

WINTER EDITION 2012

We've been busy...

Apologies for the delay in the production of this newsletter. Our koala and non-koala related workload has been very high and, consequently, some of our routine business has been deferred.

So what has kept us so busy?

The national conservation status of the koala has been upgraded.

A lot of our effort has been directed towards supporting the review of the koala's national conservation status and separately, the status in Queensland. We have contributed to Commonwealth expert panels, presented evidence to the Senate inquiry into the status of the koala, made formal submissions to the Qld government to reclassify the koala in this state and generally lobbied for the true state of the koala to be recognised. This was done directly through our participation in the national Koala Research Network and in association with many other researchers.

Well, you probably know that the Commonwealth has listed the koala in NSW, ACT and Qld as Vulnerable reflecting the documented decline in abundance and range. In Qld there is a good argument for a classification based on the same data. The state is yet to announce a response to our submission for reclassification.

So what does the Commonwealth decision mean?

It is good news that the koala in NSW, ACT and Qld has been listed as "vulnerable" under commonwealth legislation. However, it is hardly a cause for celebration. This designation reflects the poor conservation status of the koala in Australia. Populations have declined significantly across these two states and the ACT over the last 20 years. This has been a consequence of recent historical broad acre land clearing (now stopped by Qld state legislation in the 1990's), severe drought, probably reflecting "climate change", insidious incremental habitat losses to urban expansion and minerals development as well as direct mortality on roads and from dogs – especially in peri-urban areas.

However the Commonwealth "vulnerable" classification provides opportunities for direct benefits for koala conservation if there is wise implementation of regulations. All new projects that may affect koalas or their habitat must be referred to the Commonwealth for approval. The proponents of these projects will have to demonstrate how their project will avoid impacting on koalas or their habitat or how they will manage any likely impacts so that there is not net loss of animals or habitat.

This provides opportunities to negotiate koala habitat, restoration programs and koala population management programs that can potentially recover lost habitat or expand remnant koala populations. We are arguing that there is an opportunity for project proponents to partner with and resource rural landholders to manage and improve koala habitat and populations on rural lands as well as rehabilitate the post-industrial lands for koala benefit.

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers

www.cqkoala.org.au

Winter Edition 2012

We know that some in the industry sector were keen to become involved in recovering koalas and habitat but, given their corporate governance, were unable to act until there was a regulatory trigger. This has now been delivered – at least at the commonwealth level.

Although the “vulnerable” classification does not affect existing approved activities, it provides an alert (a wakeup call) that the koala is in trouble. This provides us with the opportunity to work in partnership with the whole community to build in koala conservation practices in existing land uses. We are currently working on plans for (a) landscape scale koala restoration in association with sectors of the Queensland Government. This will include landholders, state and local government and industry. The “vulnerable” classification gives impetus to this work; and (b) a network of sentinel sites monitoring the health of koala populations across Qld at least. This network will allow us to provide a koala report card and follow the progress of populations and their habitat over time.

Finally, the Commonwealth Government is required now to produce a “national recovery plan” for the koala. This should set out what actions are required for national recovery and gross funds required to deliver the actions.

So many doors are opened by this. However, some sectors of the community are unconvinced – particularly in Qld and north east NSW. In particular those associated with coastal and urban development see koala regulation as limiting their growth and profits in the face of increasing human populations. New solutions are needed to address these challenges. The solution may lie in careful regional planning and, again, working in partnership. Partnerships (combining incentives with regulatory oversight) are the way forward but will take time to develop. Much to do!

Central Queensland koala workshop

To help build awareness we ran a workshop on the status of the koala in Central Qld. This was well attended with participants coming from as far afield as California, USA. San Diego Zoo along with representatives from Dream World, Australia Zoo and the Rockhampton Zoo. Koala researchers from CQUniversity, University of Queensland and Griffith University presented overviews of their research program. QPWS talked about their management of the koala islands. The workshop received extensive media coverage locally and nationally. San Diego Zoo and Xstrata Coal sponsored the workshop. An account of the work presented is being prepared for publication and this will be available from the Koala Research Centre of CQ later this year.

TERN workshops

We also participated in a specialist workshop funded by the Commonwealth Government through TERN (Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network). Here we were part of an invited selection of researchers and managers from across the koala states (SA, Vic, NSW, Qld) to develop a considered view of the state of koala knowledge nationally.

Supporting future research A research foundation

A little while ago we initiated the development of a foundation to fund future research about CQ koalas and other aspects of the natural environment. This is being pursued in association with the Royal Society of Qld. The paperwork around the establishment of the foundation is being prepared, pro bono, by a firm of Brisbane solicitors. We are close to providing the foundation deposit for this fund. The Royal Society of Qld will match this amount and we'll jointly launch this fund – hopefully this year.

In association with this we are considering a process for the transfer of funds back to CQES in the event of this fund not being established or of some future collapse of the fund. Also we have to consider what we do with the assets of the CQKV in the case where we wish to wind up our activities. Logically we would agree to transfer our assets to groups who can contribute to CQ koala research. That could be an entity such as CQUniversity or another university which can deliver regional koala research, another community group that is capable of supporting future koala research (e.g. Wildlife Australia, Queensland Naturalists) or a zoo. Anyway we'll discuss these matters over the next few months before formulating a clear and agreed position. If you wish to contribute to this discussion please let us know. By the way, this does not mean we are planning this. Rather there is a need to have a position prepared and agreed.

Small research grants

We have decided to again try to stimulate local research by making small grants available to students wishing to pursue koala research locally. The grants (probably 6 x \$500.00) will be available for students commencing their studies in early 2013. The mechanism for applying for the grants will be available on the CQES web site soon.

New koala researchers at the Koala Research Centre of CQ

Mr Rolf Schlagloth has been awarded a scholarship to undertake a PhD on the impact of roads and traffic on koalas. Based on his data collected in Victoria, Rolf will be seeking to understand some of the issues around koala behaviour and road design.

Angele Lecacheur has been working with the Koala Research Centre since February this year. She has been working on the management of koalas on St Bees, Brampton and Rabbit/Newry islands. Her work is

approaching completion and she will return to France in mid-June.

Two new French students (Lucie Lescure, Solene.Bailly) will arrive in June. They will be working on a range of koala related projects with Alistair Melzer and Gail Tucker.

Trade in koalas

In a press release from the national Australian Veterinary Association, Dr George Wilson from the Fenner School of Environment and Society at Australian National University said that:

“The world is facing a biodiversity crisis with up to 30 per cent of all mammal, bird and amphibian species threatened with extinction this century. Preventing such loss requires greater involvement of the private sector”. He went on to say that “Governments don't have the necessary resources to address the biodiversity loss problem and should focus on actively enforcing current regulations such as animal welfare codes. Greater attention to genetic selection and breeding of various endangered fauna will also assist conservation efforts.” and that “Even after 90 years of protection from hunting, under government management, their conservation status continues to get worse. There are many landholder, farmer and grazier groups willing to become involved in addressing the need for re-colonising koala populations. If governments would permit trade in koalas by private landholders, overcrowding and habitat destruction in locally overpopulated communities would be reduced. Veterinary expertise has a great role to play in this process.”

Alistair Melzer's response to this was:

This is the second of these market solutions for biodiversity conservation to be raised recently. Professor Hugh Possingham (University of Qld) has recently been advocating a “sell off” of national parks to the private sector to be “protected” under various

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers

www.cqkoala.org.au

Winter Edition 2012

covenants. Here he argues that government does not have the resources to adequately manage the natural values within the reserves and that the private sector could do it more effectively.

Dr George Wilson is using the same argument. The premise is flawed because the proposed privatization of wildlife and conservation management is in response to what are contemporary, political/economic and societal circumstances. By their very nature they are volatile and at most generational. Conservation initiatives have to be above short term fluctuations in political attitudes and economic cycles. Certainly the public concern for the iconic koala has outlasted significant change in Australia (and internationally) since the cessation of hunting in the early 20th C. The real response should be to argue and lobby for increased resources for conservation lands and biodiversity management rather than selling off the asset. Political and community attitudes will change.

However, I do support placing a value on private conservation practice (including the management of koalas and habitat on existing private lands). We do expect rural land managers to manage our ecosystem services and biodiversity assets. Generally we expect this to be done at the land manager's expense and may even regulate that they do this. I think that there is a good case to reward the land managers for undertaking these public services with real incentives (I argue for cash). How much would a ratepayer be prepared to pay landholders to maintain or regrow koala habitat and look after the koalas I wonder? However, there is no need to transfer the ownership of the wildlife to the private sector to do this. Genuine public/private partnerships would be useful.

Finally in the expanding resource sector there is a requirement for industry proponents to "offset" their destruction of significant natural

assets (koala habitat & populations). These resource rich industries would be able to fund and facilitate the management/recovery of koalas and habitat on private lands that are remote from resource reserves under a contract arrangement with the landholder.

So, I think that there is a role for the private sector but it does not involve selling off our national assets or wildlife icons.

Research Activities

St Bees Island

Rolf Schlagloth and Angele Lecacheur visited St Bees Island over the last weekend in May to commence the next census of koalas.

Alistair Melzer will take a team to St Bees in the last half of July to complete the audit and also to assist QPWs with the routine monitoring of vegetation change as the goats are progressively removed. There may be space for volunteers who can handle the terrain and the daily climbing in and out of boats. Contact Alistair for details.

Rabbit Island

Alistair Melzer and Angele Lecacheur accompanied QPWs to Rabbit Island in February to recover the remains of a koala and to look at the habitat at the southern end of the island. There will be no further trips there in 2012 but stay tuned for 2013.

Springsure

All the tree plantings in the habitat regeneration trials on Norwood Creek have been repeatedly flood affected over the last three years. Alistair Melzer inspected last October's plantings in May. There have been considerable losses from the Norwood Creek Water Reserve due to erosion and spreading salt affects. In the National park the plantings within enclosures were affected by flood debris. Despite that most trees survived and are almost 3m tall. A maintenance trip will be scheduled later in 2012. So if you would like

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers

www.cqkoala.org.au

Winter Edition 2012

to come and remove debris from around the trees and pull down flood damaged fences please contact Alistair.

We are also due to conduct a koala census this breeding season. This is more fun than removing fences. So let Alistair know if you are interested. Dates will be advised.

Tambo and Hughenden

Field trips are required this season but plans have not yet been made. We'll advise as soon as we know.

Victoria

We have a study site in the Ottways in southern Victoria. This is in conjunction with Desley Whisson from Deakin University and Earthwatch. Alistair will be leading the trip in early October.

Carmen's Report on the Workshop Conference

As a CQ Koala Volunteer I attended the Workshop Conference held at CQ University on 1-3 February which was sponsored by San Diego Zoo and Xstrata Coal. It was a great success with each speaker giving an insight into the amount of work being carried out in so many areas. We tend to think of ourselves as working in isolation in regards to koala research; however there are so many dedicated people working towards the survival of our koalas. I was amazed by the amount of research and conservation being carried out by so many - Universities, San Diego Zoo, Dreamworld, several Shires and Councils including our own Rockhampton Regional Council, plus individuals.

Talks covered re-vegetation in areas, corridors in Redland Bay, re-establishing koala habitat on mine sites along with the logistics and cost that go into each project. The monitoring of koala deaths along roads and rail lines were also on the program and talked about.

I totally enjoyed the "workshops" where there was such an interesting interchange of ideas. In spite of the fact that several mining companies are giving money towards the research and re-establishment of koalas they also seem to be the biggest threat with massive loss of habitat in C Q.

It is interesting to see the shift since I began as a volunteer. Once the grazers who cleared their land extensively were regarded as destroying the koala colonies, now they appear to be almost an ally in wanting to conserve habitat.

St bees Island was much under discussion due to its ability to keep a stable colony and because of its isolation it should remain so (hopefully).

Loss of habitat and road deaths, particularly in South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales appear to be considered the biggest threat to the koala with drought also a factor.

The Central Queensland Koala Volunteers were acknowledged for the work they have carried out over the years. Many of the participants came and spoke to me and congratulated us for our commitment to koala research. I had a small stall of our orphans and several went off to a new home. Mary managed to give a very large and floppy koala that we had for some time to Sean FitzGibbon, who said he would use in his talks to school children.

The Board of the Koala Research Centre of central Queensland held a meeting during the Conference. It was proposed:

1. to dis-establish the Board of the Koala Research Centre and the Scientific Advisory Committee and in the future the Research would be managed as a constituent group within the Centre for Environmental Management at CQUniversity.

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers

www.cqkoala.org.au

Winter Edition 2012

2. That a Partners' Advisory Group for the Koala Research Centre of Central Queensland be established, with membership be defined as

Director of the Centre for Koala research, representing CQU

One representative from the Rockhampton Regional Council, one from the Department of Environment & Resource, one from CQKVolunteers, the leader of Koala Research Centre, a member of Koala Research Centre and a member from the dis-established Scientific Advisory Committee.

This will now require one annual meeting of the Group and be a less formal structure

I hope with all the endeavours' of so many people, the Queensland koalas will be less endangered.

Carmen Drake

A brave koala ventured into the Lighthouse Restaurant at Cleveland unfazed by all the curiosity he aroused. Patrons had their photos taken with him. Eventually he left and was found by wildlife rescuers dangling over the water from the roof. He was released in dense bushland nearby. (Courtesy The Courier-Mail, Wednesday 7 September)

Mission

CQ Koala Volunteers seek the conservation of the koala and other tree living mammals in Central Queensland by

- *Supporting research into koalas, other arboreal mammals and their habitat through (a) providing volunteer support to research projects, and (b) assisting in the raising of funds for research and the volunteer teams;*
- *Developing public awareness of the needs of koalas, tree living mammals and their habitat requirements generally;*
- *Fostering community support for koalas and tree living mammals generally;*
- *Encouraging and assisting with the development of habitat rehabilitation projects where necessary through the region;*
- *Supporting the rehabilitation and release of sick, injured or displaced koalas and tree living mammals.*

The Central Queensland Koala Volunteers are not about stopping development. They seek to encourage planned development, which allows for the co-existence of koalas and other tree living mammals with human activity.

Funds are used to buy equipment for the researchers, to fund volunteer field teams and provide limited support for animal carers. Donations may also be made to the Koala Research Centre of Central Queensland and are tax deductible.

Office Bearers

Alistair Melzer, signatory, Chairperson

Carmen Drake, signatory, CKQV representative on Koala Research Centre Board

Shirley Hopkins, signatory, Treasurer

Doreen Lovett, Editor: drl33@bigpond.com

Nick Quigley, Web designer

Web: www.cqkoala.org.au

Direct correspondence to

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers

PO Box 1489

or call and leave a message.

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers

www.cqkoala.org.au

Winter Edition 2012