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Russian Embassy in Australia Hopes Koala Hugged by Putin Wasn't Culled

By The Moscow Times

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Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott (L) and Russia's President Vladimir Putin each hold a koala before the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brisbane on Nov. 15, 2014.

The Russian Embassy in Australia has said in a sniping social media post that it hopes a koala famously hugged by President Vladimir Putin at a G20 summit was not covertly killed off by the authorities.

"Hope in the number of euthanized koalas did not get those animals that leaders at the G20 summit in Brisbane were photographed with," said the post published Wednesday on the embassy's Facebook page.

Australian regional authorities this week admitted that 686 koalas were culled in the state of Victoria in 2013 and 2014, the Australia news website reported.

Victoria authorities said they were euthanized because the number of koalas in the region had

far exceeded the advised density of one koala per hectare to 11 per hectare, causing sickness and starvation among the marsupial population.

The embassy's bilingual post was accompanied by a three-way photograph of U.S. President Barack Obama, Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and Putin, all happily holding a koala at the G20 summit in Brisbane late last year.

The photos of world leaders holding the cuddly marsupials captured one of the few moments of relaxation at a summit otherwise fraught with tensions caused by the increasingly icy relations between Putin and Western leaders over the Ukraine crisis.

The Russian Embassy's online quip was backed by some animal rights activists. Others pointed out a temporal discrepancy in the comment, given that the culling presumably took place before the Russian leader ever set foot on Aussie soil.

Koalas are native to Australia and have been a protected species since the 1930s.

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