

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

**Organisation:** Tweed Landcare Inc

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31 July 2019

Dear Committee

**Re: The NSW Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitats**

Tweed Landcare Inc supports people caring for the environment and natural resources of the Tweed. We provide information, training, project coordination, advocacy and representation for our members, locality groups, landholders and community.

On behalf of our members I ask you to consider the following submission. I believe urgent action is needed to prevent the extinction of koalas in NSW. This gives added impetus to this enquiry and its role in guiding the NSW government to implement steps that will see koala declines reversed before it is too late.

Independent studies (undertaken by WWF) indicate that koalas in NSW are on track to extinction by 2050 – their numbers are now below 20,000. This trajectory can be averted but we need urgent action. Both the problems and the solutions are known, and the government has the power to choose which future it wants for koalas. The actions suggested below are informed by the NPA and the WWF after extensive research by independent experts.

The results are clear if we continue in the current manner. Examples like Pittwater and SE NSW show us the results of inaction. The Tweed Coast koalas too have become a “Locally Endangered Community.” We will continue to see koala deaths, dwindling populations, and local extinctions.

It is clear from the “NSW Koala Strategy” that protecting koala habitat and connectivity is the first and most important step in protecting koalas. I therefore urge you to ensure the following actions are taken:

- End industrialised logging on public land that destroys habitat quality for koalas and ensure Private Native Forestry is genuinely low-impact and selective. This is a critical aspect that will impact the efficacy of all other measures.
- Reform the The Biodiversity Conservation Act and Local Land Assessment Act to end “Self-Assessment” and to provide opportunities for legal challenge in the public interest
- Repeal & reform the current “Offset Policy”
- Ensure grants offered under the ‘Koala Research Plan’ address the primary threats of conserving koala habitat – as they fail to do at present.
- Protect known koala habitat from land clearing by identifying it as Category 2-sensitive land or Areas of Outstanding Biodiversity Value, and urgently require local governments to complete the mapping of koala habitat for holistic protection
- Create the Great Koala National Park” and implement other NPA reserve proposals presented to the Committee to protect koalas in NE NSW—a region that will become more and more important as weather extremes make western areas less hospitable.
- Protect ‘koala hubs’ (areas identified by the Office of Environment and Heritage as particularly important for koalas) immediately on all land tenures
- Identify and protect koala climate ‘refugia’ as a matter of urgency

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- Strengthen SEPP 44 (koala habitat protection) to ensure koala habitat is not destroyed by urban development
- Create a new national park in SW Sydney to ensure rapid development does not come at the cost of koalas.
- Revise the NSW Koala Strategy in its failure to consider climate change. Koalas are in the top ten most vulnerable species to the impacts of climate change
- Conduct an enquiry into the failure to provide fauna bridges for koalas in the Pacific Highway upgrade particularly the Ballina section, which splits a highly vulnerable koala use area.

Regarding industrial scale logging TLI is particularly concerned about the recent decision to extend “Regional Forest Agreements” (or “IFOA’s”) for a further 20 years. These new agreements are structured in a way that will legalise greatly intensified logging throughout NSW. This is in direct contradiction to the extensive evidence of the devastating impact RFAs have had on native wildlife over the past 20 years. Many species – including koalas, quolls and gliders – have been brought closer to the brink of extinction. It has also been decided to extend intensive logging in a new “Intensive Harvesting Zone” that ***overlaps strongly with the Great Koala National Park*** proposed by the NPA of NSW.

It is important to note that many scientists have called for a thorough reassessment of RFA’s calling on extensive evidence to declare them “a failed model”. Native forest logging – particularly “clear felling” - has pushed forest wildlife to extinction. The NSW government has also reduced stream buffers for logging sites and has sanctioned the logging of giant trees (up to 160cm diameter) which will remove hollow bearing trees so important to our native species particularly threatened species who rely on these hollows for shelter and nesting.

Of even more serious concern is the proposal to ***“remap and rezone” protected Old Growth forests***. These forests were preserved in return for granting RFAs in the 1990s. How can it be possible to now take them out of the public domain for logging? This industry has been granted logging rights in State Forests in return for preserving certain high value Old Growth and Biodiverse forest areas. How is it that these forests could be considered as no longer valuable and requiring conservation?

These recent decisions do not indicate an approach that will preserve and protect koalas and their habitat even though the Government has been proposing a national strategy to save the koala for the past 5 years. These decisions do not optimise our public native forests and their role in carbon storage. It is vital that these decisions are reversed, and the steps proposed herein are implemented if we are to give koalas a chance of survival in NSW.

If we do not do so as we will very likely see koalas and many other threatened species continue the slide towards extinction. I urge you to secure the future of koalas by taking decisive action to protect wildlife habitat.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Roberts  
Acting Chairperson  
Tweed Landcare Inc