

Supplementary
Submission
No 25a

**INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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In all my years, I have never witnessed such destruction as we are witnessing in this country today. The continued existence of many iconic, unique Australian wildlife is on the line. Koalas are facing looming extinction in NSW and Queensland. Not in 50 years or 20 years, the rapidly escalating extinction rates are happening now. The reasons are straightforward. Koalas are dying as a direct result of governments' policies of extermination. The deliberate wiping out of defenceless wildlife in the way of development, infrastructure, forestry, urbanisation and mining. Our democracy is corrupted. Public interest legal rights have been repealed. There is no transparency and almost every shred of information relating to an environmental/wildlife issue has to be obtained through Freedom of Information requests. At every level of government, the opportunity for corruption of the planning and environmental protections is available. The Australian government is in breach of its ratification of the Biodiversity Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species.

There is a complete and deliberate failure of compliance and enforcement at state and federal level. Slim protections available under state and/or federal legislation have been repealed or replaced including MOUs and/or Bilateral Agreements. In 2012, when the koala was listed under the EPBC Act as Vulnerable, a National Koala Recovery plan was recommended. No recovery plan has been developed. The National Koala Conservation & Management Strategy 2009-2014 has been a complete failure. Federal Koala Referral Guidelines are not mandatory and allow developers to self refer if koalas are found on project site. In some cases, koalas on site have been deliberately removed to ensure the project developer does not have to refer the site to the Federal government. Gold Coast City Council translocation of 180 koalas and joeys to facilitate 30 developments at Coomera provides an excellent example. The translocation was the largest ever attempted in Queensland, AFA was able to establish through Right to Information requests that only 2 koalas survived the translocations.

In Queensland, the planning laws and regulations relevant to koalas are obfuscatory gibberish incapable of generating any protection from development. At the Federal level, the Common Assessment Method signed off by Greg Hunt in 2015 and agreed to by all state governments is a further disaster for wildlife, allowing one national listing for a species. Any effort to upgrade EPBC protection for a listed species will now fall under the responsibility of a Species Expert Assessment Panel, a Panel which will be as useless as the Common Assessment Method. There are no dedicated national parks or protected reserves for koalas. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has identified the koala as one of the ten most vulnerable species to climate change. Yet there are no climate change policies, or refugia for koalas or recognition of the IUCN designation. Offset policies are a further disaster. Queensland, however has provided an excellent example of the economic cost of the loss of non juvenile koala trees.

According to the EPBC documents, the Coomera High School Project will see 1832 koala trees removed, valued at \$920 each placing the total value of trees lost at \$1,685,440. We need to put an economic value on a healthy environment. Finally, Australians for Animals Inc. commissioned an IPSOS national poll in January which asked the question: Do you support the urgent introduction of legislation to protect Koala habitat in Queensland and NSW? An overwhelming 80% responded YES. I am tabling an extensive list of the koala talkfests which have been held by NSW, Queensland and Federal governments in relation to koala survival. This list makes it abundantly clear the only government response to the plight of koalas is more talkfests. The terrible and catastrophic loss of koalas and other ecosystem dependent wildlife is also a moral issue. One that should make every government bow its collective head in shame. As my dear friend, Mickey Ryan, Chairman of the Bundjalung Elders Council says: "Our wildlife is becoming vulnerable everywhere. We're losing the soul of the country. What's happening here is downright murder."