Vicki Hams
Thu 11/08/2011 5:55 PM
FW: Monday 1st August hearing into status of koala (held in Melbourne)

Dear Senators

As requested during a break in Melbourne and a brief talk with Senator Brown please find additional information:

To introduce myself properly – I am on the Board of Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter (specialist koala shelter dealing with Strzelecki koalas) and I oversee (with 2 others) the spending of public donations made to the shelter. Five of us attended Monday's hearing. Two of us had lodged submissions prior however none of us spoke on the day.
Colleen Wood operates the koala shelter at Rawson and has done so for 17 years. She also holds two scientific permits allowing her to gather information in relation to the species and to perform post mortem's on those deceased. Though not published it is all at hand. She has referred to it in her submission and is available at any time for expansion.

In fact, we would be honoured, if appropriate, for any of the Senators to visit the shelter to view scientific data and also view the koalas in care.

Further information on questions/issues that arose specifically at Monday's hearing except for the first enumerated point which we only became aware of yesterday:

1) Please note that mining company ***"Mantle Mining***" has just been granted a tenement to explore in Latrobe Valley across a huge area of the ***Strzelecki ranges*** – habitat to our Strzelecki koala. We have only just become aware of this ourselves and stress (given the other issues the koala faces) that this is of critical importance. (see Mantle Mining website – the link to Latrobe Valley tenement).
2) We can confirm the answer to the question asked of HPV logging by Senator Bob Brown whether the koalas breed in the felled areas. We have had numerous mothers or orhpaned joeys brought in as a result of felling. We are currently caring for a female koala who was reported as being ***felled twice*** in a Strzelecki coup. She had a jelly bean ***joey in her pouch***. We have photographs of the koala on admission to the shelter and today however, we do not have photographs of her "on site" after being felled. (we can only rely on the forest workers to do this)
3) Some of the "habitat corridors" left by the company are roadside only. Not ideal as the koalas have to take refuge so close to traffic.
4) We have witnessed and documented the suffering and failure of sterilised and **tran**slocated koalas. Colleen has put more information in her submission and, as this only briefly came up yesterday, we respectfully request that you have a read of that part of her submission. We have fully documented a circumstance of a sterilised female who was carrying a back young, stopped lactating and was subsequently euthanised. We are caring for her joey presently and have the removed implant from the dead mother. (our issue here is that ***a full health assessment must be made on the animal prior to administering implants and we highly recommended joeys and lactating mothers not receiving the implant. We would be happy to discuss such with the Victorian Koala Advisory Board, whom did not submit to the inquiry***. From implants taken from dead mothers it appears that there is no modification to the design (same size and style as that used on humans). We are presently having this confirmed by a local G.P.

5) The question of approximate numbers of koalas that had been burnt to death during the January and February, 2009 bushfires in the Strzelecki ranges could not be answered. It would be impossible to answer given the magnitude of the fires however we did keep details of those found burnt to death or rescued through our local wildlife rescue group WRAP and BADGAR. 30 alone were found at the bottom of one gully by rescuers. All had perished.
6) The question of genetics was covered several times – with particular reference to the Strzelecki and/or other Victorian koalas vs. Queensland koalas. It was not clear to us as laypeople whether the Threatened Species Committee supported this or not.
In the absence of science we have 17 years of anecdotal evidence and several years of scientific evidence . The shelter holds two scientific permits, as aforementioned, and submits tissue samples/swabs to Sydney and Melbourne and Queensland University researchers. An interesting piece of information is the difference in the reaction to medications. "Clavulox"(*amoxicillin and clavulanic acid*) a commonly used medication in Queensland and NSW koalas leads to mortality in the Victorian koala. Conversely we commonly use medication "Baytril" *(Enrofloxacin)* in Victoria and the Qld koalas develop internal ulcerations that lead to death as a result of this medication.
7) In the past 10 days we have had FOUR koalas – perfectly robust, healthy looking koalas – called in deceased by members of the public. All found away from roads. There is no apparent reason for their deaths. One was a 14 kg young male. This is of great concern. Is there an issue that we do not know about? We have sent carcasses to Melbourne Uni (Pam Whiteley) for examination.

Again, we would be honoured for any Senator who wishes to visit the shelter, view the scientific information or phone us for further questions. It is blindingly apparent from yesterday's hearing that there is insufficient scientific data collected by the authorities. (although we knew this already) In the absence of same the anecdotal evidence that we see "at the coal face" becomes very important and, although we are only volunteers, Colleen has gathered a lot of science to support our anecdotal observations and has dedicated her life to the koala.

Yes we are passionate about the preservation of the Strzelecki koala but we have also maintained practical and verifiable data to support our passion! Apart from Colleen all of the volunteers work full time, some in professional occupations.

We thank you so much for your interest last Monday. As one of the volunteers said "the Committee had their koala ears on!"

Regards
Vicki Hams
Board Member of Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter