

Submission
No 192

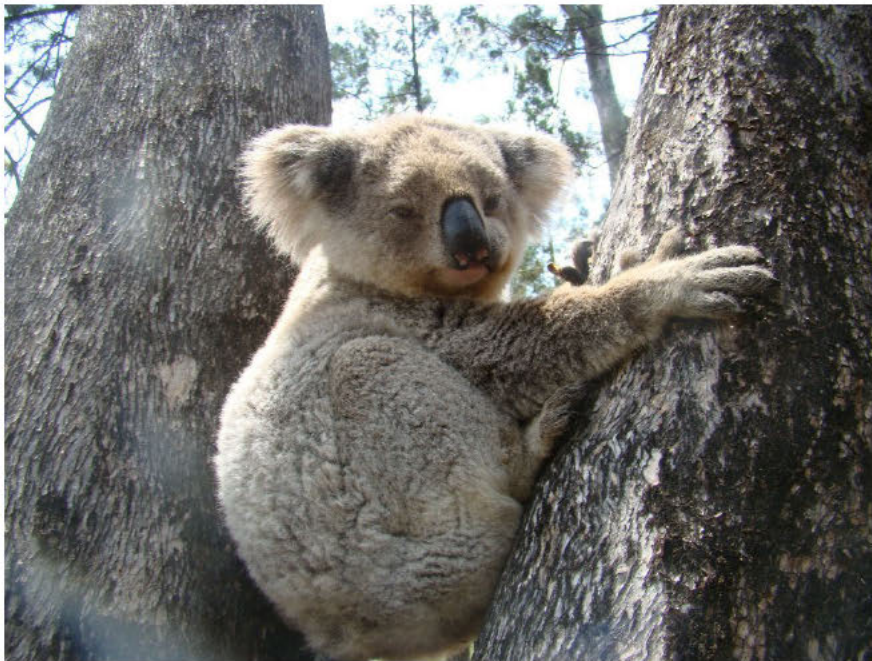
INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre

Date Received: 3 August 2019



NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Koala Populations & Habitat in NSW



Pic: Leard Forest koala, by Tania Marshall (2013)

Submission of the

Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre Inc.

1212 Black Mountain Creek Rd, Maules Creek NSW 2382

Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre koala monitoring

Wando CCC was formed in 2015, and is the only dedicated environmental conservation group in the Narrabri area, based in Maules Creek. The group has since then engaged in many conservation activities including biodiversity monitoring. Field activities to identify high-use koala habitation in Leard Forest has been one such biodiversity study areas.



With the help of experts able to identify and educate community members, locations of high use have been found in Leard Forest repeatedly throughout the past few years, showing that the koala is continuing to survive in the ravaged Forest which is beset with coal mining which results in serious aberration of the natural environment, through regular blasting, 24-hour low frequency noise, vibration, loss of habitat through clearing and fragmentation.

The most recent survey was conducted in September 2018, whereupon koala scats were again found in the Goonbri Creek vicinity, which is covered by a coal Exploration Licence.

The mining company Boggabri Coal, owned by the Japanese conglomerate Idemitsu via its Australian branch Idemitsu Resources Australia, has a licence to explore this very area.

Boggabri Coal has already wiped out a considerable portion of the high-use koala habitat that existed prior to coal mining.

The Department of Planning has been ineffective in overseeing these developments, and gives no weight to the possibility of species extinction.





Submission

Wando CCC wishes to concentrate its comments on the following terms of reference:

- 1. The status of koala populations and koala habitat in New South Wales, including trends, key threats, resource availability, adequacy of protections and areas for further research.**

Members of the Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre response attended the Koala Strategy workshop in Gunnedah organised by Office of Environment and Heritage. We raised the problem of habitat loss due to coal mining. It is deeply troubling that the comments provided by Wando CCC to the OEH workshop did not find their way into the Recommendations. We think it is ludicrous that water fountains for suburban and semi-urban koalas of Gunnedah are considered more important means of preserving the koala species than, for example, preserving the ONLY permanent water source in the Leard Forest, which was Lawler's Well, a billabong which has now been destroyed by Whitehaven Coal, the neighbouring coal mine to Boggabri Coal.

The NSW Government, whilst espousing a wish to protect the koala from extinction, is actually fast-tracking its extinction through slack biodiversity assessments which falsely describe koala habitat and populations.

The adequacy of protections is abysmal, and we refer particularly to the system of biodiversity offsets which claims to offset the Leard, Vickery and Breeza Forests with inferior and not like-for-like habitats sometimes 40 km from the existing koala habitat.

There is no evidence at all that offsets have been beneficial in preserving species whose habitat was destroyed by coal mining in the Namoi Valley.

- 2. The effectiveness of State Environmental Planning Policy 44 - Koala Habitat Protection, the NSW Koala Strategy and the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, including the threatened species provisions and associated regulations, in protecting koala habitat and responding to key threats.**

This is ineffective. The current development at Gilead in Camden is an apt example of the failure of SEPP 44.

3. Identification of key areas of koala habitat on private and public land that should be protected, including areas currently at risk of logging or clearing, and the likely impacts of climate change on koalas and koala distribution.

Key areas that should be protected include the areas currently targeted by coal mines including Shenhua Watermark mine, Whitehaven's Vickery mine, also Santos coal seam gas project.

Wando CCC would greatly appreciate an opportunity to meet with the Parliamentary Committee, either at Parliament House, or to invite the Members to visit us in the Namoi Valley to obtain a first-hand account and view the destruction for themselves.

Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre Inc.

2 August 2019