

**Submission
No 104**

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

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Date Received: 29 July 2019

Inquiry submission:

Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

I enthusiastically support the development and implementation of a strategy to protect our koalas. I am deeply concerned that koalas are in crisis and would really like to see integrated, unified action taken across all government levels and agencies. The main threats - habitat loss from land clearing and native forest logging – must be addressed.

I would like all potential large, well-connected habitat areas (not just areas where we currently have data) reserved for the protection of koalas NOW. Biodiversity conservation, land clearing and Forestry Corporation's ecologically unsustainable practices must be promptly brought into line with maximum protections for this iconic species and its habitat.

When I moved to my beautiful farm near a state forest on the mid north coast in 2002, there were koalas living here. I planted a wildlife corridor of over 1,000 trees. A few years later, I watched with horror as Forestry Corp conducted a logging operation. The unsustainable practices included felling old growth trees. This is given the misnomer of “single tree selection”, which sounds innocuous but is not the reality. Today there are no koalas on my property. And I see with my own eyes, areas on private and public land where clear-felling is taking place, despite incontrovertible evidence of koala habitation and it breaks my heart.

We must protect ‘koala hubs’ (areas identified by the Office of Environment and Heritage as particularly important for koalas) immediately on all land tenures. It is imperative we identify and protect koala climate refuges as a matter of urgency.

And only by demonstrating that it can effectively protect koalas can we have any confidence that the government can protect the rest of Australia’s extraordinary wildlife that doesn’t share the koala’s high profile.

Large and well-managed protected areas remain the single most effective tool to conserving biodiversity. The Great Koala National Park, the key part of a broader koala reserve plan, is the best chance for koalas to have a secure future in NSW, a region that will become more and more important as weather extremes make western areas less hospitable. There are indications that climate change is affecting the chemical composition of koala foods so that they are unable to gain sufficient hydration, especially during dry spells and drought. This adds to the urgency of our mission to conserve this beleaguered species.

For decades the public has subsidised native forest logging that is killing our wildlife, destroying forests and releasing carbon. Those of us who care about nature, recognise the threat of climate change and believe in a sustainable future for regional communities can no longer stand by and watch this happen.

We need to repeal the IFOAs and end the Regional Forest Agreements that have allowed forest and habitat destruction. Instead, let's end logging and use our public forests to drive

forest-based recreation and tourism industries, protect the wildlife we love and help tackle climate change by letting our forests grow old. The GKNP would create thousands of jobs, compared to the dwindling handful in unsustainable, subsidised logging. This is a terribly important issue. These Forestry Agreements that are leading to this carnage are sickeningly absurd.

It is also important to address improving protection of koala habitat in private native forestry, ensuring urban development does not wipe out koala habitat, and to reverse the recent changes to our land-clearing regulations. Every day 23 football fields of koala habitat is bulldozed in NSW! (Nature Conservation Council & WWF Australia).

Rates of deforestation have tripled under the Berejiklian government. Koalas are being forced to spend more time on the ground searching for trees, where they are more susceptible to car strikes, dog attacks and stress-induced diseases. Under the government's new land-clearing laws, WWF estimates we could see 2 million ha of koala habitat lost via the 'Equity Code'.

Koalas must be protected from urban, suburban and town expansion into habitat state-wide. It's important that we strengthen SEPP44. We need to create a new national park in south-west Sydney to ensure rapid development does not come at the cost of koalas.

We must immediately 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 comprehensive management

If we continue with our current regimen of profligate habitat destruction, the iconic and adorable koala could be extinct in our children's lifetime. Shame on us.

We owe it to our children to protect the trees, and those for whom they are a home. We mustn't leave them a desert as legacy of our "civilization"? I urge you to ensure koalas are protected into the future, so that the world's favourite animal is not lost from NSW.

MARY FORBES