

**Submission
No 107**

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Friends of Koala Inc

Date received: 22 July 2016



Upper House Inquiry into Crown Land
Parliament of NSW
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

I write on behalf of Friends of the Koala, an entirely voluntary organisation widely acknowledged as the lead koala conservation group in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.

Our mission, which we have been pursuing since 1986, is conserving koalas in recognition of the contribution the species makes to Australia's biodiversity. Our core business encompasses habitat protection and regeneration; licensed koala rescue, rehabilitation and release; community education; advocacy and research assistance. We maintain a regional Koala Care and Education Centre in East Lismore.

We understand that the NSW Government's proposed Crown Lands Act will introduce extensive changes to the management of approximately 42% of NSW that is Crown land, involving transforming the Crown Lands Division into a Public Trading Enterprise, transferring Crown land with local values to local councils, reviewing all Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves and allowing conversion of some Western Lands grazing leases to freehold.

Public concern about management and administration practices that have encouraged commercial development on Crown reserves, refused National Park protection for high conservation reserves and the sell-off of hundreds of thousands of hectares of Crown leases has been festering for well over a decade. There is little public accountability in relation to sale and leasing, nor on how the proceeds are spent. With considerable uncertainty surrounding how the new legislation will work, so hot on the heels of the weakening of our native vegetation laws should the new Biodiversity Conservation Bill proceed, we believe a robust Inquiry is timely and highly appropriate.

Friends of the Koala's interest in the State's Crown land is those parcels which provide habitat for populations of NSW's remaining wild koalas. Our concern is the very real risk of further loss of such habitat and other environmental values which could result if widespread sale and commercialisation were to be introduced.

We admit to not making a submission to the Crown Lands Legislation White Paper. We did however comment on the draft Travelling Stock Reserves State Planning Framework 2016-19, to the effect that travelling stock routes should remain in public ownership and be managed to maintain biodiversity, serving as habitat corridors. In our view Australia's continued biodiversity loss is directly related to vegetation loss and development. To sell off our travelling stock roots via long-term grazing leases, etc. is missing an important opportunity to help our threatened species, including koalas, and to improving their resilience to the challenges we face right now with climate change. Until a proper assessment of these and other environmental issues has been undertaken, there should be no further decisions made about the future of Crown land including Travelling Stock Routes.

So, by and large we are opposed to proposals that will allow the sale or lease of public Crown land into private ownership without rigorous consideration being given to environmental matters. Crown land belongs to all of us, humans and native wildlife alike, and must stay in public ownership. It must be administered in an open, transparent and accountable manner that increases public participation in management; management that is underpinned by the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

We thank you for the opportunity to make these few comments.

Yours faithfully

Lorraine Vass
President
21 July 2016

Koala Rescue and Information
6622 1233

*Volunteers conserving koalas and their habitat on the Northern Rivers.
Friends of the Koala services the local government areas of Ballina, Byron, Kyogle,
Lismore, Richmond Valley & Tweed.
Licensed under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 to rehabilitate injured, sick and orphaned koalas.
Licence no. MWL000100225*

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*The Nature Conservation Council of NSW's 2012 Outstanding Member Group and
2014 Marie Byles Award for most outstanding new environmental campaign
Lismore City Council's 2013 Sustainable Environment Award Winner
Byron Shire Council's 2014 World Environment Day Award (Conservation & Land Management)*