

**Submission
No 117**

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

Name: Mrs Linda Ambrose

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Linda Ambrose

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Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC
Chair – Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in NSW

Dear Ms. Faehrmann,

Submission to Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in New South Wales

I am a professional ecologist involved in surveying for koalas in various parts of New South Wales and Queensland, and also have direct experience of the impacts of habitat loss on koalas through my volunteering work with Friends of the Koala.

I moved to Australia from the UK in mid 2016 and since living here I have been shocked to see how little the government is doing to protect the iconic koala. In fact, it seems that the government is keen to hasten its demise in NSW by removing protection of habitats and facilitating removal of trees.

In this area of the Northern Rivers we have a good population of koalas but a high incidence of disease, which is often associated with high levels of stress. Parts of the Northern Rivers, in particular Byron Shire, are under immense pressure of development and with increasing fragmentation of habitats the koalas have to spend more time on the ground moving between small patches of habitat, and crossing increasingly busy roads and new property developments with dogs. Friends of the Koala has around 400 koalas come through its rescue and rehabilitation centre in Lismore every year and from that number only approximately a pitiful 20% survive. This level of loss cannot possibly be sustainable and with increasing loss of habitat, and climate change, the loss is likely to increase further.

Following a hot, dry, summer I rescued a number of koalas suffering from severe malnutrition and dehydration which did not survive. The only way to buffer the effects of climate change is to ensure that there are large areas of protected and connected habitats where koalas have access to food and shelter. Many of the koalas in this area live on private property, so removing protection of individual trees, as well as changes to the Private Native Forestry Code of Practice will result in the loss of important koala habitat. Individual paddock trees provide critical links for koalas between higher quality habitats, as well as being important habitat in their own right.

In some areas, particularly around Lismore and around the Dunoon area, there has been large scale removal of rows of trees adjacent to macadamia farms, frequently tallowwood, an important food tree for koalas, as well as an important corridor for movement. When carrying out surveys in the Lismore area in 2017, many landholders advised us that they used to see koalas frequently but that

in the last 4 or 5 years this has changed. This seems to be the same story in other areas of NSW where I have been involved in surveying for koalas - around Port Stephens and Coffs Harbour. Koalas are rapidly disappearing from many areas and the government is seriously failing them.

The Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and SEPP 44 are both totally inadequate to save the koala and the new forestry agreements are resulting in huge increases in land clearing. The only way to protect the koala and ensure its long term survival in the wild in NSW is to put much stronger protection measures into place to prevent any further loss of koala trees. Once this is done, resources need to be put into compliance monitoring and significant fines and other penalties need to be enforced for any non-compliant removal of trees. If something is not done, and done very soon, to prevent further habitat loss, the koala will go extinct in parts of NSW at least, and that would be a huge international embarrassment to the Australian government for allowing it to happen, and one which it will never live down.

Yours sincerely
Linda Ambrose
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