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Associate Professor Paul Adam  
Chairperson, NSW Scientific Committee  
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Dear Associate Professor Adam,

Thank you for your letter of 10 May 2004, although I remain unclear as to whether the content represents a request for further information or a position statement. Should the former be the case, I am aware of a few reports of Koalas just outside the catchments delineated in the nomination.

These reports seem consistent with other reports of 'wandering', individual Koalas after the disappearance of the known breeding aggregate in Yurammie and the apparent dispersion of the Numeralla 'Koala population'. It is suggested that these reports of Koalas, outside the catchments delineated in the nomination, represent evidence of the ongoing decline of the nominated population. There is little doubt Koalas can move from their home-range, although I am not aware of any evidence to demonstrate these animals have found suitable habitat or 'other' Koalas and no evidence to suggest they have returned.

While it could be assumed that the post-logging disappearance of Koala breeding aggregates in the Cuttagee catchment was a result of their demise, the anecdotal reports suggest that some may have dispersed in search of suitable habitat or 'other' Koalas. None of the reports demonstrate the existence of an 'other' Koala population and all of the reports were to the immediate south of the delineated catchments. At a recent meeting about forest and Koala management issues (Feb, 2004), State Forests Ecologist, Dr. Jim Shields indicated that Koalas were now 'very rare on the south coast', suggestive of a shift downwards in this agency's previous estimate of their Eden region 'Koala population'.

Possible explanations for such a downward revision may include State Forests' recent estimates that 35% of native forests on private land in the Bega Shire are declining with Bell-miner assisted dieback. Regrettably, and despite the fact that these forests are generally downstream of public forests, State Forests, National Parks, and the Catchment Management Authority do not consider changes to natural hydrology a factor in eucalyptus decline.

Another explanation may be the extensive public forest areas, like the Wadbilliga-Deua 'wilderness' that are, at least since the start of the recently identified forty year cycle of below average rainfall, considered to be 'prone to senescing', during periods of below average rainfall.

As previously indicated, I have no direct contact with the NPWS on Koala issues, although I am aware that suggestions have been made to landholders about Koala 'translocations' and 'other' Koala populations. During an interview (ABC Regional Radio, 5 June 2004), a National Parks spokesperson reiterated this position and that by their assessment there is 'a lot of Koala habitat', but did suggest that Koalas in the region are 'highly endangered' and that the nominated population was the 'most important'. An appeal was made for listeners to ring in and report any Koala activity. No calls were received.

The Scientific Committee alludes to Koalas in locations not subject to the adverse environmental changes evident across the rest of the Bio-region and that these 'other' Koalas demonstrate the nominated population is not disjunct. Unfortunately, no supporting documentation was provided with your letter, although I note the Scientific Committee has previously relied on information that fell short of demonstrating the existence of an 'other' Koala population.

However, as the nomination was intended to assist in preventing extinction, it does seem logical that the likely extinction of the nominated population would seem to render further correspondence academic. In addition, it would seem that if the unidentified 'Koala populations' alluded to in your letter are not subject to the same threatening processes, then logically the area/s they occupy must be of regional conservation significance. These areas are not provided for in the TSC Act.

Given this situation, I have been advised to take all reasonable steps prior to raising my concerns about the Scientific Committee's interpretation of the TSC Act, in a separate forum. I now understand the 'statewide' recovery plan supersedes a previous draft recovery plan for the south coast and no other documents are to be produced. In the absence of a determination in support of the nomination, I seek confirmation as to whether the Scientific Committee retains an interest in receiving comments on the 'state-wide' Koala recovery plan.

Although community efforts to address the key threatening processes will continue, I am also advised to take a precautionary approach in preparation for threatened agency actions aimed at stopping these efforts. Due to a hardware failure I request the return of all documentation that the Scientific Committee has received from me in regards to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Bertram  
14 June 2004