

**Submission
No 210**

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

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Submission into the koala populations and habitats

‘They (koalas) used to cry like babies when we tapped the tree they were in.’

1) The Huskisson (NSW) boat builder who spoke those words was out in bushland to cut down the habitat tree for use in his boat building business. So the tree the koala was in would have been cut down. There was no mention of the outcome of the koala but it is presumed it was killed when the tree was felled.

Alfred Raymond Settree OAM was one of the last wooden boat builders in Huskisson from a long line of boat builders commencing in the mid 1800s with Joseph Dent’s shipyard, so the surrounding bushland would have been well and truly utilised for many years. They picked especially shaped trees that could be used to build their boats i.e. ‘crooks’ and ‘knees’.

This statement formed part of an oral history interview taken c1994 by myself Maureen Webb and another museum volunteer Robyn Dalleywater. Alf had been asked about wildlife in the Huskisson area during the time (1930 to 1977) he was a wooden boat builder working from his boatyard in Dent St, Huskisson.

While this would have occurred up to the 1970s, possibly later, many people now do not realise *the prevalence of koala and how easily and quickly they become extinct in a local area.*

There is no apparent evidence from the remnant bushland and now gone from memory as people have died. The only evidence now is the statement made by Alf Settree and these are held in the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum as part of his oral history.

2) The Currumbene Creek area should be examined as my husband and I were advised in the 1990s that there were koalas being monitored in the Currumbene Creek (near Huskisson) catchment. This statement was made by a representative working at the Wirrimbirra Sanctuary in Brogo on the Southern Highlands of NSW. From our understanding this monitoring was being carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

There has been evidence of koala in Nerriga area also and close examination should be made to ascertain their habitat and presence.

3) It is imperative that protection of koala habitat is given the highest priority to ensure no more losses of this Australian icon. The Koala cannot be saved unless we ensure their remaining habitat is protected and restored.

Right now the opposite is occurring and they are being lost! This is even happening in areas of existing 'koala hubs' mapped by the Office of Environment and Heritage.

This should not even be possible and means that any protection policies in place are either being ignored or not working sufficiently to ensure the koala's ongoing existence.

Koala habitat is still being cleared for logging and to make way for agriculture as well as infrastructure.

4) I suggest that solutions can be worked through and prioritised to prevent ongoing habitat destruction? These solutions should include:

(i) Immediately and permanently protecting all 'koala hubs' from clearing for any reason including agriculture, logging and development. Koalas must come first. It is too late to put their habitat aside for any reason.

(ii) Investigating areas where koalas are known to have inhabited ie Currumbene Creek and Nerriga areas.

(iii) Our National Parks system is one of the best ways to invest in ongoing koala existence so

- (a) Our National Parks network should be expanded and
- (b) The creation of the Great Koala National Park on the NSW mid north coast would help ensure this.
- (c) Implement other National Parks Association reserve proposals that would protect koalas in north-east NSW
- (d) Create a new national park in south west Sydney to ensure rapid development does not come at the cost of koalas.

(iv.) End the logging of native forests on public land.

- (a) This may require a transition plan.
- (b) Reject the Government's proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forest to logging on the NSW North Coast.

(v.) Ensure Private Native Forestry is genuinely low-impact and selective.

(vi.) It is urgent that you protect koala habitat in the Sydney Basin from development.

(vii.) Koala populations in southern NSW must be allowed to recover and this can be assisted by ending woodchipping.

(viii.) Strengthen SEPP 44 (koala habitat protection) to ensure koala habitat is not destroyed by urban development.

Finally,

It is clear that the koala is fast losing our battle for its extinction. The rapid decline and loss of koala in the Shoalhaven area is testament to this and its clear also that helping the koala is in your hands

The NSW Parliament faces a choice. To either:

- (1) Continue business as usual and see the rapid decline and extinction of one of our iconic Australian animals '*on their watch*' or
- (2) Urgently make changes to protect vital habitat and restore our native forests.

I am a committed environmentalist and very concerned with the state of our environment and losses of our native wildlife.

I urge this committee to work together to save koalas from extinction. Not just extinction but please ensure the koala can live fully in a safe and sustaining environment. Protection of koalas requires visionary leadership and lasting change so hopefully this can be achieved.

Thank you

Maureen Webb