

Guideline

Nature Conservation Act 1992

Determining Whether a Koala Requires Euthanasia

This non-statutory guideline has been developed to support Queensland’s veterinarians, the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network, and koala rehabilitators in their respective roles when the euthanasia of a koala may be required. This Guideline should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation and the Code of Practice: Rehabilitation of Sick, Injured, or Orphaned Koalas in Queensland.

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Determining Whether a Koala Requires Euthanasia

1 Purpose

A dedicated network of wildlife hospitals and volunteer wildlife rehabilitators provide rescue, treatment, care, and release services for sick, injured, and orphaned koalas throughout Queensland. Through these actions, thousands of koalas that would otherwise not have survived, have been successfully rescued, treated, cared for, and returned to the wild. However, euthanasia is sometimes necessary for welfare reasons.

Under section 17 of the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*, persons in charge of an animal during its rescue, treatment, care, or release (including wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians) have a statutory duty of care to appropriately provide for the animal's welfare, including treatment for injury and disease.

This guideline provides information to assist veterinarians and rehabilitators in understanding when euthanasia may be appropriate.

2 Mandatory requirements and limitations

Under the Nature Conservation (Animals) Regulation 2020, a veterinary surgeon may euthanise an animal (protected, international or prohibited animal) if the surgeon believes the animal is unable or unlikely to recover from sickness or injury, or for a protected animal only, survive in the wild because the animal is orphaned.

Koalas that have a poor prognosis for survival and that are suffering must be euthanised rather than left to die from the injury or illness. Failure to take appropriate steps to arrange the prompt euthanasia of a koala(s) may be a breach of the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*.

3 Initial assessment

3.1 Veterinarians are requested to:

- a. Conduct a thorough assessment of any koala that is initially brought to their practice; and
- b. Record the following particulars;
 - i. Name of rescuer;
 - ii. Phone number of rescuer;
 - iii. Location of the rescue; and
 - iv. Status of the koala.

3.2 Veterinarians outside of South East Queensland (SEQ) are requested to:

- a. Send the above particulars to the Department of Environment and Science (department); and
- b. Following assessment, either:
 - i. Promptly provide pain relief and/or treatment for the koala; or
 - ii. In necessary circumstances, euthanise the koala in accordance with this guideline.

3.3 Veterinarians in SEQ are requested to:

- a. Send the above particulars to the nearest SEQ Wildlife Hospital (Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, Currumbin Wildlife Hospital, Moggill Koala Rehabilitation Centre, or RSPCA Wildlife Hospital); and

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- b. Following assessment, either:
 - i. Promptly provide pain relief and/or treatment for the koala and coordinate with the nearest SEQ Wildlife Hospital, or the koala rescuer, to promptly transport the koala to the nearest SEQ Wildlife Hospital. In circumstances where pain relief and/or treatment is provided, this information should be recorded and sent to the nearest SEQ Wildlife Hospital; or
 - ii. Advise the rescuer to promptly take the koala to the nearest SEQ Wildlife Hospital; or
 - iii. In necessary circumstances, euthanise the koala(s) in accordance with this guideline.

4 Determining if a koala requires euthanasia

4.1 A koala must be euthanised without exception when:

- a. death is imminent or highly likely regardless of the treatment provided; or
- b. it is suffering from chronic, un-relievable pain or distress; or
- c. it is permanently unable to consume leaf unaided (e.g., due to an injured jaw or missing/worn teeth).

4.2 A koala must only be deemed physically fit for release if:

- a. it has adequately recovered from any pre-existing injury;
- b. reasonable steps have been taken to determine the koala is free of disease;
- c. its weight and body condition are within the normal range for the koala's age and sex, or its weight and body condition is equal to or exceeds that of when it was admitted to a veterinarian; and
- d. it has adapted to prevailing climatic conditions.

4.3 A koala that cannot be deemed fit for release must be considered for the Queensland ZAA Ex-situ Placement Process (Q-ZEPP). For further information contact the Department of Environment and Science.

5 Methods of euthanasia

5.1 Methods of euthanasia, including methods of restraint for euthanasia, must not cause significant pain, suffering or distress.

5.2 Wherever possible, the preferred method is barbiturate overdose while under general anaesthesia.

5.3 Koalas must only be euthanised by a veterinary surgeon or a person otherwise authorised under the *Medicines and Poisons Act 2019*, as per section 36 of the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*.

5.4 To remove any doubt, the following euthanasia methods must not be used on koalas:

- a. suffocating via drowning
- b. strangulation or chest compression

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- c. freezing
- d. burning
- e. poisoning with household products
- f. air embolism
- g. exsanguination or decapitation without stunning
- h. electrocution or microwave irradiation
- i. poisoning with any domestic or agricultural pest control agent, chemical or noxious agent not currently approved for the veterinary euthanasia of domestic animals.

6 Disposal of carcasses

- 6.1 Death must be confirmed prior to the disposal of the carcass. The absence of a heartbeat and dilated pupils indicate death has occurred.
- 6.2 The carcasses of koalas must be disposed of in accordance with the local regulations. Carcasses of koalas euthanised using veterinary euthanasia solutions may present a significant risk to scavengers, including native animals, and must be disposed of by deep burial or incineration.

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7 Definitions

Animal — any member of the animal kingdom (other than humans) as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Code of Practice — the *Code of Practice: Rehabilitation of Sick, Injured, or Orphaned Koalas in Queensland*.

Department — the Department of Environment and Science

Euthanasia — to achieve humane destruction of an animal. The method must achieve instant insensibility followed by rapid death of the animal without it first regaining sensation or consciousness.

Guideline — the *Guideline: Determining Whether a Koala Requires Euthanasia*.

Koala — a mammal of the species *Phascolarctos cinereus*.

Koala rehabilitator — a person who is engaged in the rehabilitation (rescue, care, and release) of sick, injured, or orphaned koalas and is operating under a valid rehabilitation permit either as an individual or as member of a rehabilitation organisation.

Orphaned — a koala that was rescued at a stage of development where it was or would have been dependent on its mother but was kept, fed, and cared for by a person, in place of its mother due to the mother being deceased or temporarily sick or injured.

Permit — a rehabilitation permit issued under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Protected wildlife — an animal that is prescribed as such in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Q-ZEPP — the Queensland ZAA Ex-situ Placement Process. This is the process for placing wild fauna that has come into care in Queensland, but has been deemed non-releasable, into zoo collections for conservation/education purposes in lieu of being released successfully.

Rehabilitation — a multi-phase process aiming to address the welfare needs of koalas that are found sick, injured, or orphaned, and contribute positively to koala conservation, including rescue, care (if necessary), and release of koalas to the wild, in such a way that they can, where possible, successfully re-join local breeding populations.

Rehabilitation organisation — a corporation or association holding a valid rehabilitation permit whose members engage in the rehabilitation of sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife.

Rescue site — the location that the koala was rescued.

SEQ Wildlife Hospital — a veterinary clinic of the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network.

SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network — Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, Currumbin Wildlife Hospital, Moggill Koala Rehabilitation Centre, and RSPCA Wildlife Hospital.

SEQ or South East Queensland — the twelve local government areas that make up the South East Queensland region, as defined in the South East Queensland Regional Plan, which includes, Brisbane City Council, City of Gold Coast Council, Ipswich City Council, Lockyer Valley Regional Council, Logan City Council, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Noosa Shire Council, Redland City Council, Scenic Rim Regional Council, Somerset Regional Council, Sunshine Coast Council, and the urban extent of Toowoomba Regional Council.

Veterinary surgeon — a person registered as a veterinary surgeon under the *Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936*.

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Veterinary treatment — the conduct and application of veterinary surgery and veterinary medicine when applied to sick, injured, or orphaned animals by a veterinarian.

Wildlife — a protected animal as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

ZAA — the Zoo and Aquarium Association.

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Human Rights Act 2019 compatibility

The department is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the [Human Rights Act 2019](#), the department has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When acting or making a decision under this Guideline, officers must comply with that obligation (refer to [Comply with Human Rights Act](#)).

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Science should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved by

Ben Klaassen

Signature

30 June 2023

Date

Deputy Director-General

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and
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