

**Submission  
No 143**

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

**Organisation:** National Parks Association of NSW, Hunter Branch

**Date Received:** 2 August 2019

---

2 August 2019

Hunter Branch

Ms Cate Faehrmann, MLC  
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment  
Legislative Council of NSW  
Parliament House, Sydney

Uploaded via  
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/>

Dear Ms Faehrmann

## INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NSW

---

The Hunter Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in New South Wales.

Established in 1957, NPA is a community-based organisation dedicated to the protection and conservation of nature. Our activities are particularly focused towards advancing:

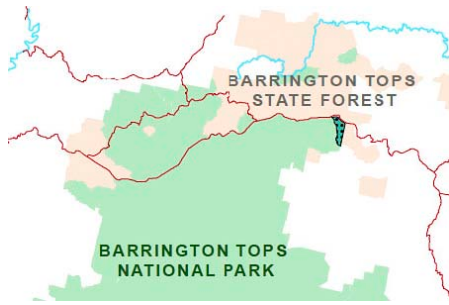
- long-term protection of biodiversity and its supporting ecological processes
- an expanded network of protected natural areas
- better systems of environmental law, policy, and planning
- evidence-based natural resource management
- a closer connection between people and nature.

NPA considers that the best way to ensure long-term survival of koala populations is to protect and manage Koala habitat under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*. NPA's Sydney office has made a separate, comprehensive submission to the Inquiry setting out various reserve proposals that are urgently needed to avoid future extinction of Koalas within NSW. This submission addresses matters relating specifically to the Hunter Region.

### Complete inadequacy of NSW Koala Strategy

The NSW Government released its *NSW Koala Strategy* in May 2018. The strategy includes 5,400 ha of national park additions and 14,200 ha of new flora reserves across the State. Despite the fanfare, the new reserves are minuscule, scattered and inconsequential to securing long-term protection of Koala populations and their habitats. The following reserves were announced for the Hunter Region:

Location	Area	Type
Barrington Tops (W of Gloucester)	155 ha	Flora reserve
Corrabare (SW of Cessnock)	842 ha	Flora reserve
Olney / Watagan (SW of Cessnock)	3,107 ha	Flora reserve

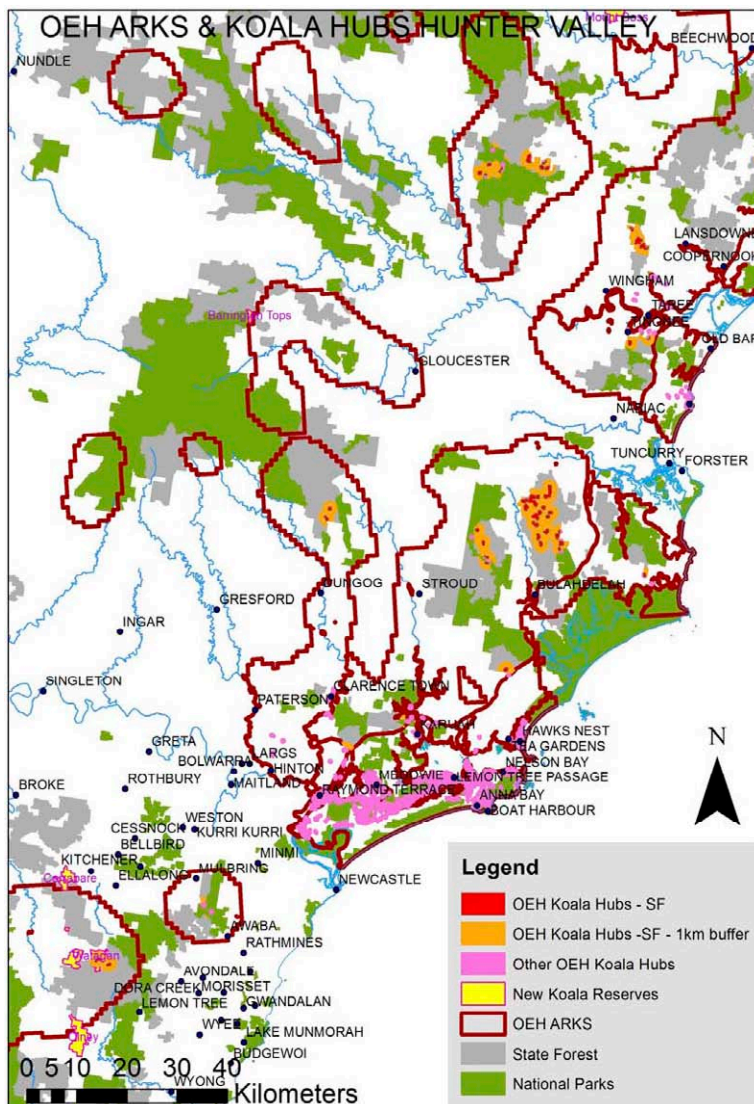


Proposed 155 ha koala reserve at Barrington Tops (tiny thin strip shown by dark green shading). Our reaction to it might be best summed up as ‘incredulous’.

Following the release of the Koala Strategy, NPA made a GIPA (“freedom of information”) request for information that provided the basis for the Strategy, including:

- locations identified by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage as being “Areas of Regional Koala Significance” (ARKS) and “Areas of Local Koala Significance” (ALKS, commonly referred to as ‘koala hubs’ or ‘hubs’)
- selection criteria used to determine new koala reserves.

However, no selection criteria were disclosed in the information provided by the NSW Government. An analysis of the information indicated that, whatever the selection criteria for new koala reserves might have been, they had absolutely nothing to do with Koalas. There is no correlation between those areas identified as being significant for koala conservation, and those areas identified for reservation by the Strategy. This mismatch is plainly obvious in the following map of sections of the Hunter Region.

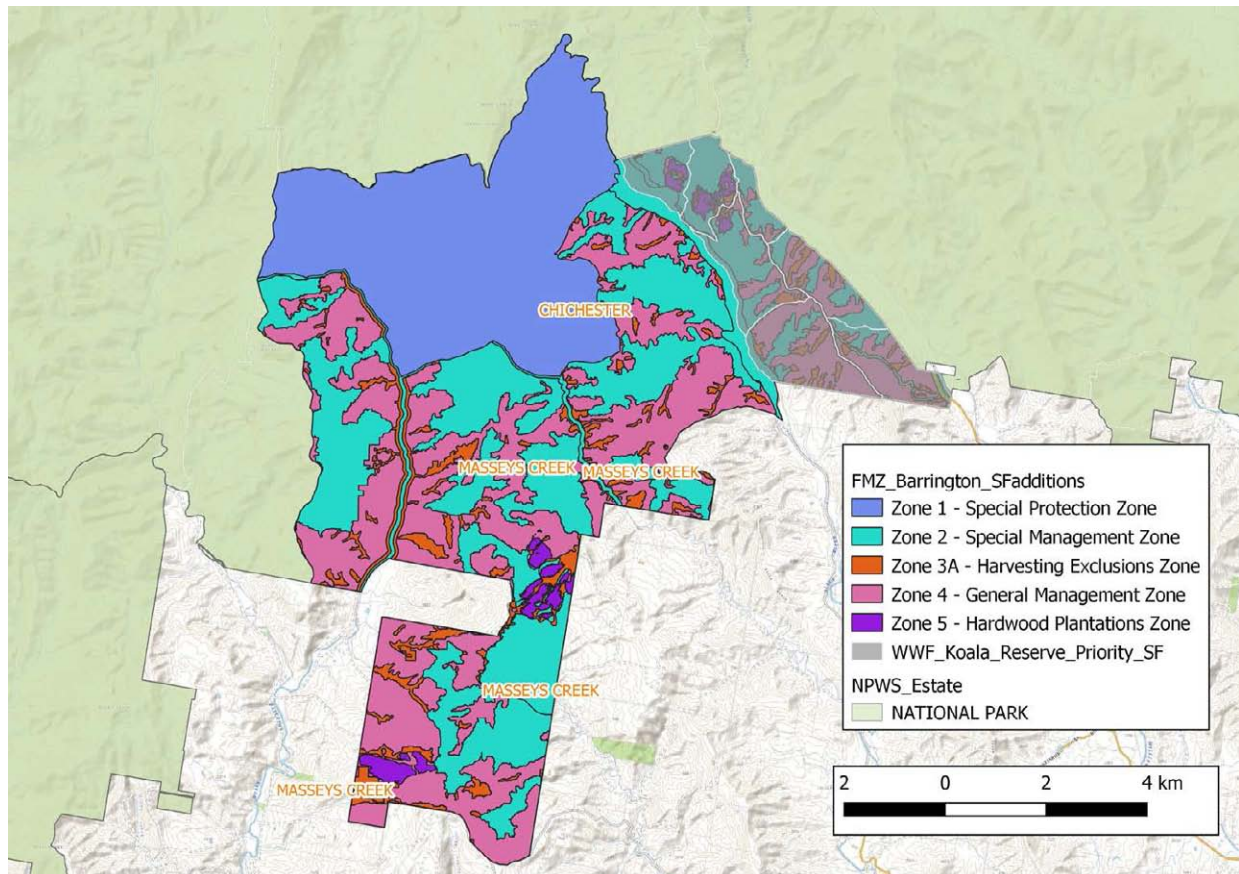


Map prepared by the North East Forest Alliance using data supplied by NSW Office of Environment and Planning

Two of the proposed koala reserves ('Barrington Tops' and 'Corrabare') are outside of ARKS and contain no hubs. The 'Olney' reserve is mostly outside of ARKS and contains no hubs, while the 'Watagan' reserve is within an ARKS but contains just 36ha of hubs. Conversely, important hubs located in State forests northwest of Bulahdelah (Wang Wauk and Myall River district) remain unprotected from logging, as do hubs in State forests in various other locations. In summary, the proposals for the Hunter Region are neither adequate, well located or evidence-based, and give a reasonable apprehension of being less than sincere.

### Case study: Upper Paterson and Allyn Valleys

Quite independently of the Koala conservation issue, the NPA Hunter Branch has prepared a detailed proposal to extend Barrington Tops National Park by transferring adjoining State forest lands. The proposal is located in the Upper Paterson and Allyn Valleys, north of Gresford (see map below).



Proposed additions to Barrington Tops NP, showing existing forest management zones and Williams Ridge 'koala hub' (grey shading). The area is currently within Chichester and Maseys Creek State Forests. Under current rules, logging may only be undertaken in Zones 4 and 5.

The proposal forms a logical addition to the existing national park and World Heritage area, and will protect a mixture of moist forest types with important natural values. The area includes one of the mapped 'koala hubs' (Williams Ridge, shown by grey-shading on the map), where there has been numerous Koala sightings in past years. While the park additions are primarily motivated by a variety of other objectives (including better management of the popular Allyn River recreational areas), they would nevertheless make a useful contribution to Koala conservation at a regional level.

State Forests of NSW (1995) regarded the Koala as locally common in the area. Distribution is strongly influenced by particular tree species that are restricted to high nutrient soils, with Grey Gum and Forest Red Gum highly preferred. White Mahogany has also been identified as a preferred species in the area. Ecotone (1995) recorded koala presence on the ridge south of Mt Paterson, and on Williams Ridge. Earlier Koala records are from Williams Ridge and Maseys Creek State Forest on ridges.

During 2018 NPA Hunter Branch conducted two community Koala surveys within the area. A third survey was held during April 2019, and a fourth survey will be held in coming weeks. The surveys were conducted using the “spot assessment technique” (Phillips & Callaghan, 2011).

The surveys have so far failed to reveal unequivocal evidence for recent Koala presence within the Williams Ridge ‘Koala hub’. This possibly reflects the significant time needed for habitat to recover from past logging activities. However, Koala presence has been detected in other locations within the proposal. The very limited experience gained from these surveys tends to support the notion that ‘Koala hubs’ are likely to be biased towards locations that have received greater survey effort (because they are more easily accessible). It is likely that remoter areas that have received little or no survey effort to date will subsequently be found to support useful albeit diffuse Koala populations.

## Conclusions

The *NSW Koala Strategy* might best be summed up as disingenuous. This is not only because the Strategy lacks any intellectual foundation, but also because it is inconsistent with logging rules set by the very same Government. These rules permit intensive logging of koala habitat within State Forests, and place little or no constraints on logging of koala habitat on private land.

Quite apart from strategies targeted at ‘hot spot’ habitat locations situated on pockets of high nutrient soils on private land, koalas conservation efforts will need to address the maintenance of diffuse populations located across State forests. The Barrington Tops case study illustrates one small example. While Koalas are important in their own right as an iconic Australian species, they can also be viewed as an ‘umbrella species’ that, if effectively protected and managed, will help protect all the other species that share the same habitat. In our view, this gives significant support for a general strategy to phase out native forest logging in State forests, and where relevant criteria are met, to transfer lands to an appropriate reserve category under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*. Accordingly, a complete review of the public native forest estate is urgently required.

Yours faithfully

Ian Donovan

**President, Hunter Branch  
National Parks Association of NSW**

## References

Ecotone Ecological Consultants (1995). *Fauna Survey of Gloucester and Chichester Management Areas*, Report for State Forests of NSW.

Phillips S. & Callaghan J. (2011). The spot assessment technique: a tool for determining localised levels of habitat use by Koalas *Phascolarctos cinereus*. *Australian Zoologist* **35**(3), 774–780.

State Forests of NSW (1995) *Environmental Impact Statement – Proposed forestry operations in the Gloucester and Chichester Management Areas*, Volume C – Fauna Impact Statement.