



Australian
Koala
Foundation

A.C.N. 010 922 102

media release

****Embargoed: 7.00pm Monday November 30 2009****

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E-mail trail from Garrett's department proves it has no koala data

Once again the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) is calling on Environment Minister Peter Garrett to urge him to use his precautionary powers to immediately list the koala as vulnerable under the EPBC Act.

As public pressure on Minister Garrett to list the koala as a vulnerable species continues to build, the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) can reveal that an e-mail received from his department states it does not have the science to make an informed decision on the marsupial's fate.

The AKF received the email on May 1 2009 at 2.02pm from a senior member of the department.

According to AKF Chief Executive Officer Deborah Tabart OAM, the e-mail contained a series of internal e-mails that discussed what other data, besides the AKF's, the Government could use to make a decision on whether or not to list the koala during the next scientific assessment.

"The internal dialogue between bureaucrats arose after the AKF raised concerns that aside from mortality figures, no new data existed since the last time the committee met to decide the koala's fate in 2006.

"The pinnacle of the e-mail was a comment made by one of the Minister's senior staff which said: *"There would be a certain satisfaction to listing the koala using data other than AKF"* but also acknowledged there was next to no other data available.

"This is highly alarming. Not only does it undermine the 20-years-worth of quality data that the AKF has produced, but it proves that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) and the Department - who ostensibly are supposed to make a scientific decision on the fate of the koala - do not have any definitive data of their own to make an informed decision.

"The contents of the email show clearly the Minister's department has no data to counter AKF's research. The AKF is confident it was also like this in 2006," Ms Tabart said.

"Minister Garrett has no other option but to use his powers to make an immediate listing of the koala until his department can prove why it shouldn't be protected.

"Currently the Minister is saying he will not list until September 2010 and we believe that will be too late for many koala populations in Australia.

"Mr Garrett, his department and the head of TSSC Professor Bob Beeton, are hiding behind a wall of bureaucratic process and absolutely deluding themselves if they think they can replicate AKF's data in an acceptable time frame.

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“AKF field teams have scoured the bush for over twenty years. We have 2,000 field sites and have individually measured 80,000 trees across the east coast of Australia. “Interestingly enough, we have never bumped into any Government scientists during that time. I know this, because I was there.

“With our comprehensive database and reliable on-the-ground knowledge, I can assure you that you either know koalas are there or they are not.

“This first hand knowledge gives us certainty behind our estimates that the mainland koala population of Australia is as low as 43,000 and no greater than 80,000.

“It has taken hundreds and hundreds of volunteer hours to build this data and the Government will never be able to replicate it.

“AKF has done enough – once the Department makes the listing we will work with them to create a meaningful strategy and share our data with them.

“Mr Garrett, when you can assure the Australian public the koala is safe, with data collected by your scientists, then you can unlist the koala.

“Until then, as custodian, you must protect this precious Australian icon before it is too late.”

The TSSC will resume meetings on the koala’s fate on December 1, 2009.

“The writing is on the wall. We have the data, it shows the koala is in serious trouble and now it is clear there is nothing but political will getting in the way of making this listing,” Ms Tabart said.

“Worse still we know the Australian Government doesn’t have anything to back up their rhetoric.”

For more information, please visit www.savethekoala.com.

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- For further comment please call AKF CEO Deborah Tabart OAM
Ph. 0407 750 668.