

**Submission
No 269**

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

Name: Mr Peter Richards

Date Received: 2 August 2019

Dear Committee,

Please accept this letter as my submission to the Inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales. I consent to the committee making this submission and my name public.

Recently, the NSW Government recognised that Koala populations are in steep decline. In some areas, this has been known for many years. For instance, in 2006 a 5-year review of Coffs Harbour City Council's Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (Eco Logical Australia 2006) found that, although the Plan had raised awareness of Koala-related issues in the local area, the Plan itself had not been adequately implemented by Council and was failing to halt the documented decline in local Koala populations. To this day, many areas of Primary and Secondary Koala Habitat remain unprotected in the Coffs Harbour local government area.

Unfortunately, the current State Government's recently announced Koala strategy and current government policy also fails to address the number one threat to koala populations – continued habitat loss and fragmentation of remaining habitat, which exposes Koala populations to other key threats such as dog attack and road trauma.

Koalas cannot be saved unless we ensure their remaining habitat is protected and restored, but right now the opposite is occurring. In NSW areas of core koala habitat called 'koala hubs' have been mapped by the Office of Environment and Heritage but are still being cleared for logging, agriculture and infrastructure and the pace of the destruction is increasing. The recent Government decision to grant an amnesty to the many perpetrators of illegal clearing of native vegetation in NSW is an appalling example of how this government holds the natural environment in such low regard. The NSW Government cannot grant such an amnesty and claim to be protecting the Koala and its habitat at the same time.

I therefore call on the committee to recommend real solutions to government which will prevent ongoing destruction of Koala habitat. This includes:

- Assisting local councils to re-zone all areas of Koala habitat within their Local Government Areas (LGAs) to E2 Environmental Conservation in their Local Environmental Plans (LEPs). This very basic step will go a very long way to protecting remaining Koala habitat from inappropriate development proposals. This is a particularly important conservation step to take in those areas where the urban/rural interface exposes Koalas to key threats such as dog attack and road trauma.
- Immediately and permanently protecting all identified 'koala hubs' from clearing for agriculture, logging or development.
- Investing in the future of koalas by expanding our National Parks network, including creating the Great Koala National Park on the NSW mid-north coast.
- Rejecting the Government's proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forests to logging on the NSW North Coast.
- Ruling out burning our native forests for electricity.
- Ending all wood-chipping operations in NSW to allow koala populations to recover.

The NSW Parliament faces a choice: continue with business as usual and oversee the rapid decline and possible extinction of an iconic Australian marsupial or make urgent changes to protect and restore Koala habitat. I urge you to work together to save koalas now, before it is too late.

Yours Sincerely,

Peter Richards