



**Australian
Koala
Foundation**

A.C.N. 010 922 102

Former US President saved Koalas from extinction

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New research from the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) has revealed that Koalas were nearly hunted to extinction for their fur early last century – and it was President Herbert Hoover who saved them.

Records show that 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.

Koala fur is waterproof and was used to make hats and gloves and to line coats.

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.

The Koala fur trade was only halted in 1927, when Mr Hoover, then US Secretary for Commerce, signed an order permanently prohibiting Koala skin importation.

AKF Chief Executive, Deborah 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.

The AKF said this 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?” Ms Tabart said.

“Because of the fur trade, by the 1920’s there were only a few hundred individuals remaining in the State of New South Wales, and just 1000 in Victoria,” she said.

Records obtained by the AKF 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.”

The US wasn’t the only market, with AKF records showing that between 1888 and July 1928 that at least 4,098,276 Koala furs passed through London auction houses.



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“Perhaps there are still people out there with information about this dreadful trade; did Mr Hoover have anything in his library about why he did this?”

“Has anyone got a piece of Koala fur from that time? Email the AKF (akf@savethekoala.com), we would love to hear from you,” she said.

Now, the AKF is again looking to the USA’s past to help save Australia’s rapidly declining wild Koala populations.

“All of our energy is now focused on getting a Koala Protection Act in place, which is based on the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act from the USA,” Ms Tabart said.

“The Koala deserves to be treated with absolute respect, and a Koala Protection Act is the only way to ensure this,” she said.

Key Facts & Figures

- 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 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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