

**Submission
No 193**

INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Voice of Woodville and Wallalong

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V.O.W.W.

Voice of Woodville and Wallalong

Including Brandy Hill, Nelson Plains, and Seaham

2 August 2019

Jenelle Moore

Director Committees

Parliament of New South Wales

Submission to Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment

Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

I write on behalf of Voice of Wallalong and Woodville (VOWW), a community association that encompasses an area of the West Ward of Port Stephens Council.

This submission has three components

1. Published policy and programs of the NSW Government's Office of Environment & Heritage
2. A Submission on the Kings Hill Urban Release Area,
Concept DA 16-2018-772-1 for Lot 41 DP 1034711 and Lot 4821 DP 852073
3. The views put forward by our community with respect to the consequences of the loss of habitat and breeding territory for our endangered species, both fauna and flora

1. The **Office the NSW Government's Office of Environment & Heritage** has an excellent web site that we commend to our community and the committee, and we draw your attention in particular to the following.

Publication: "Saving Our Species 2016 – 21"

More plants and animals to be saved from extinction

The forward of this document makes the statement:

NSW has one of the world's most diverse and beautiful natural environments, including its plants and animals.

Yet despite our natural wealth, NSW has nearly 1000 species on the verge of extinction. This presents us with a considerable challenge.

The Saving our Species (SoS) program is the NSW Government's solution.

By taking a more strategic approach to management, working together and committing substantial investment in the program, SoS aims to maximise the number of species we can secure in the wild in NSW for 100 years.

I invite you to join us and together we can secure threatened species in NSW.

Mark Speakman: NSW Minister for the Environment.

In 2016 the NSW Government undertook to **invest** in saving more threatened plant and species from extinction with the following two key objectives.

- Maximise the number of threatened species that can survive securely in the wild in NSW
- Control the key threats facing our threatened plants and animals.

Success is measured by the number of sites where threatened species and ecological communities are stable or increasing in the wild in NSW.

Conservation activities delivered as part of the SoS program **are complemented by effective regulation of human impacts** on threatened species and ecological communities.

Our community has an expectation that the committee is familiar with the publications of the Office of Environment & Heritage and in particular with the SoS program and embrace it's ethos and the knowledge into their questionings and decision making.

2. Kings Hill Urban Release Area,

Concept DA 16-2018-772-1 for Lot 41 DP 1034711 and Lot 4821 DP 852073

Please accept our submission where in we raise in the strongest terms our objection to the revised development application of the Kings Hill Urban Release Area.

This development of 1900 lots proposes to clear fell the required area thereby destroying an active Koala population – one of just two hub populations in Port Stephens Shire according to Dr Steve Phillips' research.

The NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee declared in 2017 that in the Port Stephens Council area, koalas faced "a very high risk of extinction...in the near future."

As part of its report the committee found that habitat had become **highly fragmented** due to clearing for agriculture, housing, sand mining and roads. New developments proposed in the area would take in more than 1200 hectares of koala habitat.

Further, the Tomaree Koala population would decline to extinction within a decade at the current mortality rate.

'Port Stephens Koalas', which was among the groups that lobbied the NSW Government to reverse its decision on the Mambo Wetlands, said attention now needed to focus on the potential loss of habitat around Anna Bay, Salamander Bay and Kings Hill.

"It would be terrible if these breeding areas were destroyed," president Carmel Northwood said. "Just because this [Mambo Wetlands] has been saved doesn't mean the other threats have disappeared."

"There are some big development applications, and things are not looking good," Ms Northwood said.

Included in these developments is the proposed expansion of the Hanson Brandy Hill Quarry, which seeks approval to clear 45hectares of undisputed Koala habitat and breeding territory, an area considered by Port Stephens Council as a Koala hub. Hanson's own DA states that the removal of this habitat will have a significant effect on the national Koala population. The

proposed solution is to provide an “offset” as required by State Government; a practice that has been widely criticised as being ineffective in saving this iconic creature.

This brings us back to the proposed **Kings Hill Urban Release Area**.

If the NSW Government is sincere on delivering on the SoS initiative, that is costing the people of NSW some \$100 million over five years, it is incongruous that its Department of Planning would approve, or be pressured to approve developments that destroy habitat and breeding territories of that most iconic and unique Australian marsupial, the Koala, let alone other native flora and fauna that is under threat due to urban development and sprawl.

The influence of developers is seen by communities as a significant contributor to inept planning that brings about fragmentation of the habitat that our native fauna and flora are so dependent upon. There does not appear to be a wholistic approach to the planning process for urban development, but rather a fragmented one that is driven by opportunistic developers, who have one interest only.

And the tragedy of such action is the loss to future generations of the rewarding engagement and co-existence with our native flora and fauna. And for what purpose. Profiteering by the developers?

There is a better way.

3. Community Perspective

Internationally Australia has been known for its diversity of landscape, flora and fauna. The tourism industry prides itself on providing “nature” experiences that only this country can offer. Tourism creates jobs, and provides incomes that support many communities across our country. Tourism is sustainable and makes money for even the most remote communities.

Australian Governments and businesses regularly gift “toy Koalas” to foreign dignitaries and overseas visitors.

Children who participate in foreign educational exchange take Koala stick pins as gifts and these are graciously accepted.

Go to any souvenir shop in Australia and the most obvious souvenir is based on the Koala; toys, paintings, T-shirts, socks, ties and more.

So while the Government is happy to bask in the spotlight of this industry it is in denial as to what is happening to the Koala population in the wild. Are we prepared to sacrifice the one unique creature that has been internationally identified with Australia?

State Government and Local Council planning policies of the not so recent past (20 – 30 years) acknowledged the plight of the Koala and insisted on realistic, and undisturbed Koala corridors be preserved when residential and industrial development plans were submitted. Unfortunately, these corridors have been eroded over time, in the name of “development” for growing suburbs.

The community has a view that, in more recent times governments have bent to the might of developers who believe that clear felling of land is their best option for their highest financial return, with “offsets” provided in other locations far removed from the development site. Alarmingly these have proven to be ineffective when considering fauna that rely on specific feed source, and the time needed to both determine suitability of locations and establishment of suitable mature flora, to provide both shelter, protection from predators, and feed for displaced fauna. Quite bluntly such a strategy is a death sentence to our fauna,

The trend in our local area seems to be to grab as much land as possible and cram as many residences upon that land as possible with the irresponsible consequence of loss of flora within these developments. This loss has a twofold impact; loss of habitat for a wide range of native fauna: and the generation of heat sinks, which in a multitude of ways contributes to global warming, which then contributes to changing weather patterns and an acceleration of loss of habitat through extreme weather events, eg drought, wild fires, etc.

Habitat loss forces Koalas to migrate and this brings them into contact with new threats in our Human environs. As they pass through unfamiliar territory, they are at a high risk of being attacked by our dogs. Our Koala hospitals regularly receive injured or sick koalas and even the smallest wounds are considered to be life threatening.

A more fatal risk they face though comes from humans and their machines. There are numerous confirmed observations of Koalas in the Port Stephens Council West Ward area. Most often they are on the move when sighted, and having sought shelter for the day move off around dusk. To continue their journey, they have to cross busy roads with high speed limits, often with life threatening or fatal consequences.

V.O.W.W. has actively pursued Port Stephens Council to erect "Koala" signs on West Ward roads where there have been repeated sightings of Koalas. However, this is but a band aid measure. Protection of habitat is what is really needed.

This community believes that legislation to protect the habitat, breeding territory and corridors of Koalas is the only strategy that will save them from extinction.

James Moore

President: V.O.W.W.

Attachments: Chantel Parslow Redman submission to DoP

Newcastle Herald article "HARD TO BEAR" link

<https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6182152/koalas-in-the-spotlight-after-port-stephens-quarry-expansion-report/>

Koala signage for PSC West Ward

References: NSW Government's Office of Environment & Heritage website

Port Stephens Koalas Submission on DA 16-2018-772-1