



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr Bob Irwin**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 17 September 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Speaker</b>	Robert, Stuart, MP	<b>Question No.</b>	

**Mr ROBERT** (Fadden) (12.38 pm)—Early this week I had the great pleasure of bringing Bob Irwin, the father of the late Steve Irwin, to parliament to get him across the key leaders in the coalition side. I thank the shadow minister for the environment, Greg Hunt; the shadow minister for energy and resources, Ian Macfarlane; the Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, of course; the backbench water and environment committee; and others that Bob Irwin had the opportunity to chat with.

Bob came to this place, to Canberra. It was the first time he has ever been here. He came here to speak to the leadership on our side of politics, to talk about the loss of Australian animals and his great concerns about that. As he so colloquially said, as perhaps only Bob could, ‘Steve would want me to continue his work, and if I wasn’t he’d probably give me a good kick in the bum.’ So Bob came here to speak about the loss of Australian fauna, particularly wombats, kangaroos and koalas. He made the point that there are perhaps only 200 of the northern hairy nosed wombat left, and the southern hairy nosed wombat may well be following the same path. He made the point that kangaroos are currently being culled in this nation three times faster than they are breeding and that kangaroos as small as 13 kilograms in size, not even reproducing adults, are being culled.

He also made the point that in the last few years the koala population had halved. Diseases like chlamydia were reducing the numbers quickly and 50 per cent of current female koalas were already infertile. One of the reasons I brought Bob here was that the koala population in Coomera, in the northern part of my electorate of Fadden, is particularly vulnerable and threatened. Estimates from professionals like Bob and others say that the koala population in Coomera would be wiped out if no action was taken, at worst in 12 months and at best in 24 months. I come to this place, to the halls of parliament, to say that I do not want to see the koala population in the northern part of Fadden wiped out in between one and two years. I do not want to see that happen, and we need to commit ourselves to doing everything we can to ensure that that does not happen.

One of the reasons the koala population in the northern part of Fadden, the northern Gold Coast, is threatened is habitat destruction. This parliament knows that the seat of Fadden is the fastest growing electorate in the nation, having grown by something like 32.6 per cent between the 2001 and the 2006 censuses. Everyone, frankly, is leaving the southern states and coming to that corridor between the Gold Coast and Brisbane, which is why it is a high-growth area. High-growth areas and koalas at present do not seem to mix. But they can, they should and they must.

We must look at developing in sensible ways to ensure we do not destroy the natural environment and the habitat that supports our most iconic and enduring marsupials. I have committed to work with Bob Irwin in reviewing the South-East Queensland plan that the Labor state government has put out to ensure that there are indeed the necessary corridors and green spaces to ensure the koala populations of the northern Gold Coast are not destroyed. It would be an enormous tragedy if the koalas were destroyed on my watch and I had said nothing. It is important that I stand to say that I will look at working with developers, with the local council, with the state government, with environmental organisations and with concerned citizens to ensure that the people of the northern Gold Coast, the developers of the northern Gold Coast—who do such a great job in providing places for people to live—and the koala communities can live in peace and harmony. I look forward to working with Bob towards that end.

I would like to thank Kenton Campbell, the CEO and founder of Zarraffa’s, who was also instrumental in bringing Bob to Canberra. He was instrumental in funding one of the major pieces of koala research, with Bob Irwin, that have provided so much information and knowledge about what the koala populations are doing and the things that threaten them. Business leaders like Kenton Campbell set a great example of what business can do with the environment to ensure sustainability and a great planet going forward. Lastly, I would like to say good luck to the Titans for this weekend. (*Time expired*)