

From: Wanda Grabowski [mykoalas@bigpond.net.au]
Sent: Saturday, 12 November 2005 2:30 PM
To: RRAT, Committee (SEN)
Subject: National Animal Welfare Bill 2005
RE: NATIONAL ANIMAL WELFARE BILL 2005

I wish to make a submission to Andrew Bartlett (Australian Democrats) about the National Animal Welfare Bill 2005. I have several concerns that relate to Part 4 - Animal Welfare Offences. My concerns relate predominantly to breaches of duty of care, animal cruelty and alleviation of pain. I have been witness to many of the situations that I will detail below. These observations have come about by way of personal experiences as a koala rescuer and carer for many years. I have worked as a volunteer koala carer since 1993 and have been rescuing sick, injured and orphaned koalas from 1999 up to the present time.

As at 2005 there are two facilities that treat sick, injured and orphaned koalas in Southeast Queensland. The Moggill Koala Hospital (MKH) and the Koala and Wildlife Hospital at Beerwah (KWH).

I worked as a volunteer carer for sick, injured and orphaned koalas at MKH from August 1993 to June 2004. So I am well aware of the procedures and activities undertaken there both as a volunteer carer and as a consequence of bringing sick and injured koalas to MKH after they have been rescued.

I began working as a volunteer carer for sick, injured and orphaned koalas at KWH from May 2004 and I am still working there on Thursdays and Sundays. All koalas that I have rescued since I began working at KWH are taken there. I have had the unique opportunity of seeing for myself the treatment given to each and every koala that I have admitted to this facility. I have also seen the miracles performed on other koalas coming from other areas in SEQ and Northern NSW. There is a vast difference between the two facilities in the treatment regimes offered and the quality of care given to koalas.

The KWH operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Wildlife Rescue Telephone Number is 24/7 operation. A fully qualified vet and fully trained vet nurses with expertise in wildlife are available on call anytime of the day or night. Koalas injured as a consequence of being hit by a motor vehicle or attacked by a dog are treated as soon as they arrive in the hospital. They are stabilised, rehydrated if necessary and given pain relief. State of the art medical equipment including X-Ray equipment, an ultra sound machine, humidicribs etc are available. In addition Jon Hanger, the Senior Vet in Charge often consults with other experts about various procedures that could be used to treat koalas coming into care.

I have rescued sick and injured koalas in the Pine Rivers Shire. These animals have been transported to Beerwah immediately by car. Koalas received medical attention within forty five mins of being rescued which has substantially increased their chances of survival. In many instances delays in getting koalas to appropriate medical care has resulted in them having to be euthanased.

On the other hand, MKH has a vet available Monday to Friday during business hours only. It is not open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. On weekends between 8am and 4pm MKH does have employees with koala expertise providing basic treatment only, however, to the best of my knowledge they are not qualified vet nurses. Often other koala rescuers must hold sick and injured animals for many hours and sometimes overnight in cages at their homes till transport can be arranged to MKH.

Rescuers have told me that they do take sick and injured koalas to other vets if the rescue takes place after hours. Many vets working in Pine Rivers Shire are experts in domestic animals but unfortunately they lack sufficient knowledge to appropriately diagnose or treat koalas and/or other native wildlife. These koalas are then left till the vet at MKH

comes in on Monday. This is totally inappropriate and results in the animal experiencing unnecessary stress and pain..

In addition as most koalas are rescued between the hours of 6pm and 6am the vast majority of domestic vet facilities are closed. This means koalas can be kept in cages from 6pm until MKH opens at 8am the next morning without medical attention or pain relief. The suffering these animals experience is unjustifiable, unnecessary and unreasonable when other options are available.

All native animal rescuers must take reasonable steps to ensure that animals are treated for disease or injury as quickly as possible. Yet some organisations are choosing not to use the KWH for political and personal reasons that have nothing to do with the welfare of the animal. I know of one such organisation that choses to keep sick and injured koalas in cages till transport can be arranged to deliver the koalas to MKH rather than use the KWH.

If both facilities offered the same treatment options, care and attention I would be pleased to see sick and injured koalas go to either one. At this point in time that is not the case. Because of a lack of resources, koalas going into MKH are more frequently euthanased than is necessary. Statistics from both facilities will confirm my statements. A visit to the KWH and MKH would clearly show the various treatment options used and the quality of care given. By looking at cause of admission and outcome, as in euthanased, in care and released it will be easy to determine which facility generates a higher number of successful outcomes. The best option is one that ensures more koalas hit by cars, attacked by dogs or suffering from stress related disease are released back to the wild.

Koalas are classified as "vulnerable" in SEQ which means that each and every animal must be offered the best possible chance of recovery. All I ask is that it be made clear to all koala rescuers and koala related community groups that the welfare of the animal must always come first.

Thanking your for your time.
Wanda Grabowski
39 Hillsdale Street
STRATHPINE, QLD, 4500
Telephone 07 3205 6141