

**Submission
No 257**

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

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Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment

Inquiry into Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

The nest at Gleniffer is an accommodation business situated on the mid north coast of NSW near Bellingen 2454. Established in 2018 we offer accommodation to guest who are wanting to spend time in nature to experience our unique biodiversity. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into Koala populations and habitat in New south Wales.

Our property is partially within the Bellingen Shire Councils Coastal Koala Management Plan (KPOM) which is an endorsed SEPP44. This KPOM is the largest SEPP44 in NSW and was the fourth KPOM out of a total of six SEPP44 plans currently approved between LGAs and the NSW Government. As a business operating in this area, we fully support Council efforts to provide planning conditions for development that see environmental protection as a planning priority. Getting the balance right between development and the environment is essential. Nature based tourism is extremely important to the Bellingen economy. A survey of our guests over 12 months suggests that nature is the number one reason people visit our area and on departure is nominated as the factor that will bring them back in future. Seeing a wild koala is one of the primary goals of any visit to this area according to our visitors.

The Bellingen KPOM strategy has a number of actions developed after extensive community consultation. However, as a small regional council funding to implement the strategy relies on grants and other support from the NSW Government to implement it. Disappointingly since the KPOM was endorsed by Council this assistance has so far been ad hock and minimal with little progress made to implement the KPOM. When the NSW Government announced a new approach to the Koala crisis we had high hopes that the Save our Species (SOS) would address this issue by preferentially providing funding support to help implement the KPOM. However, since the launch of the SOS Icon Koala strategy no funding has been allocated to our community despite its importance as an area of coastal NSW with a large and relatively healthy population of koala and the fact SEPP44 planning is advanced and has widespread community support. The SOS strategy for Koala doesn't even mention our KPOM in their strategy. What is the point of encouraging LGAs to develop complex SEPP44 plans to ignore them?

We are greatly concerned that increased native forest logging currently underway in the Bellingen Shire, especially the forests compartments of the Kalang headwaters will place further pressure on our fragmented koala populations. Displaced koala moving away from these logging activities will be susceptible to dog attack, become stressed and vulnerable to diseases like chlamydia and ensure localised functional extinctions of these populations. With little funding allocated to target habitat connectivity initiatives identified in the KPOM, increased logging of core koala habitat will threaten many of our koala populations. Native Forest Logging is a damaging and loss making industrial activity that isn't sustainable or process a social licence to operate. Logging does great harm to fragile habitats and species that occur there. Logging our iconic and unique native forests also

compromises our nature based tourism economy that this area relies on and threatens the clean green reputation our region holds dear.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen and fully fund SEPP 44 (koala habitat protection) to ensure koala habitat is not destroyed by urban development.
2. The NSW government to provide funding to Land Care to prioritise projects that target habitat connectivity that link core koala habitat with crown land reserves, protected areas and council conservation areas to link important habitat.
3. 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.
4. Create a new national park in south-west Sydney to ensure rapid development does not come at the cost of koalas.
5. Protect ‘koala hubs’ (areas identified by the Office of Environment and Heritage as particularly important for koalas) immediately on all land tenures.
6. Identify and protect koala climate refugia as a matter of urgency.
7. End industrialised logging on public land that destroys habitat quality for koalas and ensure Private Native Forestry is genuinely low-impact and selective.
8. 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.

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