Covering Letter

<Date>

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

The Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala

<Name> is pleased to provide these comments to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts for consideration.

Should you require further information our contact details are as follows:

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First name:	Steve
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City	
State:	Victoria
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I would appreciate it if the Committee could (tick as appropriate):

* make the submission and my name public;
  make the submission public but withhold my name; or
  keep the submission confidential

The Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala

Submission by <name>

Introduction

<Brief description of party submitting and why this inquiry is of interest>

Purpose of this Submission

The purpose of this submission is to provide further information, evidence and observations in relation to the following terms of reference (tick as appropriate):

- x The iconic status of the koala and the history of its management;
- Estimates of koala populations and the adequacy of current counting methods;
- x Knowledge of koala habitat;
- x Threats to koala habitat such as logging, land clearing, poor management, attacks from feral and domestic animals, disease and roads, and urban development;
- x The listing of the koala under the EPBC Act;
- x The adequacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy;
- x Appropriate future regulation for the protection of koala habitat;
- x Interaction of state and federal laws and regulations; and
- Any other related matters.

Evidence and Observations

1. Adequacy of Conservation and Management ????

Koalas are at risk because attention by relevant government departments to ongoing population status, threats and habitat management has been virtually non existent. …….

*Issues which have contributed to this risk include……*Very low staff numbers, lack of funding and also the prevention of ordinary citizens from having any real involvement with wildlife management.

Evidence or Observations that I have to support this position includes……..my initial concern over the primary issue (that of the apparent total absence of koalas in Halls Gap) and the confusion and lack of quantifiable records concerning previous natural

occurrence and reintroduction history remains. Sadly the one person who could have shed light for me on the questions was Ian McCann from Stawell (who was my original source of information and personally involved in the reintroductions) who unfortunately is no longer with us.

* **Just as a starting point**....a friend of mine who was a park ranger back in the early eighties here counted over 300 koalas in the 4 .5 km stretch between the town and Lake Bellfield back then....and that was only looking from the roadside.....obviously those sort of numbers indicated a severe over population problem.....Parks didn't appear to give a toss sadly....and a drought, habitat removal for houses and Chlamydia seemed to cut them to pieces in very short order....the major problem now is since the last fires 3 years back the same ranger who once counted over 300 has not even HEARD one (and he lives right herein the National Park as do I)....and nor have I seen or heard any sign since moving back here in November and I am out and about every single day. Now that is something of a change since I used to have them around my house every day and they were constantly heard .....there were always breeding animals and babies....now there are none to be seen anywhere and even Parks Victoria staff say they aren't seen here in the Halls Gap valley any more. It is a worrying status...well at least to me. I am no longer a ranger but as a career wildlife artist I make it my business to be alert to changes in the ecosystem and this is a big one as I'm sure you would agree!!!

Apart from the absence of Koalas I am also concerned that certain people (within Friends of Grampians Group and Parks Victoria) seem to be promoting the notion that Koalas never ever occurred here naturally....and this will obviously give them a great reason not to do anything about ANY Koala problems here.

This trend worries me enormously and I know as a former park ranger that bureaucratic trends work along the CARE principle.....Cover Arse Retain Employment!!!!!.....and any excuse to do nothing is something likely to gain common usage. Top heavy beurocracy in action!!

I may be completely wrong....but I reckon saying Koalas never really occurred here is total frog spawn.....but you may know more about that than I. The Halls Gap Historical Society 'records'which FOGGs mention as noting the absence generally of Koalas are at best put together by well intentioned hobbyists....and are hardly to be taken as evidence or otherwise of Koala occurrences here.

Anyway....you guys are the experts.....I am just a caring , concerned artist who is desperatle aware that the natural ecosystem here is struggling and a keystone species such as the Koala is pivotal in the ongoing well being of such systems .

Recommendation for Consideration by the Committee
List what could be done to improve this situation for the future.

2. <Name term of reference>

Koalas are at risk because…….

Issues which have contributed to this risk include…….

Evidence or Observations that I have to support this position includes…….

Recommendation for Consideration by the Committee
List what could be done to improve this situation for the future.

In summary, …We need to understand the historic and ongoing status and value of Koalas as a keystone species in the ecosystem. We need to change our view that wildlife is the sole province of government bodies and encourage true engagement with ordinary community members who can feel some sense of ownership and pride in healthy ecosystems. We need as a country to allocate proper(real) and useful funding to employ adequate numbers of qualified staff for the relevant government management bodies to do the work truly required. We also need to allocate an equitable portion of both federal and state budgets to facilitate properly useful conservation and management actions at both the government body and community level. We need to get beyond the point where we view any wildlife and particularly Koalas as only the concern of government and correct the natural beurocratic apathy that perforce comes into being under such poor management structures.

……In conclusion as a Professional Wildlife Artist it has been my privilege and pleasure over 30 years to represent Australia Internationally on many occasions and Koalas have often formed an important part of my promotions since they are so well known globally. How tragic I find it that I am guilty of being an Australian from a country who of turns its back on them and their habitat both!!!!!

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.