

**Submission
No 56**

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

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The only way to save the koala is to save the forests. Our native eucalypt forests are being substantially diminished by inappropriate logging, weed invasion, dieback and climate change. We know what the koala needs to survive. The science is clear and has been repeatedly stated by the experts. Koalas need healthy eucalypts in protected forests.

I want to discuss my personal experience with forest health and koalas.

My husband and I own a 470 hectare property in the Northern Rivers of NSW. Our property is located in the Toonumbar Valley, bordering the Toonumbar State Forest, near to the Toonumbar and Richmond Range National Parks and the foreshores of Toonumbar Dam.

As well as raising cattle on about 120 hectares of pasture, we manage and regenerate native forests on the other 350 hectares of our land. Our forests contain eucalypt species like Spotted Gum, Grey Gum, Grey Iron Bark, Tallowwood, and Stringy Bark as well as rainforest flora in more sheltered places.

Due to logging by previous owners, much of our forest was fragmented when we took over its management. Over the years, the forest areas on our property and across the public lands in Toonumbar filled with the invasive weed lantana. Around 2000, the forest dieback known as Bell Miner Associated Dieback had spread to the point that large areas of trees were dying. This dieback threatens much of the forest along the east coast of Australia, especially in the Northern Rivers. For more information on dieback and lantana, you can watch our YouTube video at: <https://youtu.be/s4zINkKPESU>

As well as killing large numbers of eucalypts, the dieback has contributed to the decline of biodiversity in our valley, including the koala. We have spent the past 15 years removing invasive lantana from our forests and are pleased at the tree regeneration we are seeing. However, we are concerned at the low numbers of koalas. Historically, our valley had large numbers of koalas in times past. We have primary and secondary tree food species in good numbers.

Before the dieback spread, we saw koalas periodically on our property, often moving on the ground between trees. When lantana covers the ground and grows to heights of two to three metres, animals cannot move easily between trees. Our last sighting of a koala on our property was in 2009, though we have evidence of recent koala activity in the form of scratches on feed trees and some scats. The koala population has not easily recovered from the detrimental effects of logging and dieback – it will obviously take time. The species has a poor recovery potential due to its low breeding rate. So it is really important to maintain and protect all koala habitat.

Forestry Corp wants to use dieback in native forests as a reason to cut out all remaining healthy trees in these areas. This is not only bad for forest recovery, it is bad for the koala.

As we demonstrated in our YouTube video, these dieback forests can be recovered in a cost effective manner by removing the lantana and letting the forests regenerate. That cost is minimal compared to the cost, both locally and globally, of losing our eucalypt forests. Growing trees is one of the best insulators against a heating climate. Trees sequester carbon, create oxygen, cool and add moisture to the air, and filter ground water. On a hot day, the forest is a cool refuge for people and animals alike. This will be a precious commodity in our climate crisis future.