

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 7 - PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT
Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in NSW

Paula Flack - Representing the Great Koala National Park Steering Committee
5 March 2020

Dear committee

**Response to requests for further information and questions on notice, from the Committee
Hearing at Coffs Harbour, 4 February 2020, Session 2.**

1 Questions on Notice from the Hon. Mark Buttigieg regarding the Tasmanian town of Derby.

In terms of the analogy with the Tasmanian industry, what type of workers were displaced in Tasmania? Were they timber workers or mill workers or both? I am interested to know what happened down there.

I have been unable to find any evidence of timber industry job losses attributed to the establishment of the Blue Derby Mountain Bike Trail. Derby's declining tin mining industry collapsed in 1929 after a mine accident which resulted in 14 deaths and closure of the mine. The town population dropped from 3,000 to 173 with farming and forestry being the biggest employers. The timber industry and town of Derby was already in serious decline before the successful mountain biking hub was created.

In Dorset Council's Dorset Tourism Strategy 2011, Direction 3 states *"Derby will become the premier destination for mountain bike tourism in Tasmania."*

Dorset Council invested \$3.1 million into the establishment of 80km of mountain bike trails in around Derby, which now attract 30,000 visitors and returns \$30 million a year to the town.

The Blue Derby Mountain Bike Project is also backed by a \$2.5 million Federal Government grant aimed at developing a new industry to help the region recover from the collapse of the forestry industry and the timber giant Gunns.

<https://www.ridebluederby.com.au/about>

2 In my response to a question from the Chair, I referred to media releases by National Party MP Melinda Pavey opposing the GKNP. The Hon. Catherine Cusack asked that I provide the Committee with copies of the media releases I referred to.

I provide the following:

- Melinda Pavey's media release in the Bellingen Courier Sun on 3 August 2017. Note that Pavey's media release contains factual errors eg she states "**There are now 2.4 million hectares of National Parks, Conservation Areas and Nature Reserves in our region**". There is in fact only 980,148 ha of national parks, nature reserves and conservation areas in our region according to the NSW EPA State of the Environment Report 2015 Table 14.2
<https://www.bellingencourier.com.au/story/4828007/pavey-managing-koala-country/>
- The NSW National Parks Association's fully referenced response to Melinda Pavey's "More national parks will not help koalas" published in the Bellingen Shire Courier Sun on 3 August 2017, copied in full below.

The National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) rejects assertions by the Hon. Melinda Pavey MP that more national parks will not help koalas, and calls on the NSW Government to honour Ms Pavey's call for 'a mature, factual, science-based discussion about forestry our forest estate and koalas'.

Throughout the world protection of habitat in national parks is the first step to protecting species. That's because human activities often pose a threat to the resources and connectivity that animals need to survive. Koalas are no different.

Unfortunately, what makes a forest good for loggers also makes it good for koalas: forests on fertile soils on the coastal lowlands in high rainfall areas grow trees quickly and timber can be harvested on shorter rotations. But koalas also prefer these forests, because they produce more nutritious leaves which are the koalas' sole food source. Following the Regional Forest Agreements, the forests added into the national parks estate were those that were least fertile or on steeper country[1]. In other words, those least preferred by koalas. So a conflict still exists between loggers and koalas for preferred habitat.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority[2], and researchers[3], have shown that koalas like big trees and mature forests, and that intensive logging that removes a high percentage of trees is not compatible with koala persistence[4]. Big old trees are hugely important to wildlife (not just koalas), and just last week the destruction of 'ol grey' demonstrated how logging results in the loss of such trees[5]. Recent revelations from the North East Forest Alliance have shown the extent to which intense logging is impacting koala habitat and, disturbingly, that this logging is probably illegal according to the previous Environment Minister[6].

So logging is a key threat to koalas. Is it the only threat? No. Loss of habitat via urban expansion on the coast is also important, so it's good that the government is reviewing

SEPP 44. But logging is a threat that we can end tomorrow, because State forests are public land.

We congratulate Ms Pavey for drawing attention to the resourcing crisis in the National Parks and Wildlife Service that is undermining its ability to manage the protected area estate. Repeated 'restructures' by Ms Pavey's government has resulted in the loss of hundreds of years of experience in the Service—a fact noted by rural communities[7],[8]. As a Minister in the Government, we call on Ms Pavey to lobby her colleagues for a bigger slice of the NSW budget pie to better manage protected areas for the benefit of regional NSW.

Since 2011, the number of jobs has declined sharply in Forestry Corporation from 803 in 2011[9] to 463 in 2016[10]. A 2015 state-wide estimate of the number of direct jobs in the native forest logging industry is about 600, which cost the taxpayer \$78 million to subsidise between 2009 and 2014[11]. The few jobs that native forest logging now supports come at a very high cost indeed to broader society. Contrast this with regional tourism, worth \$14.4 billion annually to NSW and directly employing 84,600 people[12]. The north coast is the most popular region: 11.9 million visitors spent \$3.7 billion in 2016-17[13].

The question for Ms Pavey is why the determination to undermine a proposal that will bring jobs and visitors to her local area? We believe that, rather than continue to pretend that all is well in the rose garden, we need to act now to protect forestry workers and their families and urgently transition to alternative industries. The Great Koala National Park offers a perfect means by which to do that.

In conclusion, the science confirms what we all know: that koala populations are in serious decline throughout NSW. Conservation groups are not going to wait for the Government's interminable dithering on koalas. We're galvanising the community to act now to protect koalas because they're a species that we're not prepared to sacrifice without a fight. Call us starry eyed, but we know millions of people agree with us.

Kevin Evans is the CEO of the National Parks Association of NSW

[1]Pressey et. al. 2002. Effectiveness of protected areas in north-eastern New South Wales: recent trends in six measures. Biological Conservation 106, pgs. 57-69

[2]See pages 60-62 and 75-76 of NSW EPA 2016: Koala Habitat Mapping Pilot. NSW State Forests. <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/forestagreements/koala-habitat-mapping-pilot-160038.pdf>

[3]Moore & Foley 2005: Tree use by koalas in a chemically complex landscape. Nature 435, pgs. 488-490.

[4]Smith, A. Koala conservation and habitat requirements in a timber production forest in north-east New South Wales. The Conservation of Australia's Forest Fauna pg. 591-611

*[5]Re-enactment of cutting of massive seed tree 26/7/17:
<http://www.bellingencourier.com.au/story/4814927/forest-protest-draws-a-crowd-this-morning/>*

[6] Clearing koalas away: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-20/koala-habitat-in-northern-nsw-destroyed-by-logging/8724486>

[7] <http://www.theland.com.au/story/4440301/pest-fire-management-threat-in-parks-rejiq/>

[8] <http://www.theland.com.au/story/4782203/parks-cutback-npws-restructure-called-into-question/>

[9] See page 103 in:

http://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/448918/Forests-NSW-Annual-Report-2011-12.pdf

[10] See response to question 77 in:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryOther/Transcript/10303/GPSC%205%20-%20ASQ%20-%20Primary%20Industries%2c%20Land%20and%20Water.pdf>

[11] Campbell and McKeon 2015. Money Doesn't Grow on Trees.

<http://www.nature.org.au/media/213736/160320-money-doesnt-grow-on-trees-nsw-forestry-final.pdf>

[12] NSW Department of Industry Media Release 6/3/17:

[https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/media/media-releases/2017-media-releases/2017-media-releases/\\$300m-boost-for-regional-environment-and-tourist-attractions](https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/media/media-releases/2017-media-releases/2017-media-releases/$300m-boost-for-regional-environment-and-tourist-attractions)

[13] Destination NSW: <http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/North-Coast-NSW-Snapshot-YE-Mar-17.pdf>

<http://www.bellingencourier.com.au/story/4831712/letter-npa-response-to-pavey-koala-management/?cs=483>

- Melinda Pavey's opinion piece in the SMH 2 February 2018.

<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/drawing-lines-on-maps-will-not-help-koalas-20180202-h0sjun.html>

- CEO National Parks Association of NSW Alex Goodwin's media release following Melinda Pavey's opinion piece.

<https://www.northernstar.com.au/news/a-matter-of-survival-or-extinction/3335999/>

Despite Ms Pavey's assertions that new parks for koalas are a waste of time, with mounting public pressure the NSW government in June 2018 announced some new 'koala reserves' under the NSW Koala Strategy. Trouble is, like most of our existing National Parks, these new reserves are not the best koala habitat and are focused on areas not needed by the timber industry. According to the North East Forest Alliance "Ten of the 12 Koala Reserves are already protected as part of the

informal reserve system (as FMZs 2 and 3). Four have no records of Koalas, and only 2 have "contemporary" records. Only 3 of the north-east reserves have high quality Koala habitat identified within them, and 2 of these have no "contemporary" records to substantiate the models." Pugh 2018

- Mr Evans' response to the new koala reserves announcement in the Bellingen Courier Sun 28 September 2018 says it all:

<https://www.bellingencourier.com.au/story/5674244/letter-the-great-koala-conservation/>

3 Question on notice from the Chair regarding who provided the estimate that the GKNP would generate \$300m/annum for the Coffs Coast region.

This estimate was provided by Dr Grant Cairncross a Southern Cross University Lecturer in business and tourism.

I provide below, Dr Cairncross' response to our request for further information regarding his quote:

From: Grant Cairncross

Sent: Tuesday, 18 February 2020 3:40 PM

To: Lyn Orrego

Subject: Re: Hello and re Your estimate of economic benefit of proposed Great Koala National Park

Hi Lyn,

Yes I did some work around this based on an old report that looked at the possible economic benefit of the GKNP based on an 1995 NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service report titled the "Economic Value of Recreational use: Gibraltar Range and Dorrigo National Parks."

*As the article I wrote below states it is a **very rough** estimate and that needs to be kept in mind when presenting and discussing it. There are limitations because of the estimates involved.*

The basis for the figures used is in the article too.

For what it is worth I believe the input/output analysis the GKNP Group have now recently got funding for should be far more accurate so long as the tools used can go down three or four levels into the relevant ABS data.

I also suspect it will show the GKNP will be worth more to the Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour LGA's than \$300m p.a. but time will tell.

<https://coffscoastoutlook.com.au/great-koala-national-park-concept-potentially-worth-300m-to-the-coffs-coast-part-2/>

Yours sincerely,

Grant

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I trust my responses will be of assistance to the Committee in appreciating the strong community support and urgent need for the protection of koala habitat, through the creation of the Great Koala National Park.

Yours sincerely
Paula Flack
Committee member
The Great Koala National Park Steering Committee

An opinion piece by Dr Grant Cairncross relating to his estimate appeared in the Coffs Coast Outlook

https://coffscoastoutlook.com.au/great-koala-national-park-concept-potentially-worth-300m-to-the-coffs-coast-part-2/?fbclid=IwAR2L4k1UV_ERq4v0hIVtnFQfpRtBlyUXbghDazLcSpAF2siAakBT5PXpugo