



AUSTRALIAN KOALA FOUNDATION

The international organisation dedicated to saving the koala and its habitat

Conservation of the wild koala and its habitat is of global significance

5 August 2009

Premier Anna Bligh
Queensland Government
PO Box 15185
City East QLD 4002

Dear Premier,

RE: Koala Mapping Project Southeast Queensland

On behalf of the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF), I am writing to enquire as to why the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency did not put the recent Koala Mapping Project for Southeast Queensland out for open tender.

After trawling through the established Queensland Government guidelines for consultancy work, the AKF found these guidelines advise that each project tender should ensure "probity and accountability". The Queensland Government State Purchasing Policy also suggests the consultancy tender process should be conducted in a manner which will "advance Government priorities" whilst achieving "value for money".

The guidelines clearly assert that a sole invitation process, as used for this particular tender, is only recommended if there is only one consultant who can do the job. Additionally, the QGM (Queensland Government Marketplace) instructs "it is not good practice to advise the sole offer or that they are the only consultant offering". Government policy mandates that the relevant staff "must submit a written justification for sole supplier situation to [their] authorised officer for approval."

The Australian Koala Foundation Koala Habitat Atlas methodology is recognised by both Victorian and New South Wales Governments as a preferred mapping methodology. A number of other environmental consultants have also contacted AKF asking why there was no tender, so it is clear that there were others who could have completed this project, and probably more cheaply.

It would therefore appear that there has been an error of judgement by the Department on this matter and I put the case to you that this consultancy tender was not conducted according to your own guidelines of "proper practice".

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It is clear that probity and value for money were not achieved. We can assure you that the AKF would have been able to provide maps of the region being assessed for a much smaller figure than the estimated \$900,000 allocated. In fact, on several occasions the AKF has offered our mapping services for free. I would encourage you to check the notes from meetings with myself and Ms. Desley Boyle, a previous Minister, where this offer was made.

Premier, so that the AKF will not have to make a Freedom of Information request on this issue, will you as a matter of urgency provide us with:

1. The written justification for sole supplier by the relevant EPA staff,
2. The exact cost of the tender,
3. The expected outcomes of the tender,
4. The responsible party who determined the scope and nature of the brief for the mapping methodology.

This last point is the most concerning to the AKF. As you probably know, the AKF has grave concerns about existing mapping methodology and have shared our concerns with you and other Ministers for years. The key issue – that your maps do not identify and protect habitats with koalas. We would argue that by the imprecise assessment of koala habitat in urban and non-urban areas, your Government sanitises areas, ignoring resident koalas and making it impossible to protect the area for ever more.

We would argue this has been a conscious action to allow for future development. There are several case studies now where incompatible developments have occurred because koala habitat has not been mapped as such.

Our concerns have been heightened in recent times with this tender. When we shared our concerns with Dr. David Dique from the successful tender company about the proposed Koala Mapping Project Southeast Queensland including significant biases in the methodology and insufficient survey days, these concerns fell on deaf ears.

Why would you, the Government, pay \$900,000 for a methodology that as yet has no scientific merit?

This is particularly important because there is potential for a new national mapping standard, eventuating from the revised National Koala Strategy. The AKF is most concerned that should Queensland decide “to go it alone in its mapping standards”, efforts to create a national standard where all consultants and developers can evaluate what is or is not koala habitat will be undermined.

Given that the results of your poorly planned mapping will potentially set the benchmark for development over the next 22 years after such mapping is incorporated into the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031, a response is urgent. Your prompt attention to this matter is requested.

As I have said to you many times before, why you don't do it properly in the first place is just beyond me.

Yours faithfully,

Deborah Tabart OAM
Chief Executive Officer