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

Mr. Al Mucci, General manager-Life Sciences, Dreamworld, is pleased to provide these comments to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts for consideration.

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

Submission by Al Mucci, Dreamworld

Introduction

I am a professional wildlife manager with expert knowledge in the husbandry of koalas. I have a professional interest in the conservation of koala populations and in the presentation of the species as an iconic Ambassador for the conservation of Australian native wildlife and habitats.

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:

- The iconic status of the koala and the history of its management.
- Threats to koala habitat such as logging, land clearing, poor management, attacks from feral and domestic animals, disease and roads, and urban development.
- The adequacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy.
- Appropriate future regulation for the protection of koala habitat
- Other related matters.

Evidence and Observation

1. The iconic status of the koala and the history of its management.

Arguably, along with the giant panda, the koala is the most recognised iconic species of mammal in the world. Unlike any other iconic species, except the giant panda, the koala's iconic status is very firmly associated with a country. The koala is unmistakably Australian.

This makes koala conservation an imperative of more than just biological and cultural concern, but an issue of national identity, international image and reputation.

To hold koalas in the highest regard, to do the utmost to protect the health, welfare and sustainability of koala populations, is to support Australia's international standing in the world as a civilized and enlightened country.

Current tends suggest that we are driving the koala in the direction of extinction.

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

The population of South East Queensland is growing by hundreds of people a week. The suburban area required to house such population growth is expanding faster than any comparable area in Australia destroying koala habitat and threatening the existence of the once thriving koala population. Ten years ago there were estimated to be 10,000 koalas in SE Queensland. Last year there were approximately 2000.

3. The adequacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy.

The National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy is a policy document. While it notes that its successful implementation depends on sustained commitment by a variety of stakeholders, the Strategy is still weak in not setting out more clearly the steps and mechanisms to ensure the required degree of cooperation and commitment is secured and sustained. The implementation team is an "advisory group". No Actions are set to identify and establish specific structures and mechanism that can ensure cooperative action.

4) The listing of the koala under the EPBC act.

The koala should be listed as an endangered species under the EPBC act, in consideration of the threats it faces, from disease, inbreeding, habitat loss and direct human-induced mortality. It is important that current trends are recognised and time lines for effective (including cost-effective) actions are manageable. The further we move the koala in the direction of extinction, the more difficult and costly it will be to reverse the trends.

4. Appropriate future regulation for the protection of koala habitat.

Clear regulations preventing further loss of Koala habitat should be implemented as quickly as possible, and actions taken to expand existing habitat strategically. Incentives and clear directions to land owners and developers to incorporate sustainable Koala habitat to support existing and new populations, should be configured.

5. Interaction of state and federal laws and regulations.

A national task force should examine state and federal laws that relate to the conservation of koalas, identifying problems inconsistencies and framing solutions. The aim must be secure the most effective cooperation between States and between State and National Government agencies as quickly as possible.

6. Any other related matters.

As the General Manager of Life Sciences at Dreamworld, I have direct knowledge and involvement with the Australian zoo community in managing captive Koalas.

The Koala is an icon for Australian zoos and wildlife parks and for zoos overseas, lucky enough to hold koalas.

There is enormous potential for the zoo community, with its enormous reach to promote Koala conservation, to garner public support and community action.

I would welcome an opportunity to address the Senate Committee on the perspectives of koala conservation from the Australian zoo community perspective.