

**Submission
No 145**

INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Earth Learning Inc

Date Received: 2 August 2019



Address: 454 Hopkins Ck Rd, Chillingham

Aug 2 2019

To: Committee for Inquiry into Koala Populations & Habitats NSW,

Dear Sir or Madam:

Earth Learning is a registered environmental group of over 100 members dedicated to Awareness and Preservation of Natural Ecosystems – particularly the natural heritage of the Tweed region.

On behalf of this group I would like to make the following comments on this upcoming inquiry.

Koala populations in NSW are on a serious decline and are now considered to be at risk of extinction as reported in several independent ecological studies.

In our own area – The Tweed Coast koalas have now become a locally endangered population. The NSW Koala Strategy has reported that the central reason for the sharp decline in koala numbers across NSW is *loss of habitat and connectivity*.

Earth Learning's mission is to conserve biodiversity – of vegetation and wildlife in NSW and beyond. We understand the 'Koala' to be a "Keystone Species". Its loss in any area represents a significant loss of other species with damaging consequences for biodiversity.

I would like to highlight the following points to the Committee to ensure that the upcoming inquiry delivers an effective plan of actions that will ensure the survival of koalas in NSW.

- The Biodiversity Conservation and Local Land Assessment Acts need to be revised to end "Self Assessment" and the "Offset Policy" in its current form. Both of these important Environmental Protection Acts must be strengthened to ensure that industrial logging on public lands is genuinely low-impact and selective. This revision must reinstate the provision for public comment and legal challenge.
- Industrial logging that is currently occurring in koala habitat areas must **cease**.
- Known koala habitat must be classified as areas of Outstanding Biodiversity Value and holistically protected
- The SEPP 44 must be strengthened to ensure koala habitat is not destroyed further by urban expansion and development
- Climate change impacts must be a factor in this inquiry. Identified "Climate Refugia" need to be protected as a matter of urgency
- The OEHS has identified "Koala Hubs" as particularly important for koalas. These areas need immediate protection on whatever land zone they occur.



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- The NPA has proposed the “Great Koala Park” for NE NSW – a region that is due to become increasingly inhospitable. This must be implemented to avoid the impacts of extreme weather on koalas. A proposed koala park on SW Sydney is also essential to protect koalas from rapid development in that area
- The “NSW Koala Strategy must be revised to include climate change as koalas are considered to be one of the most vulnerable species to its impacts
- In our area it is of serious concern to most environmental groups that the Pacific Highway upgrade failed to provide fauna (koala) bridges in this construction. This is particularly concerning at the Ballina section near Wardell where the highway completely divides an important koala population – thus isolating animals from each other for breeding and other purposes. The viability of this population has been significantly impacted.

Earth Learning is very concerned that what is considered by scientists to be a “failed model” in “Regional Forestry Agreements” has been *extended for another 20 years*. This has already resulted in an intensification of logging throughout NSW. Intensive logging and ‘clear felling’ is known to have pushed several forest species towards extinction.

Even more alarming is the NSW decision to create an “Intensive Harvest Zone” which overlaps with many areas of primary koala habitat. In addition the “**size**” of trees for logging has been increased to include giant “hollow bearing trees”. This will be devastating to species like gliders and others that rely on them - thereby reducing the biodiversity of ecosystems which koalas inhabit. Further to this stream buffers have been reduced creating erosion and damaging waterways.

In a similar vein and equally alarming is the plan to “**Remap and Rezone Old Growth Forests**”. High value forests that are now protected could be opened for logging. This is inconceivable in the context of protecting wildlife and koalas and biodiversity. We urge your Committee to work hard to prevent this proposed plan. It is critical that these decisions be reversed.

Earth Learning urges you to accept the steps proposed herein as essential to give them a chance of survival in NSW and arrest their decline towards extinction.

Yours Sincerely,
Adrienne Weber
For Earth Learning Inc