**Living on the Edge: the “Iconomics” of protecting koalas on the urban fringe**

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Abstract

Two of Queensland’s most densely inhabited koala regions sit on the urban fringe of Brisbane, Australia’s fastest growing urban centre. With the expansion of urban activity into koala districts, the once healthy koala population has been decimated – hence their listing on the endangered species list under the EPBCA in 2012. Although their prospects of survival are not great, koalas have one advantage over many other species – their iconic status. In the past twenty years, pursuant to various legal and policy initiatives, the Queensland Government has poured money into elaborate preservation schemes in the hope that koalas and urban development in southeast Queensland can somehow learn to co-exist. An economic justification for this action is non-existent; even the environmental benefits may be queried in the light of the sums being spent. Clearly this is a case of “iconomics” – where iconic status overrides the logic of economic and even environmental accounting. This paper reviews the main legal and policy measures undertaken by the Queensland government, examines their successes and failures and speculates on what might be achieved by these initiatives.  At a more conceptual level, the paper asks what lessons should the environmental movement learn from the “iconomics” of koala preservation in Southeast Queensland?