

Submission  
No 242

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

**Name:** Ms Meredith Stanton

**Date Received:** 2 August 2019

---

## **Submission to the NSW Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitats**

Dear Committee,

Please accept this letter as my submission to the Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitats.

My farming and forestry background gives me a unique perspective to contribute to the debate on local koala populations and protection of their preferred habitat.

**There is a clear need for koala habitat in public native forests to be protected in perpetuity. I also support the creation of the Great Koala National Park and of initiatives to conserve wildlife connectivity from the Coffs Coast through the Dorrigo Plateau to the New England ranges.**

I am a long term resident and landowner on the Dorrigo Plateau in NE NSW. My forested property is adjacent to the Clouds Creek state forest (includes large areas of EPA mapped koala habitat) and I have been living for the past 41 years in close proximity to koala habitat on public land and native forests directly impacted by NSW production forestry methods since the late 1970's.

In the 1990's I was employed by Greening Australia (NSW) Inc at the Dorrigo Farm Forestry Project (a NSW DPI funded initiative) as a Admin/Bushcare officer promoting awareness of the importance of protecting native vegetation and establishing a future on-farm timber resource in the region. I have been involved in native nursery development, tree planting, design, development and implementation of Dorrigo's farm forestry projects across the farming landscape in partnership with local land owners.

I am a land manager and have for the past 30 years followed with interest ecological, conservation and forest science research. I monitor the health and occurrence of koalas in my local area, including participating in Forests NSW consultation, writing submissions and letters lobbying the local forestry office and local MP's for better protection of koala habitat in local logging operations (to no avail).

I currently volunteer with and support financially, state and national non-profit environmental organisations in hope of improving conservation outcomes for all wildlife on public and private lands, because I believe the timber industry is failing our koalas.

## **2Clouds Creek state forest monitoring**

I have witnessed first hand and been impacted personally by the logging of local native forests on both public and private lands and studied the ecological reports submitted by NSW Forestry Corporation (NSWFC) ecologists both before and after Clouds Creek state forest logging operations adjacent to my home and in the local area.

The history of NSWFC ecology survey data highlight the decline of koala populations in the forests at Clouds Creek, where previously numerous koala scat detection has decreased to the point of 'no koala scat detection', most notably after core koala habitat was targeted for logging in 1988, 1998 and 2009 logging operations.

There is a clear correlation with the NSWFC data and the logging methods used by forestry when concluding the cause of koala and other threatened species population declines within public native forests.

A NSW EPA study (*Koala Habitat Mapping pilot - May 2016*) also confirms my own local observations, with the research concluding that koalas prefer older and more mature trees >30cm dbh.

It is well understood that koalas experience stress and anxiety when their home trees are removed and this leads to disease, predation and roadkill outcomes.

NSW forestry's preference for logging larger trees impacts the survival of local koala populations and highlights the critical need for core koala habitat to be protected from logging operations across the state.

In my opinion it is not possible for the NSW Forestry Corporation to ethically claim "ecologically sustainable forestry management" (esfm) practices when they are deliberately ignoring the facts in their own ecology reports while continuing to negatively impact threatened species populations and promote their logging business as 'sustainable'.

### **Logging of Clouds Creek HCVOG reserves**

Further proof of NSWFC lack of sustainability are plans by the NSW government to remap and allow logging in informal high conservation value old growth (HCVOG) reserves within NSW state forests (Informal reserves in Clouds Creek SF are also mapped by the NSW EPA as "preferred koala habitat"). Allowing logging of previously protected informal reserves is a blatant betrayal of the public interest and of stated koala conservation priorities.

The HCVOG reserves in Clouds Creek state forests are vital climate refugia for a range of species and contain the best hollow bearing habitat essential to the survival of wildlife during heatwaves, drought and bushfire.

In Clouds Creek SF the indiscriminate logging of mapped HCVOG forest reserves in 1998 by NSWFC was an historic act of vandalism perpetrated during the interim logging agreement before finalisation of the NSW Regional Forest Agreements (RFA) in 2000.

These old growth reserves are ecologically important refuge and nesting sites for our unique marsupials and birds. I have no doubt that permitting access to NSW forestry will cause irreplaceable damage to ecologically intact forest areas that were mapped in 1997 and justifiably protected by legislation under the RFA's and NSW IFOA signed in 2000.

In fact NSWFC have been claiming habitat trees within the adjacent HCVOG and rainforest informal reserve system as offsets to allow them to log/remove in excess of the prescribed number of hollow bearing trees (HBTs) in approved logging (FMZ4) areas.

As a state forest neighbour I have watched in horror as our best hollow bearing habitat and any potential succession habitat trees are ruthlessly removed with no regard for the future survival of hollow-dwelling and nesting wildlife species.

Reports submitted to EPA NSW by community post-logging surveys showing failures by forestry operations to maintain habitat tree retention rates/ha have been approved by regulators using the existence of HCVOG reserves within the logged compartments to justify the removal of HBTs.

In Clouds Creek state forest many of these HBTs are also preferred koala species.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion I fully support the NSW National Parks Association's recommendations for protecting koala habitat across NSW and would be happy to provide further information to the NSW inquiry if required.

Protecting habitat is the first and most important step in protecting koalas. I therefore urge you to take the following action:

1. Create the Great Koala National Park and implement other NPA reserve proposals presented to the Committee to protect koalas in north-east NSW—a region that will become more and more important as weather extremes make western areas less hospitable.

2. Protect 'koala hubs' (areas identified by the Office of Environment and Heritage as particularly important for koalas) immediately on all land tenures.
3. Identify and protect koala climate refugia as a matter of urgency.
4. End industrialised logging on public land that destroys habitat quality for koalas and ensure Private Native Forestry is genuinely low-impact and selective.
5. 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.
6. Strengthen SEPP 44 (koala habitat protection) to ensure koala habitat is not destroyed by urban development and;
7. Create a new national park in south-west Sydney to ensure rapid development does not come at the cost of koalas.

If we can implement these steps koalas stand a good chance of surviving in NSW. If we continue with business as usual, koalas will continue to die and to slide towards extinction. I urge you to secure the future of koalas by taking decisive action to protect habitat.

Yours sincerely

Meredith Stanton

2 August 2019