



LANDMARK

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Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment

Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

Question on notice:

The Hon. Ben Franklin: I have got three questions. You will probably be able to take most of them on notice to provide substantial answers, if you wish. I want to go back to Ms Cusack's questioning about actually having some sort of independent body that can make appropriate recommendations about impact on koala habitat. Is it fair to say that you would support a recommendation by this Committee of the establishment of an independent panel with appropriate scientific expertise to assess the impacts on koala populations of any development?

Could you perhaps take on notice how such a panel might be selected and constituted in order to ensure it has both appropriate scientific expertise and the confidence of the community?

My answer to this question is that such a panel would need to be completely independent and also have the perception of complete independence. Members should not be employed by government authorities or agencies, by academic or similar institutions that receive government grants for Koala research or for large environmental consultancies that work for developers.

Members should have post-graduate qualifications in some aspect of terrestrial ecology with demonstrable past and on-going field experience in forest biodiversity survey and/or research and preferably with arboreal marsupials. There should be at least one representative (with appropriate academic qualifications) from the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, the Australian Mammal Society, the Ecological Consultants Association of NSW and the NSW Nature Conservation Council or

another NGO involved with biodiversity conservation, such as an environmental trust.

Members should preferably include one or more experts accredited by the NSW government as a Koala expert (currently under the BAM scheme) and have authored peer-reviewed publications on Koala biology and/or ecology.

Ideally, members should also have a working knowledge of the operations of development practices and pressures impacting Koala populations, including public native forestry, private native forestry, government infrastructure development, agriculture (as regulated by the *Local Land Services Act 2013*), and of the relevant assessment and regulatory regimes (including Sydney and regional planning panels) that control such developments.

David Milledge