

**Submission
No 171**

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

Name: Mr Peter Nielsen and Mrs Meg Nielsen

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Submission to the NSW Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitats.

Dear Committee,

Please accept this submission to the Inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales. We give permission for the committee to make our name and submission public.

We are appalled to see koala populations in crisis in NSW and facing the very real prospect of extinction, as are the over 1000 other threatened species. Immediate action is needed to ensure their survival and allow future generations the joy of seeing these iconic creatures in the wild. Ensuring the survival of koalas and other unique species is a moral issue which should be beyond politics. We need visionary leadership to consider a way forward and plan for the bigger picture, for the benefit of all. With this in mind we are hoping that the committee is able to work together to develop a consensus on genuine solutions to protect the future of our koalas, their habitat and consequently the many other species that share their habitat.

The recent unprecedented rates of deforestation: escalating rates of logging of both public native forests and private native forests, including land clearing for development and infrastructure are clearly the main cause of habitat loss and consequently the decline of koalas in Coastal NSW.

Koalas cannot/will not be saved unless we ensure their remaining habitat is protected and restored. However, currently the very opposite is occurring. In NSW areas of important koala habitat termed as 'koala hubs' which were mapped by the Office of Environment and Heritage, are still being cleared for logging, agriculture and infrastructure. The pace of the destruction of key habitat is increasing.

Repeatedly, areas of public native forest earmarked for logging by NSW Forestry Corporation have been found, on inspection by conservationists, to be prime koala habitat. Usually, despite advice and evidence to Forest Corp and the EPA, logging eventually continues. We raise this point because, *if* Forest Corp are *routinely* failing to check for koalas, one wonders how many other high use koala habitats are being regularly damaged and the koalas disturbed, stressed and put at further risk or driven out to areas without sufficient feed trees or unsafe areas or even roadways where they are run over and cause traffic accidents.

We should add that this is now a somewhat mute point because the new Regional Forest Agreements and Coastal IFOAs introduced by the NSW government last year, removed the need for loggers to search for koalas; instead relying on maps! Rates of timber extraction have been virtually doubled, the number of trees required to be retained for feed and recruitment has been reduced, the buffers for riparian zones of streams has been drastically reduced to only 5 metres, further reducing important habitat, with even that inadequate protection zone being allowed to include forestry roading and fording. Horrifically the native Blackbutt forests between Grafton and Taree are to be opened up for 60ha coups of "intensive" logging (which is in effect clear-fell in that so few trees are required to be retained). This is no longer farming of the forests, it is mining of our precious public resource – the common-wealth, for the profit of a few.

We often hear old retired loggers mourn that Forestry has gone from a noble sustainable industry with genuine selective logging practices to logging on an industrial scale. The machinery now too large and 'unmanueverable' causing damage even to the trees that are retained.

We believe that the drastic escalation of logging in our public native forests and the public's serious concerns about koalas and increased numbers of threatened species, has resulted in the loss of social licence.

Earlier this year, the NSW Government recognising that Koala populations are in decline, developed a strategy to begin to address the problem. Unfortunately, neither the strategy nor the current government policies for either public native forests or private native forests actually address the number one threat to koala populations : habitat loss and fragmentation. In fact these policies actually encourage and ensure the continued destruction of their habitat.

The recent report from the UNs Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change could not have made it any clearer. We must stop deforestation as a matter of extreme urgency and embark on massive reforestation projects as *the* most efficient method we have to store and sequester carbon emissions, as well as for conservation of species.

We therefore call on the committee to prioritise solutions which prevent ongoing habitat destruction. We would hope this would include:

1)Developing a transition plan to end the logging of native forests on public land, utilising the effected workforce (this is likely to effect quite low numbers because 84% of timber is already sourced from plantations) in the restoration and regeneration of damaged, weed infested and lantana affected dieback (BMAD) and replanting programs, as rangers and in the growing eco-tourism industry.

2)Rejecting the Government's proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forests to logging on the NSW North Coast. These previously protected trees are important for the essential hollow bearing trees for so many species and the old grow of tomorrow. There is obviously up to 100 years age gap before any planted seedlings replace the old trees that are many times more efficient at absorbing carbon dioxide than the growing saplings.

3)Ruling out burning our native forests for electricity. Far more polluting than coal so definitely should not be included as a renewable energy source . The temptation to take young trees as logging 'waste' is too great and impossible to regulate against this practice. The results of paying renewables subsidies for pelletising timber for export are horrific with vast areas being cleared in the USA. (if you haven't seen it already, we encourage you to watch the award winning film 'BURNED: are trees the new coal?') The USA and the EU have been running this rort for some time claiming that burning timber is renewable, efficient and sustainable. However the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change summarized the emissions of bio-energy use as follows, "The combustion of biomass generates gross Green House Gas emissions roughly equivalent to the combustion of fossil fuels." When wood is burned to produce electricity, it releases an estimated 80% more carbon dioxide per unit of electricity than coal. I understand the NSW DPI has plans for this export trade to Japan.

4)Ending woodchipping in southern NSW to allow koala populations to recover.

5) Investing in the future of koalas by expanding our National Parks network, including creating the Great Koala National Park on the NSW mid-north coast. Consider setting aside and joining

some of the areas on the North Coast for conservation reserves. We actually have historically low levels of additions to our National Parks network in recent years.

6) Permanently protecting all 'koala hubs' from clearing for agriculture, logging or development and urgently protecting koala habitat in the Sydney Basin from future development.

The NSW Parliament is at a cross roads and faces a choice to either continue as we are now with business as usual and oversee the rapid decline and possible extinction of one, if not more, of our iconic Australian wildlife species , or look at the bigger picture and make make urgent changes to protect vital habitat and restore our native forests. We know what needs to be done and we know how to do it. Our hope is that you will work together to save our koalas and our iconic species that depend on our magnificent forests for the sheer joy of future generations....and because we can.

We must learn to farm our land within our environmental constraints.

Yours hopefully

Peter and Meg Nielsen

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There is obviously up to 100 years age gap before the seedlings replace the old trees that actually are more efficient at absorbing carbon dioxide than the growing saplings. biomass burning for energy. The NSW DPI claims that, "The benefits of using forestry residues for bio-energy include the opportunity to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by displacing the use of fossil fuels." The Forest Corporation intends to use Industrial Logging to harvest 142,000 hectares of our state forests from Taree to Grafton with "residues" feeding the proposed biomass plants at Bulahdelah, Herons Creek, Kempsey and Grafton. The Herons Creek plant even has the support of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) to trial making bitumen and diesel from forest material. Single Tree selection has now become "Every Single Tree" with leaves, sticks, trees not millable and sawdust going to biomass and chips and pellet to export.

The USA and the EU, especially England have been running this rort for some time claiming that burning timber is more efficient and sustainable however the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change summarized the emissions of bio-energy use as follows: To make this devastation of our biodiversity easier the NSW LNP Government has removed the prescription to search for koalas before logging and is moving to make old growth trees "new" again.