Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Status, Health and sustainability of Australia's Koala Population.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. The purpose of this submission is to suggest that consideration should be given to the relocation of a koala population into the Tinderry Reserve in South East NSW.

Submission

The Tinderry Nature Reserve covers an area of approximately 15,000 hectares and is administered by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The reserve is home to a number of Eucalyptus varieties including those foraged by Koalas, including: Eucalyptus macrorhyncha; mannitera; nortonii; rossii; bridgesiana; dives; melliodora and rubida.

In the late 1800s it was the home to hundreds if not thousands of koalas before their numbers were decimated through shooting for the fur trade. I have seen documentation and photos of the large number of koalas taken from southern NSW, including from the Tinderry area.

While sightings have been few and far between in recent years, evidence exists that koalas continue to inhabit the Tinderry area. Within my own experience, I have seen three koalas over the 34 years I have lived at Urila, immediately adjacent to the Reserve's northern boundary. Other neighbours have also reported sightings and hearing koalas in the Reserve.

It is my view that the Tinderry Reserve should be repopulated with koalas, relocated from areas elsewhere in NSW, Victoria or Kangaroo Island. I am aware of the significant difficulties experienced by the SA Government in deciding upon a sustainable management plan for the koala population on Kangaroo Island and the inbreeding that has occurred on that island. Perhaps one option would be to relocate a small number into the Tinderry Reserve rather than sterilisation or culling.

I have raised this proposal with the NPWS, I have been met with a reluctance to discuss the issue and I have been given a variety of reasons as to why the NPWS would oppose such a relocation scheme. In large measure, the opposition is based on a view that the "existing gene pool" might be threatened by the introduction of relocated koalas. I note with interest that the NPWS web site and the list of native fauna contained therein does not acknowledge the presence of koalas in the Tinderry Reserve. As a consequence I have difficulty in understanding what "gene pool" is considered to be under threat.

As a breeder of sheep for the past thirty years and having watched my father breed sheep in Victoria since the late 1940s I have come to know that inline breeding can result in exactly the problems being experienced on Kangaroo Island, such as the absence of male testes in progeny that are the product of inbreeding over several generations.

I believe that cross breeding produces strong and vigorous species that are capable of surviving in their given habitats and suggest that this is exactly what happened before settlement when koalas were found throughout the eucalypt forests up and down the Eastern seaboard. Koalas wandered freely and did not confine themselves to exclusive gene pools and bred across geographical ranges that were far wider than the restricted areas observed today. I do not see the utility of preserving isolated gene pools in sparse locations at the expense of securing the survival of the overall mainland population which is under threat of habitat destruction, disease and diminishing numbers. I would strongly advocate that a number of healthy koalas be introduced into the Tinderry Reserve which they once populated in large numbers and where there is currently a wide variety of relevant eucalypts on which they can forage and survive. I have had wide support from the local community for this proposal.

In summary:

- Koalas lived in great numbers in the area now known as the Tinderry Nature Reserve
- Sightings indicate that there are some koalas still in the Tinderry area
- Repopulation of the Tinderry area with relocated koalas would assist in their preservation on the eastern seaboard

Concern about damage to existing gene pools is unwarranted as cross breeding will produce vigour and sustainability.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dawn E Gray

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