



# Australians for Animals

PROTECT • NURTURE • RESTORE

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MAY 2023 NEWSLETTER



## FEDERAL AND STATE LABOUR GOVERNMENTS KOALA POLICIES ARE NON-EXISTENT

***In reading this newsletter with its sobering news, it is important to stress that Australians for Animals Inc (AFA) is apolitical. The charity does not support or promote ANY political party.***

Our role is to protect wildlife, in particular the Koala which is an umbrella species for coastal forest ecosystems.

The charity has had a great deal of experience in dealing with the major parties environmental ministers. AFA has constantly warned over the

past decade that ALL governments are carrying out policies of koala extinction.

AFA is more than disappointed in realising (as a result of in-depth research) that there's no substantive change in the policies of extinction which highlighted the Morrison

government years and the current Labour governments.

Many conservationists breathed a sigh of relief when Tanya Plibersek was appointed as Minister for the Environment. But that relief soon disappeared as the focus on growth – at any cost – has trumped any likelihood of increased koala protection including legal protection of habitat.

Once again the public is showered with pretty websites and endless statements of concern with no substance.



## NATIONAL KOALA UN-MONITORING PROGRAM

***A perfect example is the “new phase” of the National Koala Monitoring Program (NKMP) to be undertaken by the CSIRO.***

Plibersek has approved \$10 million in funding over the next 4 years to “deliver a robust estimate of the national koala population which will result in a long-lasting capability to monitor and assess trends in koala populations across the entire species range.”

According to the CSIRO website, CSIRO researchers have spent the past year co-designing the national koala program with key research, agency, indigenous and community partners. With “Boots are already on the ground for the new phase of the program.”

However, under the Morrison government, in March 2022, the CSIRO was granted \$2 million “to address information gaps and provide robust data on koala distribution, population numbers and trends to target on ground actions where they are most needed across Australia.”

As well, Sussan Ley then Environment Minister, \$250,000 was granted to CSIRO to integrate koala health and condition monitoring with the National Koala Monitoring Program. This program has a 136-page report generated by the Morrison government on its aims and focus.

In essence, **over \$12 million** has been granted to CSIRO for a national monitoring program. Basic common sense would surely have been for Plibersek to audit the previous grants to CSIRO to see what, if anything has been achieved.

Otherwise, what exactly is the status of the “old” NKMP? Where has all the money gone?

The CSIRO website provides zero information on how a “robust estimate of the national koala population” will be achieved. Particularly as \$10 million breaks down to 2.5 million over 4 years. Peanuts in terms of carrying out population estimates across all koala states. That's \$625,000 per state.

AFA attempted, through its co-ordinator Sue Arnold who continues to work as an environmental journalist, to find out exactly how CSIRO planned to provide a “robust estimate.”

It's worth including the questions she raised with the communications person at CSIRO remembering that according to their website, researchers have spent the past year co-designing the national koala program.



Here they are:

**1. What methodology will be used to deliver a robust estimate of the national koala population?**

**2. Who are the co-designers of the program?**

*“CSIRO - Boots are already on the ground for the new phase of the program.. to develop cross-cultural monitoring methods.”*

**3. What “boots are on the ground” and what exactly are “cross cultural monitoring methods”?**

*“CSIRO - We are co-designing a dashboard which allows koala data to be appropriately used and shared.”*

**4. What is the “dashboard”?**

*“CSIRO - The new National Koala Monitoring Program will collect koala sightings using consistent*

*methods across the country and build survey know-how with citizen scientists.”*

**5. What methodology will be used to collect sightings and what are the consistent methods?**

**6. How will koala sightings be collected?**

*“CSIRO is collaborating with local community groups, First Nations people and experienced koala scientists – to ensure that the NKMP is built and owned by the whole community.”*

**6. Can you provide the names of the “experienced koala scientists”?**

*“CSIRO - Trial innovative koala monitoring methods.”*

**7. What “innovative koala monitoring methods” will be trialed?**

*Continued...*

## Cont'd... NATIONAL KOALA UN-MONITORING PROGRAM

**Not one single question has been answered. Of course, AFA has checked out the CSIRO website many times.**

So, AFA's co-ordinator called Plibersek's office to get a contact for the Minister's media people for proper responses to the questions raised.

The usual reply from Plibersek's office is you are told to send the questions to a specific email and

media "will respond directly". Except that from experience, media never responds despite many phone calls to the Minister's office.

So not only are the Plibersek policies not transparent but it appears no journalist can contact the Minister's media. Presumably, censorship rules.

## POPULATION NUMBERS

**Perhaps the most damning evidence of the Albanese government's "fiddling with figures" is the removal of the SPRAT (Species Profile and Threats Data Base) from the federal Department of the Environment website which demonstrated the catastrophic loss of koalas from 1990 up to 2010 in Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia. A national population figure was also included.**

The new SPRAT data on koalas contains NO population estimates for any state. And no wonder. No state or federal government carried out any surveys after the Black Summer bushfires to find out the status of koalas.

Experts reckon some 64,000 koalas died in the fires. AFA knows the Liberal Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley acknowledged that 8,000 koalas were incinerated on the mid north coast of NSW alone.

No amount of lobbying or requests by AFA directed at any state or federal government could persuade the powers that be to undertake urgent population estimates.

The seriousness of population data being removed from the SPRAT website, can't be understated. Fortunately, AFA keeps records as the charity knows how quickly they can disappear if not suitable for government policy.

Let's take NSW population in 2010. According to the old SPRAT, the 2010 population estimate was 21,000, down from 31,400 in 1990. Removing 8,000 burnt koalas brings the figure down to 13,000. That figure only covered the mid north coast.

One koala scientist estimated as many as 10,000 koalas, "a third of NSW total population" had died in the bushfires and drought.

A news report claimed as few as 11,000 koalas were left in NSW in 2019.

There's no way to estimate how many more koalas were incinerated throughout the state. Nor has the death toll from the three year drought which preceded the Black Summer bushfires been included (because no government bothered to do an estimate) in any population assessment. Any figure fails to take into account koalas lost as a result of industrial logging, major urbanisation projects, infrastructure, fracking, coal mines, disease, dog attacks, vehicle strikes.

In spite of these historic events which must have and continue to result in significant losses, one major environmental organisation claims 15,000–28,000 in NSW.

In 2022, the NSW government in its NSW Koala Strategy claimed estimates varying from 15,000 to 30,000 with a conservative population estimate of 20,000 koalas in NSW in 2020.

It's a shell game.

## CSIRO's RESPONSE

*"My response has been delayed because our researchers have been out in the field and are difficult to catch at the moment. This will be the case for the next few weeks.*

*As such we are planning our media engagement and the announcement for the release of the program's first report in mid June.*

*Happy to chat closer to this time when we can reveal some*

*research milestones for the program.*

*The additional website for the program, which features the citizen science and the dashboards you spoke about will also be published around that time. In the meantime, we have lots of information and links about the program here: [CSIRO announces new phase of National Koala Monitoring Program - CSIRO](#)*



In 2010 the NSW population was estimated by SPRAT at 21,000. In 2022 after massive bushfires, drought, the population "conservatively" according to the government was 20,000. So in 13 years no change in the numbers..... seriously?

AFA believes the koala numbers in NSW are so low with major localised extinctions that the species should immediately be listed as CRITICALLY ENDANGERED and all logging in remaining koala hubs, developments in habitats be stopped immediately.

Given the data AFA has collected from local government studies, koala numbers may well be less than 5,000. A catastrophic situation.

Nationally, koalas are doing no better. Victorian government estimates simply cannot be believed or are scientifically acceptable. Ditto with South Australian government.

As for Queensland, Palacszuk has definitely crowned herself as Australia's major koala killer as development after development wipes out critical remaining habitat. Mind you, she's had a lot of competition from Berjiklian and Perrottet.

Nevertheless, without any attempt to gather population estimates by ground truthing – preferably using dogs which are far superior to any modelling, drones or heat devices, it's anyone's guess how many koalas are left.

Locally, people know. Local Councils know. Conservation groups know. Community groups know. So do vets, independent scientists and those other occupations that use the forests (such as beekeepers) know.

Only the politicians remain ignorant. What really gets AFA is how Australia has ANY reputation other than the world's worst mammal extinction record – and it's ongoing.

# FORESTRY LEGAL CHALLENGE

*As a result of ongoing problems with the lawyer engaged by AFA to develop a legal challenge against the NSW Forestry Corporation's rape of native forests' wildlife, the charity focused on assisting the Indigenous Justice Activist Network (IJAN).*

In an historic first, the IJAN, representing an indigenous elder who is a native title holder, lodged a legal challenge in the Land & Environment court over the Forestry Corporation's approval of a harvest plan.

It is the first time such a case has been accepted by the court because of endless legal issues over standing. (The right to mount a legal challenge).

AFA spent nearly two years working with IJAN funding research, paralegals, expert scientists, barristers' legal advices, organising legal conferences as well as providing extensive briefs to lawyers.

The charity also provided funding for

the IJAN lawsuit.

We are waiting for a judgement as the case was heard last month. There's no time frame on the timing of the judgement but if successful, it will enshrine the rights of indigenous native title holders to oppose logging on native title land.

Importantly, a positive judgement may have implications for ecologically sustainable forest management (ESFM) which Forestry continues to ignore.

It's extremely unfortunate that currently AFA cannot proceed with the legal challenge which we finally identified after three plus years of research and endless legal conferences. Apparently if a legal firm provides pro bono service



(free), the client has few rights.

In any event, the judgement on the IJAN case will be either a signal to proceed or another nail in the coffin of our forest wildlife.

What the work involved does highlight is a major potentially catastrophic shortage of public interest lawyers, barristers and special counsel willing to work on complex environmental issues.

The research involved in digging into Forestry's government approval

documents was immense and dreadfully complicated. Given the current situation, both state and federal governments have stripped the democratic rights of the public to challenge in court the destruction of critically endangered, endangered wildlife during industrial logging operations.

There's no question that the forestry issue is absolutely critical to the continuing well-being and economic future of Australia.

## BUDGET WOES

*A quick search of the Federal government's budget for the environment was pretty disappointing.*

With no recognition of the plight of wildlife, ecosystems, climate impacts on flora and fauna, the best Treasurer Chalmers could do was promise \$1.1 billion to the Natural Heritage Trust "to help protect threatened species and their habitat..." etc etc etc.

The Natural Heritage was established under the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Act. The Trust is the principal funding stream supporting Landcare.

The board consists of two ministers, Environment and Agriculture.

No mention of our vanishing wildlife, native forests. The focus is to "effectively address program priorities and national objectives for a healthy environment and a sustainable future."

Seriously?

Promises were made to establish an Environmental Protection Agency to enforce Commonwealth

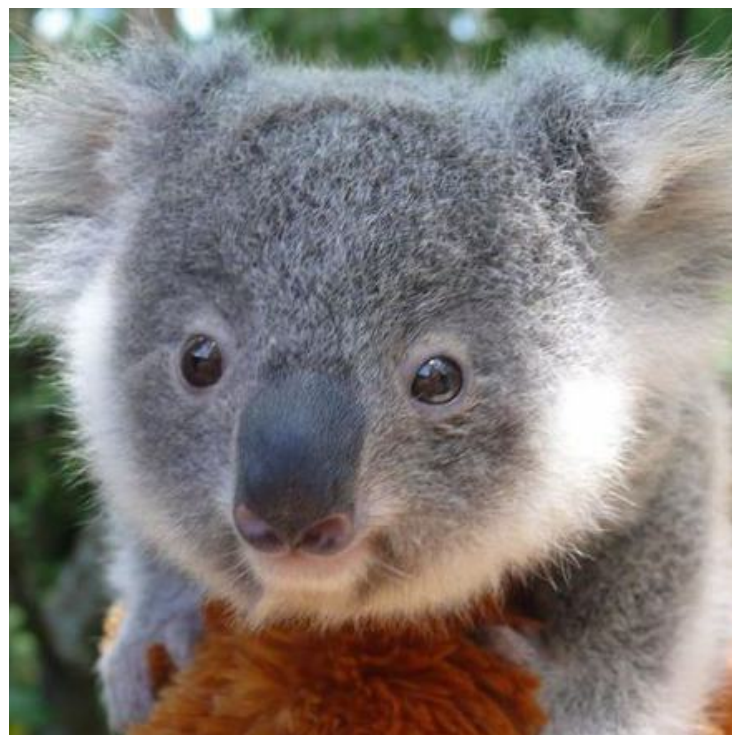
environment laws.

Commonwealth environment laws are so weak with provisions to ensure no rights of legal challenges that an independent EPA staff would need to take up hobbies such as knitting or gardening to pass the time.

The National Koala Guidelines have been repealed. Developers can continue to self refer with even weaker guidelines to "protect endangered species". Offsets can be made in dollars. The forest industry can continue to bulldoze and eradicate native forests and forest fauna. Climate change impacts on wildlife in the closet.

Another promise was to establish an Environment Information Australia to improve transparency and decision-making.

If it gave out information on the past, current and future policies of extinction pursued by all



governments whether ALP or LNP it would serve a useful purpose. Otherwise, probably the information centre's role is to generate more propaganda.

As Euan Ritchie, a Professor in wildlife

ecology and conservation at Deakin University wrote in the Guardian:

*"Our very existence and wellbeing is fundamentally linked with environmental health, as is the economy."*

# KOALA DOLLARS NO AUDITS OF TAXPAYER FUNDED RESEARCH

*AFA is toting up with vast sums of taxpayer dollars which have been granted to koala conservation by NSW and Federal governments, past and present. Millions of dollars have been poured into projects without any auditing or accounting.*

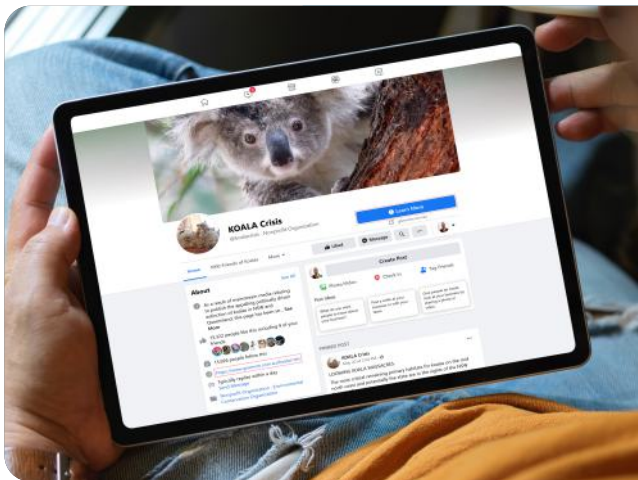
After the catastrophic 2019-2020 bushfires, millions were allocated to impacted wildlife including the koala. Money to restore habitat. Large amounts were given to zoos when securing remaining habitat was the real urgency.

In NSW, the new Labour government has indicated it will establish the Great Koala National Park. But.. we are still waiting for any sign that discussions with stakeholders have commenced. Instead we're told an economic study has to be undertaken (several have already been done).

Meantime, the Forestry Corporation of NSW continues to log koala hubs and the destruction continues.

A significant amount of funds have been spent on chlamydia vaccines. An issue that ignores the evidence provided by wildlife carers who know that chlamydia is caused by stress which is caused by loss of habitat. If a moderately sick koala is put in a healthy habitat, many recover.

Bottom line, the best cure for chlamydia and retrovirus is to stop clearing habitat!



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