

**Submission  
No 236**

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

**Name:** Ms Gae Constable

**Date Received:** 2 August 2019

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I am writing a submission as I am deeply concerned about the ignoble way we are treating koalas across NSW at a time when it so apparent that their numbers are in decline. The lack of Government will to reverse this trajectory is alarming and disappointing.

While the Australian koala population is less than 1% of what it was 200 years ago we are still destroying koala colony habitat in NSW.

I implore this committee to respect the experts, accept the evidence and work together to save our NSW koalas for future generations.

Koalas, along with all our wildlife deserve to be safe from human intervention. There is a lot of rhetoric about what Government is doing to help koalas, but this seems disingenuous when the bulk of the problems are caused by Government policies such as the repeal of the Native vegetation act and the lack of genuine leadership to reduce the alarming decimation of koalas and wildlife generally.

Koala's are not incrementally expendable - loss of habitat no matter how minor – does matter. A strong NSW stance is required to protect koala's in a consistent way. There should be no loopholes and no grey areas but just a clear law to protect koala's and their habitat while we still have the chance.

Koala's are renowned worldwide as an iconic representation of our country, yet the President of the WWF had to step in (the second time he has intervened in the affairs of a country, the first time was for orangutans) to request we take action as our Government has failed to do so. Without our unique koala's Australia will no doubt lose tourism and our reputation will be tarnished. With the scale of climate change damage, it is to our benefit to treasure koala's and be an example to the world about the importance of looking after our flora and fauna.

With a united effort across all levels of Government we can save the koalas but at the moment I feel that efforts by so many stakeholders are going in all directions and effectiveness is diluted.

A concern is the piecemeal erosion of koala habitat, little by little like a steamroller. It seems development is favoured at the expense of koala's and the mindset is for a winner or loser rather than developing workable solutions that benefit both sides.

Core 'koala hubs' mapped out in NSW by the Office of Environment and Heritage are still being logged and cleared for agriculture, urban development and infrastructure at an alarmingly increased rate. The mapping of known or suspected koala populations across NSW must be financed to continue as an urgent priority.

Provisions should be included in the Biodiversity Conservation Act and Local Land Amendment Act to protect habitat, end self-assessment, and enable the provision of opportunities for legal challenges in the public interest.

The status of koalas should be upgraded from vulnerable to endangered in the Biodiversity Conservation Act, and critical habitat should be prioritised and declared as Areas of Outstanding Biodiversity Value.

### **Koala's of south west Sydney**

My interest area is the koalas of south west Sydney, the last disease-free colony of koala's in NSW.

The colony is under serious threat from:

- land clearing for roads, housing estates and industry
- the intersection of suburbia with koala habitat
- dog attacks (including in backyards), car strikes, drought and bushfire
- a disconnect across LGA's, tiers of Government
- support for development / profit over the welfare of koala's
- weakening of the gene pool

### **Koala Guardian**

Koala's do nothing to impact humans yet here we are watching their slow demise. We need to give koala's the lawful right to live in peace - to eat, drink, travel and mate - without the need to navigate cars, dogs, loss of habitat and disease.

I would like to cut through the noise and see the appointment of an independent authority, with a clear charter and strong powers to genuinely protect koala's and prosecute those that harm them or their habitat – a law that applies to **everyone**. This includes motorists who don't stop and attend to a koala they have hit; owners of dogs who kill or maim koalas; tiers of government, developers and private land holders who compromise the wellbeing of koalas.

### **Support for wildlife carers and vets**

Many good people are doing tremendous work to save koala's, educate the public, help injured koala's and orphaned joeys. These groups should be supported by Government so they can continue with their core work instead of enduring the stress of seeking and relying on donations.

More effort needs to go towards assisting vets who usually treat wildlife for free and to ensure vets are adequately trained to deal with koala injuries. More vets should be trained about treating wildlife to spread the load. Koala's should never be denied medical assistance.

I support the introduction of annual grant opportunities for all NSW wildlife rescuers, carers and transporters to enable their valuable community work to continue and receive the recognition it deserves.

### **National Parks**

We have a window of opportunity to protect what precious koala habitat remains by creating a **Georges River Koala National Park** and **Two Rivers Koala National Park**. This would be more beneficial in comparison to the recent purchase of Tugalong Park<sup>1</sup> by the NSW Government to safeguard koalas, which is reported as not even containing a koala hub.

Lack of action by the NSW Liberal National Party Government has witnessed historically low level of additions to our National Parks network and this needs to be redressed.

### **Eco-tourism**

There are opportunities for eco-tourism and jobs. The south west can become a tourist destination by exploiting the proximity to the new airport at Badgery's Creek. The area has the opportunity for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theland.com.au/story/5885041/farm-becomes-part-of-first-national-park-in-nsw-for-11-years/?cs=4951>

eco-tourism based on the existence of the koala colony, the healthiest in NSW, to the world. Tourism is already increasing in Liverpool<sup>2</sup> mainly from Asian visitors.

## **Development**

I would like to see an immediate prohibition of new development on land inhabited by koala's.

We must repeal the 'offset' policy and immediately end all native forest logging on public and private land. Stronger state laws must be introduced to prevent koala habitat destruction through land clearing and we need to legislate immediate and permanent protection of all known and suspected koala hubs from clearing for logging, agriculture and development on public and private land.

We need to stop the formula of clearing land and then building houses side by side. Surely, we can work towards a more considered and balanced way of building or transforming communities to accommodate increasing human populations. Communities will benefit from a balanced environment which includes bushland and wildlife – not just roads and houses with no yards or green space.

## **Koala's are sacrificed for development**

There are many wonderful groups and advocates working tirelessly to help protect this colony of koala's but they are up against a bureaucratic culture that seems to value development above all else. To me it is a game of smoke and mirrors where Government and Councils say they are protecting koala's whilst concurrently undermining their safety and habitat.

The south west Sydney is experiencing an unprecedented level of land clearing and development.

Koala's are under intense pressure as swathes of bushland habitat is being removed for housing estates and infrastructure.

In the next 20 years the Greater Sydney Commission intends to release over 184,000 homes. The area is taking the brunt of Sydney's increasing population and accompanying car usage, congestion and pollution.

## **Developers building on prime koala corridor**

Mt Gilead is a key corridor for koalas. It was rezoned to allow 1700 homes to be built on 200 hectares of greenspace corridor between the Georges and Nepean Rivers. This goes against recommendations from the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer's report. Campbelltown Council has now approved a Lend Lease development on the Mt Gilead site for the housing complex and includes widening Appin Rd. This will have a huge impact on the survival of the colony. My understanding is that the developers / council expect that koalas will just have to adapt – that is adapt to the loss of their homes, food, cars and predation. The Mayor was reported as saying children were more important than koala's. I would think that if you cared about children you would value koala's and their habitat for children to treasure and experience.

Additionally, in July 2019 a corridor of trees used by koalas behind Airds High, joined other parts of the Smiths Creek bushland bulldozed as part of that suburb's redevelopment.

The irony is that despite approving koala habitat destruction, Campbelltown Council is doing good work for koala's. They have instigated a lot of traffic calming measures and signage to increase community awareness and tree planting initiatives to help protect koala's. In March 2019, they

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/liverpool-leader/liverpool-attracting-more-international-and-domestic-tourists-with-affordable-accommodation-and-transport-access/news-story/fe154a15e843d331193f026d412a2ed7>

hosted a Greater Macarthur Koala Partnership Forum. The forum report is available on the Council's website and is very informative with great ideas and information<sup>3</sup>

### **Koala's don't care about council boundaries**

Koala's traverse various LGA's. Overall, there does not seem to be a unified, collaborative or consistent approach across councils to protect koala's. Wildlife corridors in particular cut across multiple council jurisdictions. A koala is treated differently depending on what land they are on. This is not helpful for koala's. I am aware of council's doing good work, but in isolation. If councils work together to support the koala colonies and their habitats the outcomes could be more effective rather than working independent of each other and with different perspectives.

### **Koala's and roads don't mix**

Koala car strike hot spots, should at the very least have signs with contact numbers for people to report koala injuries or deaths, along with speed limits and speed camera's.

Underpasses or overpasses are the ideal strategy to prevent any need for koalas to interact with roads and cars. We can build massive roadways and bridges so surely underpasses and overpasses are achievable. The cost should be a mandatory inclusion for roadwork budgets, not an option.

Roads & Maritime Services pushback against looking after koala's and have an appalling record of koala and wildlife mortality. They currently reject any community requests to install overpasses and underpasses. This rejection condemns the largest, healthy expanding koala population to extinction as koalas will be trapped behind exclusion fences or continue to die on our road network.

### **Deadman's Creek**

Deadman's Creek on Heathcote Rd, Holsworthy is a known koala death hotspot, confirmed as such by OEH, wildlife groups and reports in local papers<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>. Despite this the bridge has no koala signage.

In January 2019, I wrote to the RMS requesting signs on either side of the bridge. I was very disappointed with their "template" response and lack of regard for injuries to animals.

The RMS advised:

*"Warning signposting is predominantly aimed at providing drivers with advanced warning of the likely presence of large animals that could cause injury to vehicle occupants should a collision occur..."*

*"With there being a variety of species and locations of potential wildlife crossings along a corridor, the risk of placing wildlife signage throughout a route is that the message can become diluted and result in little or no change in driver behaviour <sup>6</sup>."*

*"Should this location be identified as a specific koala crossing point in the future, Roads and Maritime will review the need for warning signposting at that time."*

As far as I am aware the hotspot still lacks signage. It is a straightforward request – why is it such a

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au/CouncilandCouncillors/MeetingsandMinutes/2019BusinessPapers#Council-Meeting-11-June-4>  
Attachment1toItem8.8ReportfromCouncilsconsultantcontainingtheOutcomesreportfortheGreaterMacarthurPartnershipForum

<sup>4</sup> 24/09/2018 Koalas killed on Heathcote Road <https://www.liverpoolchampion.com.au/story/5664768/koalas-killed-on-heathcote-road/>

<sup>5</sup> 03/10/2018 Six koalas killed on Heathcote Road in last year sparks call for action <https://www.theleader.com.au/story/5681392/outcry-over-koala-deaths-on-heathcote-road/>

<sup>6</sup> At the time only one faded koala sign was in existence near Woronora. Subsequent to this response a new koala sign appeared on Heathcote Rd at Pleasure Point.

struggle to erect signs with a contact number to report injured or killed koala's? My inkling is the provision of signage and confirmation of the koala's existence probably causes more headaches / paperwork for RMS.

In addition, it is generally reported that a koala underpass exists under Deadman's Creek bridge. To me it appears to simply be a bridge over a creek. There is no fencing to funnel the koala's and protect them from car strike. When the creek is full it is unlikely koala's can traverse. It is not an inviting, easily accessible or safe underpass. Koala's are still being killed here. Again, people are saying they are doing things to help koala's but they aren't really. *See photos at attachment A – taken May 2019.*

## **Appin Road**

Developers are wanting to fence off Appin Road to protect koala's from being killed. This is a band aid solution and can wreak havoc on the disease-free koala's and impact the gene pool. As climate change makes an impact, koalas are now observed drinking water as eucalypt leaves are losing moisture. Fencing prevents koalas from accessing waterways, moving to find food sources as drought impacts and exposes them to entrapment if there is a bushfire.

There is a real risk that the healthy koalas will be forced to mate with the chlamydia affected ones and the healthy gene pool will be irreversibly compromised.

Wildlife corridors overpasses and underpasses are needed to support koalas to travel around and live their lives naturally. A report by University of Sydney Associate Professor Mathew Crowther, states "To maintain long-term survival of koalas in the region, including maintaining gene-flow, both sides of Appin Road should be fenced for the 6km distance with an **underpass** provided to enable koalas to access habitat on both sides of the road. Although an expensive option, costs and koala abundance show a linear relationship in areas where roads are threatening their population..."<sup>7</sup>

## **Koala data is hard to obtain**

I tried to research koala death data to provide to RMS and the process was very difficult. It appears there is a of data around but no real time accurate scientific data on koalas from a single authority – regarding koala populations, behaviours, movement and details of koala deaths.

Please note that impressive data has recently been published on a website by Dr Cole which is akin to being a **koala bible** for south west koala's<sup>8</sup>.

However back in March 2019 what I found out was:

- Campbelltown Council and Liverpool Council do not have figures
- GIS (latitude and longitude tracking) data has not been updated since August 2017.
- Bionet is the NSW state Government wildlife data base. It is a seed portal which captures deaths. It is only updated annually, regardless of when statistics are input by nominated wildlife groups.

Thank you for reading my submission. Please do the right thing for koala's and redress the dire outcomes for koala's being perpetrated by this government -while we still have a chance. This is the time for courage, for government to listen to experts and not continue on this desolate road of koala decimation.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Animals-and-plants/Threatened-species/temporary-fencing-on-appin-road-analysis-of-costs-benefits-for-koalas.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://campbelltownkoalaresearchanddatabase.com/?fbclid=IwAR1qcvJRE37ABrQHY0jE8-im1AARzsaMORoBr4eEwolFf9hEYAYyYk0XOic>



## Attachment A

Photos of the Deadman's Creek "underpass" taken May 2019.



## Other sources of koala information

Wollondilly Council arrangement with developers

[https://www.tec.org.au/council\\_guarantees\\_koala\\_protections](https://www.tec.org.au/council_guarantees_koala_protections)



Hon. Melanie Gibbons MP  
Member for Holsworthy, New South Wales

24<sup>th</sup> January 2019

Dear Ms Gibbons,

### **SYDNEY'S KOALAS – PUBLIC STATEMENT**

The Greater Macarthur – Campbelltown area in south-western Sydney contains the only population of koalas listed in NSW by McAlpine et. al. (2015) to be growing<sup>1</sup> and are likely the only chlamydia free colony in Australia<sup>2</sup>. From a scientific, ecological, community and tourist perspective, the koalas of Campbelltown are priceless.

Few, if any, other major urban areas on earth can claim to support a species as globally recognised and valued as the koala. However, their long-term survival is being directly threatened by the level and speed of urbanisation projected for the Campbelltown and the Greater Macarthur area. In addition to major housing growth over the last few years, the Greater Sydney Commission has set a target of an additional 143,000 dwellings in the next 20 years to be built in south-western Sydney<sup>3</sup>. The NSW Government's proposed Greater Macarthur Priority Growth Area will deliver 33,000 of these<sup>4</sup>, on land that includes important koala corridors.

Already, major planning and development decisions are banking in extinction. In 2018, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment approved Campbelltown Council's rezoning application for the colonial era farm property known as 'Gilead', west of Appin Rd. Gilead is the shortest and most northern koala corridor between the Georges and Nepean Rivers. Just before Christmas the federal Department of the Environment and Energy, conditionally approved (EPBC 2015/7599) this development, (though thankfully rejecting the DPE's use of an existing council bush reserve 'Noorumba' as a Koala biobanking credit.), and has asked for a Koala Management Plan before proceeding. A whole landscape proposition to accommodate Koalas at this critical juncture is vital, before the piecemeal rezoning of Greater Macarthur ensures the slow eradication of Koalas in this area, and their local extinction.

The RMS have already singularly decided (against expert advice<sup>5</sup>) to run Koala exclusion fencing the length of Appin road to Appin without any east-west crossovers - this will empty

<sup>1</sup> McAlpine et. al. 2015. Conserving koalas: A review of the contrasting regional trends, outlooks and policy challenges. Biological Conservation 192 226-236.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Close 2018

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.greater.sydney.digital-district-plan/992>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Priority-Growth-Areas-and-Precincts/Greater-Macarthur-Priority-Growth-Area>

<sup>5</sup> Koala Corridor Project Campbelltown City Council & Wollondilly Local Government Areas: Greater Macarthur Growth Area. - Report to NSW Office of Environment & Heritage  
Biolink - October 2018