



## The Koala Calls on U.S. Friends

Deborah Tabart OAM, CEO of the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF), is a proud Australian but, after almost a quarter of a century in the job, she has had cause to lament on more than one occasion that the koala was not native to the United States of America.

“After years of going to the United States to try and understand how to protect the koala, I have come to see the U.S. Government and conservation groups as progressive and visionary in their approach.”

“When I learnt that there was a Bald Eagle Act, I just knew there had to be a National Koala Act one day too,” says Ms Tabart.

“The eagle and the koala have so much in common. They are both iconic images of what it means to be an Australian and an American. Can you imagine either country without the koala or the eagle?”

Ms Tabart believes the US experience underlines that protecting a species is not difficult, but it does require political will and a long term commitment.

Despite these elements never being evident in Australia, Ms Tabart still has hopes that a National Koala Act could be realised.

“The US has provided us with a blueprint of what we need to do.”

Ms Tabart says legislation that has planning power, plus tax incentives to encourage and support private landholders to protect biodiversity are the necessary foundation stones, if Australians are going to grapple with saving the koala on private land.

The fact that the United States Government has been directly involved in koala conservation efforts may surprise many Australians, but not Ms Tabart.

“They have scrutinized and accepted the sound science that the Australian Koala Foundation has put before them, while the Australian Government says our body of work, which has taken our top scientists 25 years to compile, is not enough”.

Ms Tabart says it's important to remember that President Hoover stopped the importation of koala skins in 1929 because he knew that if this didn't happen that the koala would have become extinct in all states, as it already had in South Australia.

“He loved Australia and this simple act meant the koala fought for another day” says Ms Tabart, but she feels very little has changed from those dark days.



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“Australia’s governments were not possessed of compassion or foresight then, and I truly question whether they are now?” she says.

“When the Clinton-Gore administration listed the koala as ‘Vulnerable’ in the year 2000, the Australian Government was not happy. Clearly, they did not want another country judging its merits or lack thereof”, says Ms Tabart.

In 2011, as the koala’s future hangs in the balance once more, its friends are desperately needed again. Ms Tabart says Facebook and Twitter are providing a great way for the koala to connect with its international supporters, and particularly in the U.S.

Meanwhile, in a submission to the *Senate Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of the koala*, the Australian Koala Foundation identified the establishment of a National Koala Act as a key priority, and also provided a preliminary document.

The AKF’s submission is no. 25 and can be found at <http://bit.ly/gQtI ZZ> or [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec\\_ctte/koalas/submissions.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec_ctte/koalas/submissions.htm)

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