

**Submission
No 148**

INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: New England Greens Armidale Tamworth

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New England Greens Armidale Tamworth submission to Upper House Inquiry: Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on this important topic.

New England Greens Armidale Tamworth (NEGAT) observes that, throughout our region there has been a noticeable decline in the passage of koalas across landscapes where, previously, they were frequently observed. In the urban area of Armidale, school precincts and parks used to provide refuge for koalas as they traversed the landscape from the gorge region to the ranges around Guyra and even further west and north – this rarely occurs now.

Loss of habitat, loss of connected corridors and fragmentation have been identified in the NSW Koala Strategy as key issues and are seen at work in the New England area; land is being cleared at unprecedented rates – in an agricultural setting often this land is marginal; in urban and peri-urban areas clearing occurs without any consideration for natural habitat and through industrial-scale logging activities often on public land. Native habitat in our region has suffered from extensive dieback, an issue not considered in the Koala Strategy.

In the New England area we urge that the following actions be implemented:

1. The creation of a Great Koala National Park reaching across the Great Dividing Range and the implementation of other National Parks Association reserve proposals as presented to the Committee by NPA to protect koalas in north-east NSW, a region that will become increasingly important as weather extremes make western areas less hospitable. NEGAT notes that the NSW Koala Strategy completely ignores the impacts of climate change on koalas, which have been identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as one of the ten most vulnerable species globally to climate change
2. Immediately protection of koala hubs (areas identified by the Office of Environment and Heritage as particularly important for koalas) on all land tenures.
3. An end to industrialised logging on public land and the repeal the Regional Forest Agreements which destroy habitat and legislation to ensure Private Native Forestry is genuinely low-impact and selective.
4. 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. Review and amend the ‘offset’ policies which are allowing the destruction of Leard Forest and endangered ecological communities- communities which, by definition, cannot be offset

5. Strengthen SEPP 44 (koala habitat protection) to ensure koala habitat is protected in areas of urban development.
6. Investigate a planning regime in which wildlife corridors and refuges are an integral part of the early stages of all development planning and that areas set aside are protected from future development.

The value of steps taken now to protect Koala habitat cannot be overestimated and will have a flow-on effect to many of the thousand or so other endangered species. In the interests of intergenerational equity we must act decisively now to extend protection to existing habitat areas and work to develop these areas into a interconnected environment.