

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 7 - PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

At Ballina on Friday 18 October 2019

Response to questions on notice

Dr Stephen Phillips

Q1. – 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.

Response: I would suggest a panel comprising a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 5 expert NSW koala ecologists, each of whom are appointed on the basis of demonstrable merit, the chair to be the most experienced and elected from / by members of the panel. Panel could have delegated authority to (say) (i) determine adequacy of Koala Plans of Management where significant impact was considered likely, (ii) review / recommend approval of Comprehensive Koala Plans of Management, (iii) draft / review Codes of Practice / Harvesting prescriptions for logging in koala habitat. Constitution / Terms of Reference could be given effect through *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

Panel needs to be independent of Government, but have the capacity to seek additional advice as and if required.

Q2. – You made some fairly strongly worded comments about the Chief Scientist's report. I was wondering if you perhaps could take on notice as well as giving some elaboration to what those concerns are and why?

Response: Since the promulgation of SEPP 44 in 1995, significant advances in approaches to the analyses of historical koala records as a means of informing changes in distribution and abundance at local and regional scales, habitat sampling, data analyses, identification of preferred food tree species and koala habitat classification has been achieved, yet **none of this material was referenced by the Chief Scientist's report**. Instead, it presented a cursory and scant literature review, made broad, sweeping statements about the status of koalas

and threats to them (all of which we have heard / read before). The lack of attention to detail and what has been achieved since 1995 has, in my opinion, actually set koala conservation and management back about 20 years, an assertion that is readily evidenced in the bibliography and recommendations of the report, and the actions now being taken by Government (e.g. preparation of statewide koala habitat models). Again, in the past 20 years we have learnt a lot about how to manage the potential for koala vehicle-strike, but was any of the advances and associated work sourced, reviewed or even acknowledged by the Chief Scientists report – no.

Q3. – could you let us know which councils, or if there are which are done very well in some councils, that you could suggest be replicated across all councils and potentially that because they are done better – I presume they are done better in some councils than others – and that government could potentially look at either legislating best practice or alternatively utilizing them in order to make sure those practices are appropriately followed?

Response: I would have to preface my response with an admission that I have had a major contributing role for all of the most recent Comprehensive Koala Plans of Management (CKPoMs approved or otherwise) such as Kempsey Coast, Tweed Coast, Byron Coast and Campbelltown. Because of this background I might be considered to have a biased perspective.

In my view, the CKPoM that currently reflects best practice is the Campbelltown CKPoM; it has been well informed, has had little political interference in its drafting and development and when compared to earlier predecessors such as the Port Stephens and Coffs Harbour, demonstrates just how far the koala planning process has come. Again, this was neither addressed nor acknowledged by the Chief Scientists report.