

Australians For Animals

Newsletter

November 2009



Break through on strandings in NSW at last

Dear Friends,
**STRANDING
BREAKTHROUGH**
You will all be pleased to know that after a great deal of nagging on the part of AFA, National Parks & Wildlife Service finally took some big strides towards getting the most up to date and effective whale and dolphin stranding program a reality.

The Service has set up a Marine Fauna Advisory Group and AFA is happy to announce that the charity has been invited to become a member of the Group. The MFAG includes four Professors from Macquarie, Southern Cross, and NSW Universities as well as two representatives from Taronga Zoo.

NGO groups will include

AFA, ORRCA and IFAW. We're pleased to that the NZ cetacean stranding expert is also on the MFAG.

The appointment to the MFAG is for four years. AFA is more than willing to contribute the charity's considerable expertise on marine fauna to the Group.

The purpose of the committee will be to provide advice to the Parks & Wildlife Service on issues related to policy, operations, research and monitoring of marine fauna including the review and development of marine fauna policies; operational manuals and plans, training programs associated with the rescue, rehabilitation and conservation of marine fauna.

As well, the group is

looking to strengthen partnerships and communication between the Department, researchers, other government agencies and NGOs. There will also be reviews of stranding incidents and recommendations on the processes.

And finally, a very important goal of encouraging and raising awareness of community understanding and knowledge about marine fauna and stranding problems.

The goal of community understanding is particularly important to AFA as the charity still has a vivid memory of what transpired when the orphan humpback whale stranded at Pittwater in Sydney last September.

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DEATH OF SAM THE KOALA

AFA, like most Australians, shed a tear on learning of the death of Sam the Koala who survived the dreadful Victorian bushfires only to die of Chlamydia. The little koala, whose picture was shown all over the world with her paw on the hand of a fire fighter as she drank from his water bottle, captured the hearts of everyone.

AFA made major donations to the Victorian wildlife carers looking after burned koalas. And we know that Sam's plight raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the bushfire victims, but sadly, the koalas in Victoria remain without a special burns unit and most of the money raised over Sam went to humans. All the indications are that there could be bushfires every bit as savage as last year's holocaust.

AFA has a long history with Australia's disappearing koala population. The charity succeeded in getting the Koalas listed under the US Endangered Species Act in the 90's and we have kept a watchful eye on these unique animals.

It is disturbing to read in the Sydney newspapers that there are around 20,000 Koalas left in NSW. This is just a fairy story. There's nothing like 20,000 koalas in NSW much less in the entire country. Australia is losing the Koala and have done little to ensure their survival. The lack of protection is a national disgrace.

AFA is appalled that the Federal Government



continues to refuse to list the Koala under the Environment & Biodiversity Conservation Act. Not long ago, we checked the status of the Koala on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List which is the most recognised listing of all species.

The scientists who claimed that the Koala was a species of Least Concern should be made to answer to a well-informed Senate Select Committee. The Koala should be listed at IUCN as critically endangered and it is shameful that both the Federal and relevant State governments refuse to protect the remaining habitat and core Koala populations.

AFA challenges the Federal Government, NSW, Victoria and Queensland State governments to identify any thriving increasing colony of Koalas. The reality is the logging, urban expansion with accompanying cars and dogs combined with the absolute failure on the part of governments to legislate for habitat protection is driving the koala to extinction.

There are no reserves set aside for them. The odd

tree planting program by community groups is very helpful but just a drop in the ocean in terms of the need for massive plantings.

There's a desperately urgent need to set up a string of wildlife refuges down the eastern seaboard so that a strong genetic pool of Koalas remains. Wildlife hospitals are badly needed as well as research money into the retrovirus which is killing so many of the animals.

Victoria's koala habitat has not recovered from the bushfires. Another severe outbreak will wipe out remaining koalas. NSW koalas are diminishing rapidly and no proper survey or count has been undertaken for years. But we know from koala care groups the continuing loss of habitat is causing major problems.

Our koalas are dying out. A direct result of the political apathy and irresponsibility in all Koala states.

Many of you will remember that our Co-ordinator was the Secretary of the Sun-Herald Koala Fund many years ago, and that she travelled the length and breadth of NSW writing columns on major threats to the Koalas.

At the time, the Sun-Herald had a far-sighted environmentally aware Editor, Peter Allen, who left no stone unturned in his efforts to protect the Koalas.

Not long ago, Sue wrote to the current Editor of the Sun-Herald suggesting it might be a good idea to start up the Sun-Herald Koala Fund again because of the perilously low numbers of Koalas in NSW.

No response. Nothing. It really is depressing to witness the arrogant and off-hand way the media dismisses what it doesn't want to know about. Maybe they caught the disease from politicians!

STRANDING MEETING IN SYDNEY

Prior to MFAG coming together for an in-depth meeting on the considerable stranding problems in NSW, the NPWS set up a meeting in Sydney in late October bringing together a wide ranging group including:- AFA, RSPCA, Australian Seabird Rescue, Taronga Conservation Society, ORRCA, IFAW, Sea Shepherd, Whale & Seal Foundation, SeaWorld, Pet Porpoise Pool and WIRES. AFA was initially more than a little sceptical about bringing together all these groups, particularly as the land based wildlife groups – on the surface anyway – appeared to have a little to contribute to whale and dolphin strandings as marine groups would contribute to land based wildlife problems. But the meeting took place in good faith and it is

encouraging to see some kind of common ground emerge. Trevor Long from Sea World was very helpful in talking about some of the procedures Sea World uses and he detailed the new stranding program which the Queensland government will soon bring into operation.

The biggest problem in NSW is one of turf! AFA believes the Service needs to take over and be responsible for all strandings and that all groups involved on the beaches should come under the control of the Service rangers. There's a desperate need for stranding protocols to be updated and for the Service to play a far more pro-active role. As well, AFA believes that many members of the public would like to be trained to deal with strandings but don't necessarily want to have to join wildlife or stranding groups.

There needs to be more up to date methods of rescue brought into any protocol and for this reason, AFA has spent the year encouraging the NSW government to utilise the services of the New Zealand expert we have had many discussions and contact with over time. His Marine Mammal Medic program is now utilised by many countries and hopefully, key elements will be adopted by NSW government.

Sea Shepherd wants to set up an experimental project to raise any orphan whale calf which may be involved in future strandings. However,



AFA would oppose any suggestion of using a baby whale in such an experiment. We know that whale mothers and their calves are, as Trevor Long says – like velcros. They stick together. The deprivation and isolation of a solitary calf in a captive environment is to our mind a more cruel fate than euthanasia.

AUSTRALIAN OIL SPILL HAS MAJOR IMPLICATIONS FOR GRAY WHALE

A massive oil spill, rivalling the Exxon Valdez, has finally been extinguished ten weeks after the oil leak began off the West Coast of Australia in the East Timor Sea.

In the ten weeks, the slick and dispersal agents covered 9,000 square miles. 9 million gallons of oil have spewed out across the ocean. To put this in perspective, Exxon Valdez disgorged 11 million gallons. The Montara platform (as it is known) is close at 9 million gallons.

The site of the oil rig is some 150 miles from the Western Australian coastline. It is one of the most pristine ocean environments on the

planet, untouched and full of diversity.

The Federal government has been irresponsible in its handling of the spill. In spite of the ongoing emergency, the Thai company responsible for the leak was granted four more exploration licenses. When the rig caught fire with the potential to burn for months as it tapped into the oil leak, the situation looked extremely serious with no relief in sight.

However the oil leak and fire have finally been extinguished. Experts say it will probably take 7 years for the full impact of the spill to be known.

When the Federal government became aware that World Wildlife Fund, , intended to charter its own flight out to the spill site, the Environment Minister was forced to hire a scientist, Dr James Watson, to do a quick report on site. Only five days were allotted to the survey which took place in the middle of the drama. Here is an excerpt from the report.

- Over five days, the scientists counted 462 cetaceans (including false

killer whales and three species of dolphin), 2801 birds (of 23 different species), 62 sea snakes and 25 turtles;

- Many of these species, including birds, cetaceans, sea snakes and turtles, were seen feeding, often in large numbers, in oil-affected water.

- The presence of dying birds and dead sea snakes suggested that there was an 'immediate risk' to species entering oil-affected area.

- Some animals appeared to be attracted to the oil because of the presence of bait fish in it; and

- The oil spill was likely to affect food supply to young birds over a long time period."

Reports on the media indicate a very high number of sea birds have been affected and are dead or dying. As dead animals are more likely to sink to the ocean floor, it is unlikely the full extent of the environmental damage will ever be known.

AFA has seen pictures of a very emaciated dolphin in the oil covered waters. We dread the full impact to whales, dolphins, seabirds, turtles, sea snakes and to the fish and fish larvae. ABC radio interviewed commercial fishermen who say the industry is virtually dead as a result of this ten week nightmare.

The slick has spread to Indonesia where its destroyed thousands of hectares of seaweed farms and local fishing.

AFA is appalled by what has transpired. The West Australian coastline will soon become one of

the most industrialised coastlines in the world as the oil and gas industry are given permits to develop the area which is rich in energy resources.

AFA has warned in previous newsletters of the potential for massive environmental disasters off the coast of Western Australia.

CHRISTMAS – THE SEASON OF NEGLECT

AFA dreads Christmas. This is the time when so many people abandon or leave their animals without adequate food, water or shelter. The charity supports the Animal Rights and Rescue group in Lismore run by a true animal angel, Barbara Steffenson. A No Kill organization relying on volunteers to house animals whilst permanent homes are found, these guys are in desperate straits because of Centrelink insisting that anyone receiving unemployment benefits find paid work. There's a massive shortage of volunteers now as a result. If you can help this group



Gray whales and all whales

We know you will all be happy to learn that Hollywood movie star Daryl Hannah has accepted the invitation of the California Gray Whale Coalition to support the Coalition and the campaign to have the Gray Whale relisted. Check out the website at: www.californiagraywhalecoalition.org

She's a strong supporter of whales and spent some weeks last whaling season on board the Sea Shepherd working to bring attention to the Japanese slaughter. Daryl is a movie star who walks her talk.

Recently, our Co-ordinator met Dr Sylvia Earle who is one of the world's leading marine biologists. She was giving a talk at the Brisbane Institute and Sue was able to have a brief meeting with her to request support for the Gray Whale Coalition. Sylvia was happy to agree and we're waiting to get a few words from her together with a picture.

Sylvia is an amazing woman. Now retired, she travels around the world raising awareness of the problems facing the oceans and life on earth. Lots of people came to Brisbane to listen to her talk which was pretty damn depressing when you realise the extent of environmental damage.

We're also waiting for some words of support



Daryl Hannah

from Jean-Michel Cousteau. His group is a member of the Coalition but featuring Jean-Michel and his work for the marine environment will be a great addition.

The Coalition has grown enormously. If you check out members on the website, you will be amazed at the number of organizations who have joined. Last month we were able to get a Resolution of support through the San Diego City Council. Other California City Councils are now being lobbied for similar Resolutions.

AFA has commissioned two excellent research scientists to develop a model of the Gray Whale looking at some of the environmental drivers of the population. The preliminary results are not good. We have a great deal of work ahead if these majestic whales are to be given the proper protection.

who are need funds urgently, please mark your donations for the Animal Rights and Rescue and we will forward on. Or you can send a donation direct

to:
PO Box 987,
Lismore 2480.
Animal Rights and Rescue is the most deserving charity helping animals that AFA knows of. Please help Barbara and her volunteers by making a Christmas donation.

POSTAL ADDRESS IN SYDNEY CLOSING DOWN

Please send all correspondence and donations to PO Box 673, Byron Bay, 2481. AFA is closing down its Sydney PO Box as it costs to keep this box operating and to have mail forwarded to our Byron Bay box number.

A BIG THANK YOU TO YOU WHO MAKE UP AUSTRALIANS FOR ANIMALS

Thank you so much for all the support and generosity AFA has enjoyed over the last year and for the past 29 years. Next year will be our 30th anniversary! No mean feat for a grass roots group these days. Bless you all, let's hope and pray that we make some major breakthroughs next year.

Animals need our help like never before ~!

For the Animals,

**Sue Arnold
& Friends**