

# Government, Industry and Threatened Species Conservation – two decades in Queensland

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# Introduction

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*Have we got the balance right between legislation and policy, opportunities for industry and threatened species conservation?*



ABC, 2013



NSW NPWS, 2010

# Introduction – Current State of Play

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- Of current known biodiversity in Australia, more than 1,500 mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and plants are listed as threatened with extinction
- Australia has the worst mammal extinction record in the world (27)
- 3,000 ecosystems have been identified to be facing extinction
- In Queensland, more than 800 species are listed as threatened

(Source: Australian Government, 2008. Assessment of Australia's Biodiversity)

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*Have we got the balance right between legislation and policy, opportunities for industry and threatened species conservation?*

- Biodiversity conversation dilemma in Australia

*Key Message: More than 1500 listed threatened species and terrible extinction record over last 200+ years*

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- Legislation and Policy: History of change

*Key Message: Over time, the pendulum has swung toward industry and then to conservation and back again*

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*Have we got the balance right between legislation and policy, opportunities for industry and threatened species conservation?*

- Case Studies – black-throated finch and koala

*Key Message: There is no simple answer*



# History

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## European Settlement to 1945

- Queensland - Moreton Bay founded in 1824, followed by rapid expansion for grazing and cropping
- Fur trade commenced in mid 1800s. From 1906 to 1936 three million possum and one million koala skins exported
- Marine fauna were also intensely harvested during this period
- Between 1865 and 1900 massive deforestation was undertaken to develop sugarcane plantations, harvest timber, and open areas to grazing.
- By 1920 most economically viable land in QLD was occupied.

# History

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- Australian naturalists concerned with extinction of native species from 1880s
- Many QLD societies campaigned for national parks and threatened species protection in late 1800s early 1900s – QLDs first national parks and state forests legislation in 1906.
- Protection of fauna through early legislation was focussed on certain species of birds and mammals

QLD Government withdrew possum and koala protection in 1927 (to stimulate fur trade), yet by the late 1930s ended hunting for fur trade





# History

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## Post war years to 1990

- Forestry, mining, dams and water resources, urban growth and development from the 1950s and 1980s
- After 1945 QLD government provided incentives for freehold land and land clearing to stimulate agricultural growth
- Major wilderness campaigns between 1960s and 1980s – protection of the GBR and Wet Tropics
- CSIRO began research programs for native species from 1950
- Efforts of environmentalist movement led to:
  - Forestry Act 1959, protect water quality and soils
  - Creation of Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service for management of national parks (1975)

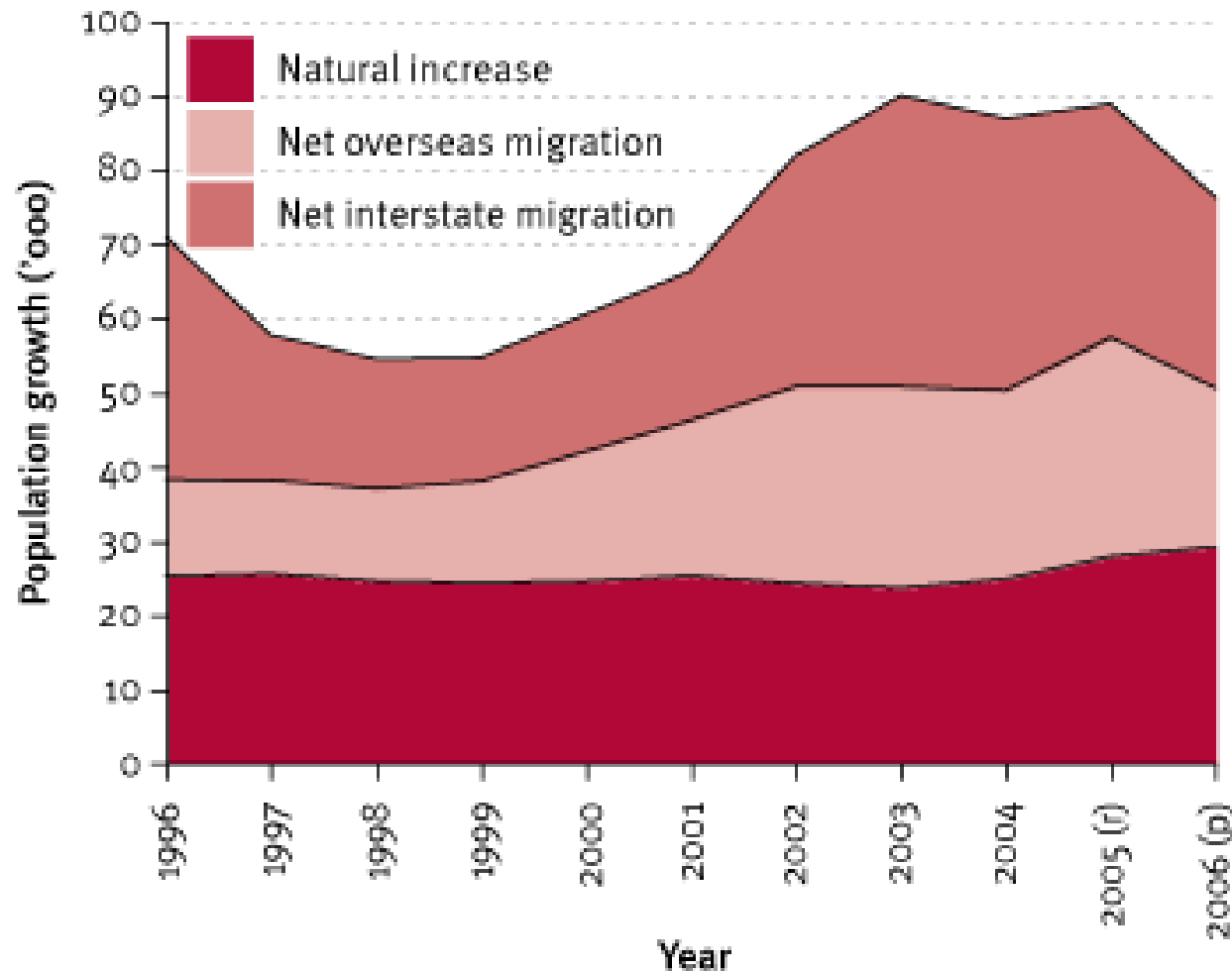
# History

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- Game and fishes acclimatisation Act of 1898
- Native animals protection Act of 1906
- National Parks Act of 1906
- Animals and Birds Act of 1921
- Native Plant Conservation Act 1930
- Fauna Protection Act 1937
- Fauna Conservation Act 1952
- Forestry Act 1959
- Fauna Conservation Act 1974

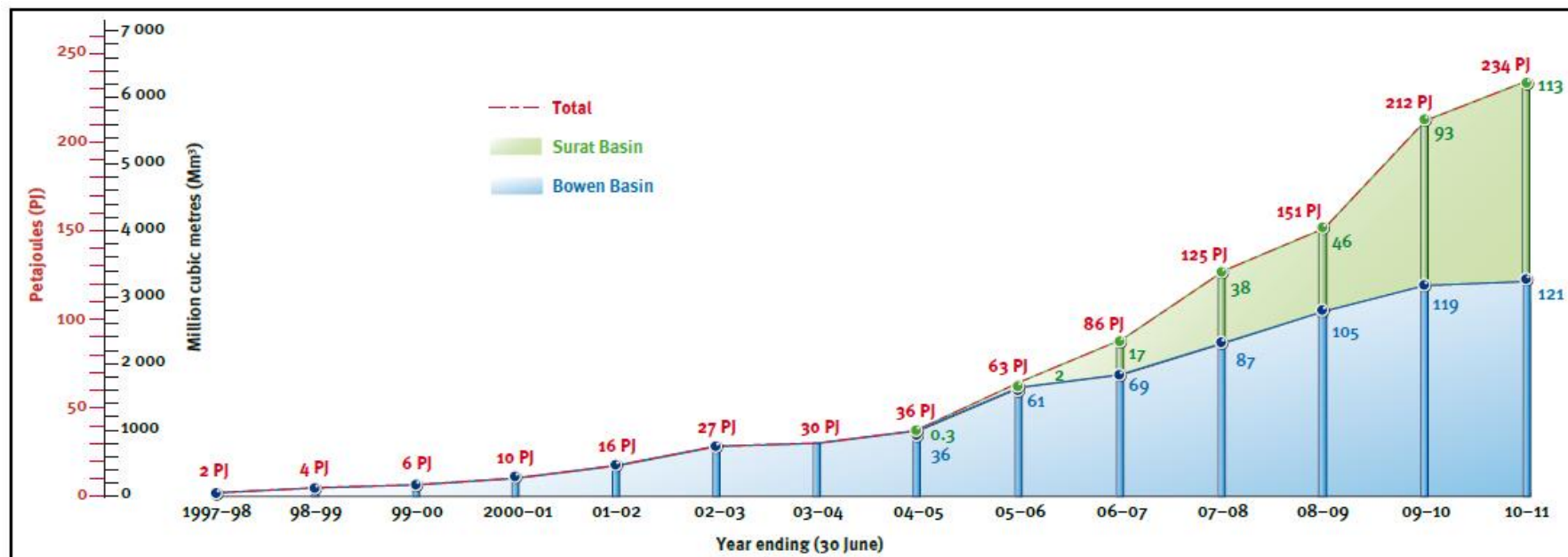
# History – the last two decades

- SE Qld in the 1990s – unprecedented levels of urban growth and expansion – the 200km city



# History – the last two decades

- Birth of a resources boom – coal seam gas and mining

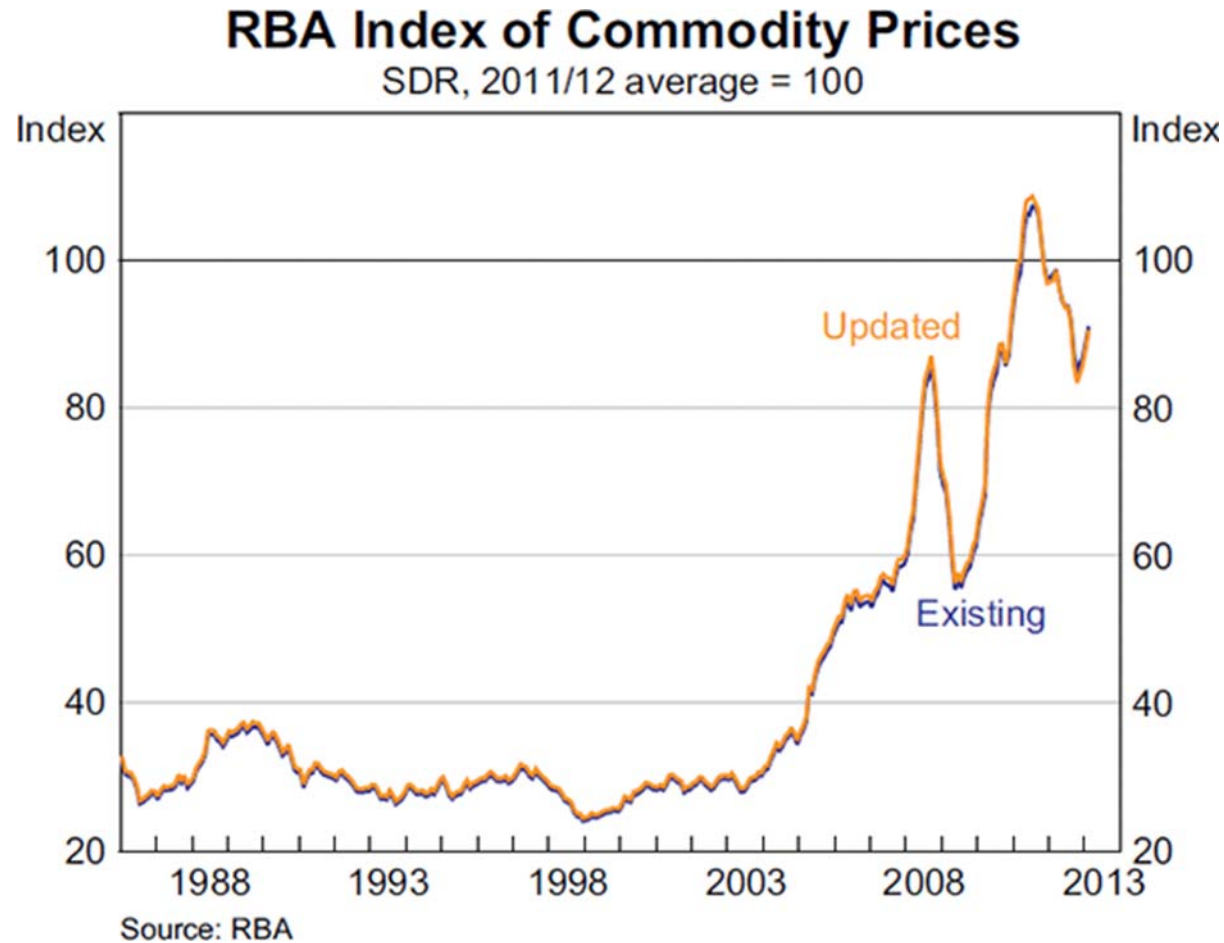




# History

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- Birth of a resources boom – coal seam gas and mining



# History – the last two decades

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- Qld vegetation clearing, little regulation prior to 1990s
- System to control vegetation clearing on leasehold and state lands under the Land Act 1994.
- A separate regime commenced in the Vegetation Management Act 1999 and Integrated Planning Act 1997 (RE Mapping)
- In 2006 the State Government introduced major reforms to phase out broadscale land clearing and the introduction of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009



# History – the last two decades

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- Nature Conservation Act 1992 was the first piece of legislation allowing for listing of species
- Introduction of legislation to control vegetation clearing VM Act 1999
- Integrated Planning Act 1997, Sustainable Planning Act 2009
- Various environmental offsets policies, state based vegetation mapping, biodiversity mapping, assessment codes etc.
- Commonwealth signed the International Convention on Biological Diversity 1992

# Federal legislation

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- Commonwealth passed the Endangered Species Protection Act 1992, replaced by Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- Most significant environmental reform since the 1970s
- The Act requires Federal Government to review, assess and approve projects that may have an impact on matters of national environmental significance
- Federal listing of species and ecological communities, referral process, impact assessment and threatened species survey guidelines, offset policies, threatened species recovery planning, SPRAT database



# Case Study – black-throated finch

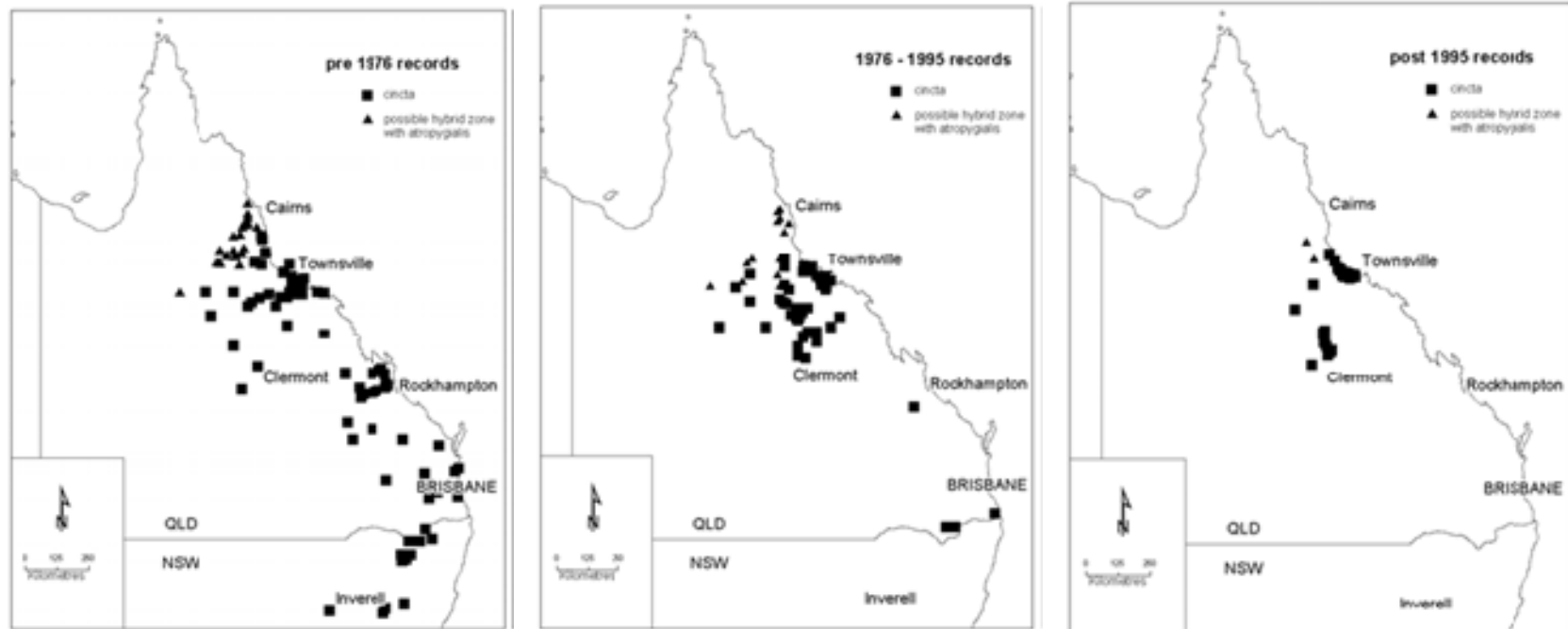
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- *Poephila cincta cincta*— black-throated finch (southern)
- The population has declined significantly and occupies only 20% of its former range
- The species has declined up to 50% during the past 10 years
- Estimated 20,000 breeding individuals
- Currently known to occur around the Townsville region and at scattered sites in central-eastern Queensland



Reef Catchments, 2010

# Case Study – black-throated finch



BTF Recovery Team, 2007

# Case Study – black-throated finch

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- Species is listed as Endangered under state and federal legislation
  - National Recovery Plan 2007
  - Significant Impact Guidelines 2009
  - Survey Guidelines 2010
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- 60 Mtpa Coal Mine EIS, baseline studies discovered potentially the second most important population of the species outside of the Townsville region

# Case Study – black-throated finch

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- Coal Mine is not yet approved by State or Federal Government, and is currently being assessed

*Have we got the balance right between legislation and policy, opportunities for industry and threatened species conservation?*



# Case Study – koala

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- Early 1900's fur trade – several million skins exported
- Declines throughout much of its range, extinction in SA and very low abundance in Victoria
- From mid 1900's to late 1900s, koalas flourished in some areas (regrowth forests, translocation programs, removal of hunting pressures)
- In contrast in Queensland, broadscale clearing and urban development continuing to impact rural populations and populations near urban centres

# Case Study - koala

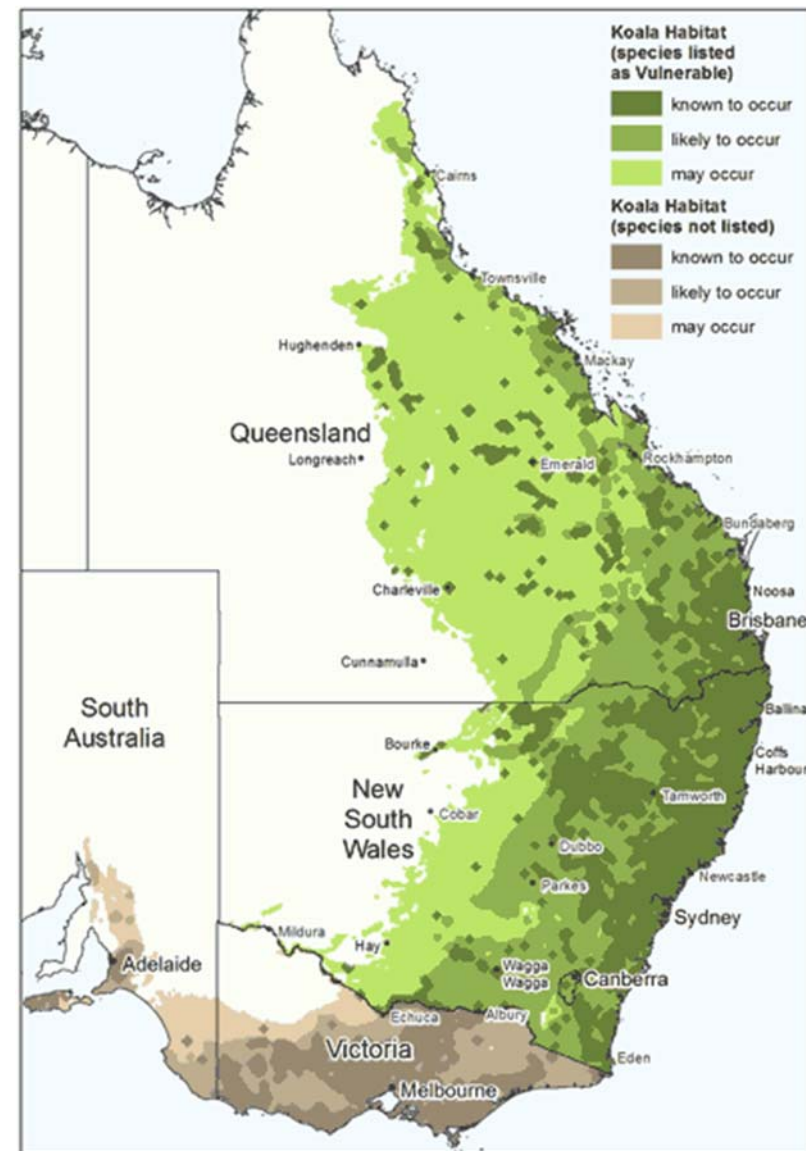
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- Listed as Culturally Significant in 1992
- State Planning Policy 95 – Koala Coast
- 64% decline in parts of SE Qld (1995-2005)
- 2004, listed under NC Act as Vulnerable in SE Qld Bioregion



# Case Study - koala

- Continued declines in western Queensland of up to 80%
- Coastal NSW populations continued declines, local extinctions
- Listed as Vulnerable in 2012 under EPBC Act in NSW, ACT and Qld
- Significant Impact Guidelines 2012
- Survey Guidelines 2013



# Case Study - koala

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- Western Brisbane, urban development State and local Government approval at a 100ha site
- EPBC Act listing of the koala prior to development proceeding, led to a referral under the EPBC Act and action found to be a Controlled Action

*Have we got the balance right between legislation and policy, opportunities for industry and threatened species conservation?*



# Conclusion

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- Biodiversity conversation dilemma in Australia

*Key Message: More than 1500 listed threatened species and terrible extinction record over last 200+ years*

- Legislation and Policy: History of change

*Key Message: Over time, the pendulum has swung toward industry and then to conservation and back again*

- Over the last two decades in Queensland, considering the post conservation movement of the mid to late 1900s, increased legislative complexities and project requirements, expansion of urban development, resource booms....

# Conclusion

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*Have we got the balance right between legislation and policy, opportunities for industry and threatened species conservation?*

*Have we halted species decline, or restored populations?*

*Does industry have certainty in project approval process and what is required for investment in threatened species conservation?*

