To the Senate Committee,

I am writing to you to voice my concerns about the Koala population which is present in small numbers on the Far South Coast of NSW. I have been involved with the Koala survey on the Far South Coast since March 2009 as a volunteer and also as a contractor to DECC. I have been living on the Far South Coast for just over 2 years and have a Bachelor of Science degree in Biodiversity and Conservation as well as being a member of the Cobargo RFS since February 2009. I am also involved in the Yowrie landcare group.

My focus is mainly on the local Koala populations which need immediate action to protect them from localized extinction.

I will attempt to address each term of reference.

<u>The iconic status of the koala and the history of its management</u>

The Koala is obviously an iconic species in Australia. The Aboriginal people called the Koala "the rain maker". Their belief is that if the skin was removed that it would not rain so the fur trade in the late 1800's and early 1900's must have been devastating for them to watch and was totally against their culture. The Koala is also an iconic species to all Australian's and if any child was asked to name an animal that lives in the bush the Koala would be one of the first mentioned. It also features in many children's books and large numbers of tourists make a point of seeing a Koala whilst on their trip.

The recent history of its management is a difficult question to answer. The population numbers have been at a low level for the last 60 years and have possibly declined further during the last 20. A study was carried out in the Far south coast region in 1991 – 1992 (Lunney et al, 1997) which suggested that Koala populations were present in various state forests and that the local National Parks were not their strong hold. This has been backed up by the recent DECCW surveys which have mapped the Mumbulla population (in Mumbulla state forest) and which failed to find any definite evidence of active viable populations in the Tantawangalo and Yurammie areas. This would suggest that due to the most viable populations occurring in state forests then the management of these areas by State Forest has failed with these populations continuing to decline over the last 20 years. It would be fair to assume that the logging practices have continued to be detrimental to Koala's and any other arboreal species.

<u>Estimates of koala populations and the adequacy of current counting methods</u>

The current population estimate for the far South coast region is less than 50 animals persisting in the Bermagui, Mumbulla, Murray area (DECCW 2010). There is also a small population to the North of Cobargo in Kooraban National Park which may be as small as 4-5 individuals. There is a survey currently under way in this national park which I am participating in and out of 31 plots surveyed 4 have been found to have Koala activity. That is an occupancy rate of 13%

which is currently lower than the Mumbulla rate which was 22%. This survey program may locate other activity cells that could increase this estimate, though it appears unlikely that the population is anything other than small.

The current survey method being used is the Regularized Grid Based Spot Assessment Technique (RGBSAT). This is carried out by teams of motivated volunteers, contractors and DECC staff. It is an unbiased survey whereby plots are surveyed throughout the landscape. These plots are currently at the grid intersections in the Kooraban survey at 1km intervals. The survey team navigates to the plot using maps and gps. Once there the centre tree is chosen and 29 other live trees of greater than 150mm diameter are marked out in a circle from the centre. The leaf litter is then searched in a 1m radius around the base of each tree. Any scats are recorded and the tree species is also recorded. The soil landscape, ground cover, other wildlife activity and anything that might be useful is also recorded. This method creates a vast data base of information which will be extremely useful for future management. I believe that this method is the best at identifying where the activity occurs.

Threats to koala habitat such as logging, land clearing, poor management, attacks from feral and domestic animals, disease, roads and urban development

There are many threats to Koala's, logging, habitat fragmentation through sub-division, bush fires, feral dog attacks, disease and road traffic. The Mumbulla Koala's would be at most risk from logging, bush-fires, feral dogs and sub-division. The most immediate risk and the easiest to resolve is logging. With data gathered mapping koala activity and tree species an adequate area around the activity cells should be protected to allow the population to naturally increase in numbers. A North – South Koala corridor should be set up to allow movement between the Mumbulla, Murray and Biamanga groups. This would also act as protected area for young animals to disperse through into Biamanga National Park and is critical to any recovery program.

The listing of the koala under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* states that it is there to "provide for the protection of the environment, especially matters of national environmental significance." The Koala at the very least should be listed as vulnerable and given the protection that it deserves due to the drastic decline in numbers nationally over the last 40 years. There are certainly area's within Australia where Koala's are still common but this is not the norm nationally. There may be a case to look at the fact that Australia is too large an area to list species nationally and maybe a state based listing would provide better protect to populations that have become fragmented and vulnerable to localized extinction.

The adequacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy

The strategy states that one of the objectives is a "*Greater area of high-quality koala habitat conserved and effectively managed through legislation, covenants or agreements."* If through the appropriate implementation of the Strategy the Mumbulla/Murrah/Bermagui Koala was

protected it would go a long way to the recovery of the species regionally. This is possibly not a failing of the strategy but the fact that there is not currently the political will to put our native flora and fauna ahead of economic growth and the dollar value of the timber resource.

I have become aware through the DECCW survey project that the most important local population occurs in Mumbulla state forest and if any recovery of this population is to occur then any potential threats will need to be removed whether those threats are from logging, bush fires, development or feral predators. Due to the excellent weather conditions which have occurred over the last 12 months there is good growth in the forests which in turn should mean that this will be an excellent breeding season for Koala's. This should then result in young animals pushing out from their mother's home ranges in 6 – 9 months. So it is of critical importance that there is suitable habitat for them to move into. We are at a point in time where if action is taken quickly to protect the animals as well as suitable habitat then the population could recover and come back from the brink. But only quick decisive action will ensure this. I feel privileged to have observed a Koala in its natural habitat on the far south coast as this has rarely happened in recent times and I hope that my children will be able to experience the excitement of seeing one in its natural habitat on the far south coast in the future.

Roger Park