the number 5 represent koalas having been seen or heard by residents in the last 5 years. The yellow markers show residents who reported wildlife sightings but did not report koalas. Some residents also reported historic long term sightings of koalas e.g. “2 or 3 koalas seen every year for 15 years”.

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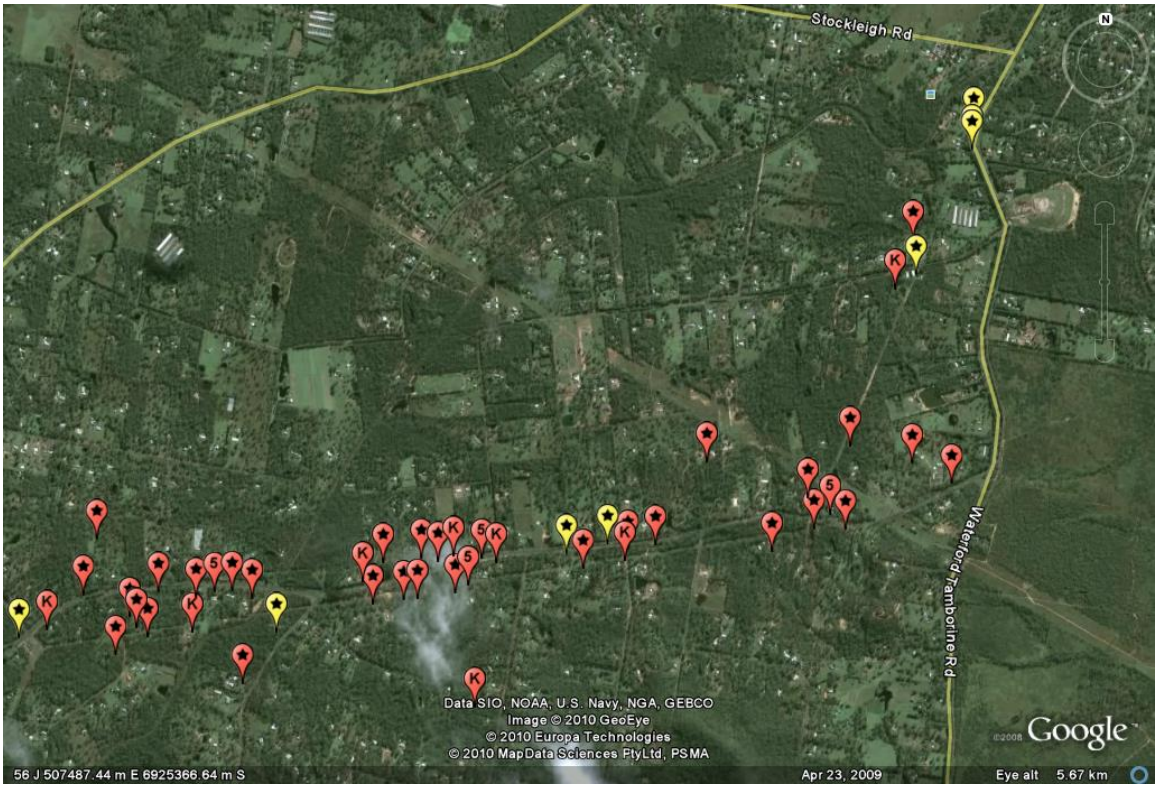
Figure 2 Resident Sightings of Koalas in the last 12 months (reported March to June 2010 Camp Cable Rd and Waterford Tamborine Rd)



Source: VETO and LACA Community Survey March to June 2010

How can a net gain in koala bushland be achieved for the koala population along or surrounding the proposed powerline corridor ?

Any further details in relation to this survey is available by contacting LACA
who has collated the survey results). This information about koala sightings will be forwarded to Wildnet as soon as possible.

The area to the east of Waterford-Tamborine Rd in Figure 2 (on the bottom right hand side of the map) is the proposed location of a satellite city that is planned to accommodate 60 000 people . The major roads at present are 2 lanes wide in Camp Cable Rd (Jimboomba) and Waterford-Tamborine Rd and will need to be upgraded and widened. Habitat is currently fragmented in the area of Camp Cable Rd and Waterford-Tamborine Rd by Powerlink easements for 275 kV powerlines. The area is supposed to be state government bioregional corridor, yet there is no legislation or guidelines for how these

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bioregional corridors must be managed. State government departments are supposed to be co-locating infrastructure under the South-east Queensland Regional Plan, but this is still not occurring.

EXAMPLE 2
Upgrade of Mt Lindesay Highway from Park Ridge to Chambers Flat (Logan City Council , South--east Queensland)

LACA became involved in this proposal to upgrade the Mt Lindesay Highway in March 2006 when a section of the highway between Granger Rd and Carter Rd was about to commence redevelopment and expansion from 2 lanes to 10 lanes wide (4 service lanes and 6 highway lanes). Road signs along the old section of the highway indicated koalas were present in the local area around a locally famous wetland reserve called Jerry's Downfall on Chambers Creek (part of a state owned parcel of land that was managed in trust by local council Beaudesert Shire and now Logan city Council) . The reserve was also part of a state government declared bioregional corridor.

Mt Lindesay Highway November 2005

The designs for the highway upgrade had been approved in 2002 by Main Roads (Queensland Government) subject to future funding. When funding became available in 2005/2006 , the project was to be started , but the original road designs had never incorporated fauna furniture, overpasses or provisions for koala and other fauna to cross this highway. No fauna fencing was planned or costed into the project. Environmental Reports for the project dating from 1996 all recommended retaining connectivity especially along Creeks and riparian areas , but the location at Jerry's Downfall is particularly low in elevation. The drainage solution was to use box culverts which flooded immediately once it rained. Community surveys of koala sightings in 2007 confiirmed the presence of koalas to the east and west of this location on the highway. Queensland Government's Environmental Protection Agency (now Department of Environment and Resource Management) had a Wildnet database that also confirmed the presence of koalas in this area.

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Mt Lindesay Highway Box Culverts over Jerry's Downfall on Chambers Creek

EXAMPLE 3
South-east Queensland Regional Plan (SEQRP), Population Growth and Satellite Cities

The Mount Lindesay North Beaudesert Area extends from Park Ridge (Logan City Council) in the north to Veresdale in the South and from Logan Village in the east to Undullah in the west (border between Logan City Council and Ipswich City Council) . In 2006 the Office of Urban Management proposed a future population in 30 -350 years time of 262 000 (a city the size of Canberra) for this area which now contains approximately 37 000 people. The predominant land use in this area is rural and rural residential with acreage blocks.

Despite the knowledge of this potential growth, no detailed koala surveys have ever taken place in this area by either local government (Beaudesert Shire , or Logan City council) or by State government. State government koala mapping completed in 2009 , did not incorporate detailed on ground assessment to ground truth the validity of the mapping. Many environmental groups in South-east Queensland have been critical of this methodology.

In 2011, 3 of the satellite cities in South-east Queensland (Ripley, Greater Flagstone and Yarrabilba) are being fast tracked for development by the Urban Land Development Authority(ULDA). Detailed koala assessment has still not been undertaken by Logan City Council or the Queensland Government. Significant areas of remnant vegetation remain in the areas proposed for development. The road, transport and power infrastructure that will be needed to connect these satellite cities will have significant impacts on reducing any habitat connectivity that remains in the Mount Lindesay

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North Beaudesert Area. What will be the cumulative impacts of this habitat loss on local koala population and for the koala population across SE Queensland?

Recommendations for consideration by the Committee

1. We recommend that the status of the koala in South-east Queensland be listed as endangered or critically endangered.
2. We recommend a National Koala Act that will have stronger and more binding legislation to protect koalas and their habitat
3. Legislative changes are needed to **guarantee** the priority for the protection of the koala and the habitat that it needs and depends on for its survival (eg in Queensland the Koala State Planning Policy is subservient to the **draft extractive industry policy and community infrastructure**). Legislation in Queensland is set up to fast track development.
4. There is a conflict of interest for the Department of Infrastructure and Planning in Queensland to be controlling koala policy.
5. We need to protect our children's precious resources for the future eg koalas, vegetation, biodiversity, potential tourism earnings and employment.
6. Greater emphasis is needed on long term planning eg 100 year time frame .
7. Deficits in quality koala mapping needed to be corrected eg use the Australian Koala Foundation mapping, the ground truth mapping and information is needed . Appropriate financial and personnel resources need to be urgently made available , especially for areas at high risk or development and population pressure (eg South-east Queensland) .
8. A stringent tree protection law is necessary to protect the remaining valuable habitat in all parts of Australia (eg see the Australian Koala Foundation's vegetation list).
9. Habitat and bushland should be protected and not be used as infrastructure corridors such as powerlines, water pipelines, sewerage and recycled water pipelines.
10. Community Infrastructure Projects (e.g. powerlines, roads, public transport) should not be exempt from habitat protection. Offsets should not be the quick fix to permit development to take place at the expense of connectivity of habitat and survival of species like the koala.
11. Transparency of decision-making and access to data and reports at all levels of government.
12. Review Australian regulations for road design guidelines (eg road widths) and recommended road speeds to include provisions for fauna safety and fauna movement solutions to reduce road kill and injury.
13. No foreign ownership of land in Australia.
14. Increase investment in solar power solutions to reduce the need for infrastructure link powerlines.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission to you for consideration by the Committee. We would be pleased to discuss these matters with the Committee further.

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If you require any additional information in relation to this recommendation, please do not hesitate to contact me via the postal address provided below.

Yours sincerely,

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