



**Australian  
Koala  
Foundation**

A.C.N. 010 922 102

## **Shocking figures reveal devastating impacts of Koala fur trade** **24<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

Recent Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) research has revealed at least 8 million Koalas were killed for the fur trade, with their pelts shipped to London, the United States and Canada between 1888 and 1927.

The current population of approximately 87,000 wild Koalas in Australia represents only 1 per cent of those that were shot for the fur trade.

Koala fur is waterproof and was used to make hats and gloves and to line coats. The AKF's research sourced its figures from historic auction house records, news archives and other published works.

AKF Chief Executive Officer Deborah Tabart OAM said Australia's Koala fur trade completely decimated our wild populations.

"I'm offended by the current literature about the history of Koalas, and we want to rewrite it," Ms Tabart said.

"For too long Australian scientists have been misrepresenting the historic trends in Koala numbers to the detriment of our national icon."

The AKF said this new research will be vitally important when it comes to regenerating Koala populations around the country in the future.

"Where did they thrive before European settlers came?"

"It will enable scientists of the future to restock landscapes," she said. AKF records show that between 1888 and July 1918 at least 4,098,276 Koala furs passed through London auction houses.

"This figure doesn't include records from 1911 to 1914.

"London wasn't the only market – records we've obtained indicate more than 400,000 pelts were shipped in 1901 alone from Adelaide to the USA.

"In 1919, 2 million pelts were shipped to the USA, followed by another 2 million in 1924."

Ms Tabart said this slaughter saw Koalas hunted to functional extinction in South Australia by 1912.

"By the 1920s, Koalas were reduced to a few hundred individuals in New South Wales and 1000 in Victoria," she said.

"Only Queensland still retained significant numbers but that wasn't to last.



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“In 1927 in Queensland, the country’s final, but highly controversial month-long hunt known as Black August, more than 800,000 Koalas were killed.”

By this time, everyday Queenslanders, led by Brisbane’s Anglican Archbishop Gerald Sharp, recognised the need to protect this iconic animal and campaigned fiercely against that hunting season.

It wasn’t until USA’s then Secretary for Commerce Herbert Hoover, who later became President, signed an order in 1927 permanently prohibiting Koala skin importation, that the Koala fur trade was halted.

Ms Tabart said as a younger man, President Hoover had spent time in the West Australian goldfields so would have been aware of the importance of this iconic animal to Australia and this might have influenced this decision.

“Let’s be quite clear, this hideous fur trade wiped out the bulk of our wild population,” Ms Tabart said.

Ms Tabart said she is offended by the existing scientific literature about the history of Koalas as it implies that when European settlers came to Australia, Aboriginal people had hunted them so much that there were low numbers.

“White settlers, in my view are completely responsible for wiping out an unthinkable number of Koalas, and we still see these effects today.”

Ms Tabart said she is confident that one day she will say sorry to the Aboriginal people for yet another slight on their culture, and that she’s confident the Koala was in a healthy state when settlers came in 1788.

September is Save the Koala Month and this research highlights why it is so important to save the comparatively tiny portion of remaining vital Koala Habitat and Australia’s wild Koala Population.

### Key Facts:

- Koala fur was waterproof, and used to make hats, gloves and fur linings for coats.
- At least 8 million Koalas were killed for their fur between 1888 and 1927.
- Between 1888 and July 1918, at least 4,098,276 Koala furs passed through London auction houses. This figure does not include records from 1911 to 1914.
- Koala was functionally extinct in South Australia by 1912 (not enough animals for the population to sustain itself).
- London was not the only market for Koala furs. Furs were also exported to



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markets such as the United States of America (USA) and Canada; in 1901, 400,000 furs were shipped from Adelaide to the USA.

- That was just the start: Nearly 2 million furs were exported in 1919, another 2 million in 1924.
- By the 1920s, Koalas reduced to a few hundred individuals in New South Wales and a thousand animals in Victoria. Only Queensland retained significant numbers.
- The catalyst for the end of the fur trade was August 1927 – ‘Black August’ – where nearly 800,000 Koalas were killed in Queensland in one month alone. 800,000 is approximately ten times the size of the current population of Koalas in Australia
- The Koala fur industry was not halted until President Herbert Hoover of the USA (while he was Secretary for Commerce) signed an order that year (1927) permanently prohibiting the importation of Koala skins into the USA.

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