

Media Release

18 December 2006

Koala Management – Saving Kangaroo Island’s threatened eucalypt habitats

The long-term survival of Kangaroo Island’s threatened eucalypt habitats is looking more positive following the initial success of the enhanced Koala Management Program during 2005/06. The Program has already generated significant improvements in tree canopy health across much of the heavily impacted habitat, and this can be attributed directly to the reduced browse pressure from the managed Koala population.

The catching season for Kangaroo Island’s Koala Management Program has begun again in an effort to continue the rejuvenation of Kangaroo Island’s natural environment. The program involves the sterilisation and translocation of Koalas and habitat restoration work, and is coordinated by the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH).

Dr Desley Whisson, Wildlife Management Officer for DEH said that teams began catching Koalas in October and will continue until April 2007.

“Over the 7 months, up to 1600 Koalas will be sterilised and a proportion of these will be translocated to south-eastern South Australia. This is part of a long-term management strategy to reduce Koala population densities to a sustainable level, which will assist in the recovery of important vegetation communities and wildlife habitat on Kangaroo Island”, said Dr Whisson.

“Koalas are not native to Kangaroo Island. In the 1920s, 18 Koalas from French Island, Victoria were released on Kangaroo Island for conservation reasons. In 2001, the population was estimated at 27,000. Koalas have had significant negative impacts on habitats on Kangaroo Island. They

Media Contacts:

Bill Hadrill
Conservation Programs Manager
Department for Environment and
Heritage
Ph +61 8 8553 2381
whisson.desley@saugov.sa.gov.au

Taryn Battye
Media and Public Relations Manager
Department for Environment and Heritage
Ph +61 8 8204 1423
battye.taryn@saugov.sa.gov.au

selectively browse on and cause damage to Rough-barked Manna Gum, South Australian Blue Gum, Swamp Gum, and Red Gum," Dr Whisson said.

"The Koalas' damage to trees has adverse effects on the whole ecosystem, including wildlife such as the endangered South Australian Glossy Black-Cockatoo, and White-naped Honeyeater. Without Koala management, Manna Gum will become extinct.

The Koala Management Program was initiated in 1997 and since then around 6100 Koalas have been sterilised, and 30% of those have been relocated to areas of the Koalas' former range in south-eastern South Australia.

The Program focuses on habitats containing the tree species that are preferred by Koalas. These habitats have a limited distribution on Kangaroo Island, and in many areas have already been critically damaged. Less than half of Kangaroo Island's Koalas exist at high densities of around two Koalas per hectare. Habitat management activities have also been undertaken, including tree planting and installation of metal collars on severely damaged trees.

"Most of this Koala preferred habitat occurs on private land, so landholder cooperation is critical to the success of the Program, " Dr Whisson said

Surveys at over 100 monitoring sites have shown that there has been a dramatic improvement in tree condition at many sites as a result of the Management Program. Koala population densities are also much lower, and there are a high proportion of tagged and sterilised Koalas in managed areas.

"In addition to the environmental benefits, the Koala Management Program has economic benefits for the Island, employing up to 20 people, and half are Kangaroo Island residents," said Dr Whisson.

DEH, in partnership with university researchers, continues to assess other options for managing Koalas. A research program is underway to assess the effectiveness and viability of hormone implants for sterilising female koalas.

The Government has no plans to cull Koalas on Kangaroo Island. Culling is not a management option contained in the guidelines of the *National Conservation Strategy for Koalas* developed by the Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council. South Australia is a signatory to this strategy.