



BALLINA HIGHWAY UPGRADE

ROADS AND MARITIME SERVICES DESTRUCTION

To bear witness may be okay in the biblical sense but in reality, when people are obliged to witness wanton and avoidable destruction, their hands tied by legislation and mainstream media censorship, the impact on human spirit is devastating.

Right now the survival of koalas on the North Coast of NSW, identified as the stronghold of koalas in the state, is perilous, with the only likely outcome – extinction. At a time when scientists acknowledge a 50% decline in the North Coast koala population, the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) have begun clearing pristine koala forest which will be replaced with a four

lane highway known as section 10 of the Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway Upgrade.

32 Threatened and endangered species are in the path of this juggernaut. Opposite the pristine forest are vast hectares of cane fields, flat lands which would easily accommodate a highway upgrade with minimal loss of wildlife. Instead, the RMS insisted on

trashing the forests, claiming the cost of locating the highway along the cane fields would be, “more expensive”.

With no economic value given to wildlife, their habitats, or native forests, the balance sheet only reflects the benefits to infrastructure and transport facilitation.



DELIBERATE MINDLESS DESTRUCTION

The stark reality of this decision is now apparent. Section 10 is a perfect example of irresponsible government policy destined to wipe out not only koalas but other vulnerable species.



Koala Grid



Temporary fencing - Old Bagotville Road



Escape hutch - Old Bagotville Road.

Old Bagotville Road in Wardell is designated by the RMS as one of four koala “hot spots” as one of four koala “hotspots” in section 10. This old gravel road is a newly created link from two quarries purchased by RMS to haul some 384,000 cubic metres of rock and gravel to Back Channel Road and the Highway Upgrade site. Large sections of the road are now

fenced on either side with escape hutches and massive grids to prevent not only koalas but other wildlife from being hit by vehicles as they try crossing the road to access the nearby forest.

In the RMS July 2016 the average traffic count (EPA comments) for Old Bagotville Road was approximately 100 vehicles per day or less.

In April, 2017, the RMS put out a flyer to the local community indicating that the traffic would now escalate to 600 truck movements per day during peak periods and 100 car movements a day. Working hours would run from 7am-6pm Monday-Friday plus 8am-5pm Saturdays. In some areas, work hours would extend from 6am-7pm weekdays. Traffic

speed to be reduced from 100km to 80km.

Not only are the so-called “koala grids” extremely wide but there’s a strong likelihood of potoroos, goannas and other animals being trapped in the grids. Escape hutches defy description, involving a death defying leap into heavy scrub, assuming any animal finds its way up the slippery flimsy boards.

Peer reviewed research on the effectiveness and/or impacts of koala grids are not readily found.

On another major hot spot along Back Channel Road, koala feed and shelter trees have been collared with polycarbonate and/or metal sheeting around the lower tree trunk to prevent koalas and other folivores accessing the trees. RMS is also ring barking trees causing defoliation.

The RMS hypothesis for collaring 80 per cent of the koala feed and shelter trees in the project is that “koalas will move somewhere else” before trees are felled.

Exactly where is unknown. What we do know is that koalas are faithful to and dependent upon their home ranges.

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DELIBERATE MINDLESS DESTRUCTION

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Many examples of koala mortality are available demonstrating loss of home range equals mortality. Moreton Bay Rail project providing a classic example.

Tree collaring and ring barking has never been attempted before.

"...this strategy has never been adopted elsewhere, including in NSW by RMS".

Both the NSW and Federal government have allowed the collaring and ring-barking to proceed. There is no published peer reviewed research which would support this major experiment.

Both koalas and gliders are listed as Vulnerable species under NSW

Threatened Species Conservation Act and the Federal Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Australians for Animals NSW Inc. commissioned a review of the Statement of Reasons relevant to the Section 10 koala populations in November, 2016 which demonstrated the extinction of the eastern sub-population of koalas as a result of the project. No action was taken by the RMS.



Koala feed trees collared.

NSW GOVERNMENT KOALA PROTECTION POLICY IS NON EXISTENT

In December, 2016, the NSW Chief Scientist, Professor Mary O'Kane published a Review of the decline of koalas in NSW indicating increasing evidence of major problems for the species in the state.

Her principal recommendation was to set up a whole of government koala strategy bringing together the RMS, Forestry Corporation, Environment Protection Authority, Department of Planning, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Primary Industries, and NSW Rural Fire Service.

Professor O'Kane's Recommendation suggests that OEH play the important role of bringing together the various agencies.

Following the release, the government declared it would provide \$10 million for a Saving our species Iconic Koala Project which would come under the umbrella of the Office of Environment & Heritage(OEH) Saving our Species Program.

"...an innovative statewide program that addresses the growing number of plants and animals in NSW facing extinction with the Save the Koala Project operating as part of the larger program."



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GOODBYE WARDELL POTOROOS

Another animal of considerable concern is the small population of Long nosed Potoroos located near Wardell in the path of the Highway upgrade.

Several weeks ago The NSW Scientific Committee made a preliminary decision to list the Wardell population potoroos as endangered.

The decision noted that the proposed realignment of the Pacific Highway will reduce the extent of suitable habitat and could lead to an increase in the incidence of fire, road mortality, weed invasion and impede movement to nearby vegetated areas.

As an example of the total inability

of government and conservation organisations to protect the Wardell potoroos under NSW legislation, Patricia Harrup – Acting Director, Public Land and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch, Policy Division, Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) confirmed in a phone conference with the writer, that the Highway upgrade consent conditions did not allow for any changes as a result of post approval designations of endangered or threatened species. Goodbye Wardell potoroos.



Long nosed Potoroo – David Milledge.

AFA HAS CONFERENCE CALL WITH NSW CHIEF SCIENTIST

However, in a conference call with the OEH, AFA was told that the Agency would only play a limited role in the Save the Koala project and further, that the OEH could not make contact with other government agencies in relation to koala issues.

An email from OEH to AFA advised:

“OEH is anchoring the development of the NSW Koala Strategy, with oversight by the Koala Advisory Committee chaired by the Chief Scientist and Engineer. It is proposed that the strategy will commit government agencies to specific actions, making each agency responsible for their actions.”

OEH has mandatory responsibility to protect threatened and endangered species and populations. It now appears that this responsibility is trumped by the RMS.

When questioned by AFA as to how the whole of government strategy would work, Professor O’Kane was only able to say she could provide the phone numbers of relevant people at the various agencies.

In fact, the real outcome of all the hype is that there is no operational or effective policy in place.

In late August, according to the Environmental Defenders Office

NSW, the Biodiversity & Conservation Act and the Local Land Services Amendment Act will come into force despite there being certain components that have not been finalized.

Major work needs to be undertaken by OEH to map koala habitat, gather historical records, mortality records, identify any healthy populations, dog and vehicle strike before any protections can be put in place.

OEH has informed the writer that this process may take up to a year or more.

The NSW government koala policies are a farce demonstrating a complete lack of governance.

There is an urgent need for a Parliamentary Inquiry into the RMS both at the state and Federal level.

Meantime, those of us who are involved in efforts to protect our rapidly disappearing wildlife mourn the loss of nature and the unnecessary suffering imposed on vulnerable wildlife.



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AFA HAS COMMISSIONED THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS OFFICE

We are working tirelessly with the EDO lawyers seeking a way to provide some protection for koalas and potoroos.

AFA has flown to Canberra to lobby Minister Josh Frydenberg. We are in constant dialogue with OEH, lawyers, scientists as well as scientists who are on the NSW government's "koala expert advisory committee". Yet another joke.

Funds are needed to continue this massive effort.

The charity has a strategy in place but the outcome is in the lap of the Gods!

*For the animals.
Sue Arnold*



MAJOR USA HELP ON THE WAY!

Last Chance for Animals (LCA) based in Los Angeles has started a big campaign on koalas.

As a result of a visit by our Co-ordinator to the LCA office earlier this year, this wonderful organization has agreed to mount a campaign to save the koalas. AFA is asking each and every one to sign the petition (link below)

which will be taken to the tourism offices of the Australian, NSW and Queensland governments. We know that Australia is an increasingly popular destination for US tourists and the majority want to see koalas. This is a

critically important campaign LCA is running on our behalf and we are so grateful.

With the Trump presidency, US conservation groups are overwhelmed with issues but Chris and Cindy de Rose who run the organization are animal angels.

Visit: www.lcanimal.org



Please Give Generously

WE NEED FUNDS TO MAKE THIS CAMPAIGN A WIN FOR KOALAS.



You can donate to Australians for Animals through GiveNow's secure online server or please send your donations to:

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