

**Submission  
No 274**

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

**Name:** Ms Lisa J Ryan

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## Submission to the Portfolio Committee No 7, Planning and Environment - Inquiry into Koala Populations in NSW

By email: [portfoliocommittee7@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:portfoliocommittee7@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission in response to the NSW Government's **Portfolio Committee No 7, Planning and Environment - Inquiry into Koala Populations in NSW**.

The NSW Government **Portfolio Committee No 7, Planning and Environment**, is required to inquire and report on a range of considerations involving actions, policies and funding by government to ensure healthy, sustainable koala populations and habitat in NSW.

I am confident that a number of native animal and koala experts, and many individuals and organisations with hands on koala experience, will provide important and useful evidence to convince this committee that **urgent and decisive action is required to halt the total and permanent demise of koalas in NSW**.

My feedback is as an individual who was raised to love and respect all non-human animal species and to stand up and fight for what is important. I care deeply for all our precious Australian wildlife and I do not wish to witness the ongoing and rapid decimation of different species.

I have reviewed the Inquiry's Terms of Reference and my responses are as follows:

Without **urgent and decisive action**, NSW koalas face an increasingly perilous and uncertain future where their very survival is at serious and imminent risk.

I am calling on this NSW committee and the NSW government to take the immediate and necessary decisive action to save our koalas and ensure strong and healthy koala populations across NSW for future generations.

I would also add that I find the Inquiry's phrase 'sustainable' (koala populations) offensive when referring to these unique native beings. Koalas are living, sentient and unique mammals. This is about their very survival, not the survival of a field of crops. Respect and language is important.

It's estimated only 50,000 koalas remain in the wild today, compared to 10 million at the time of European settlement. In NSW our unique and precious koalas are listed as 'vulnerable' and koala populations are in steep decline. Since European colonisation, an estimated 70-90% of NSW koala habitat has been cleared.

This is not complicated – this is about native animals who require mature and un-touched healthy feed trees and designated areas not impacted by climate change to remain healthy and safe.

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The 'Koala Strategy' recognised habitat loss, connectivity and fragmentation as some of the key issues contributing to the ongoing plight of koalas.



NSW koalas have been determined by some as being 'functionally extinct'. While many in Sydney, including many members of Parliament and some political parties, stay insulated in a bubble, ignoring even the only disease free koalas we have left in Campbelltown, every day bring more deaths by starvation, disease or road kill. This IS a state of emergency for koalas in NSW and personally I feel enormous sadness and a level of extreme frustration that more people in positions who should be leading the fight for koalas, are not, and instead are playing politics or siding with the very forces who are causing what will be the very extinction of koalas in NSW forever.

At state and federal government level a number of reviews have identified the urgent plight of our koalas and around 1,000 other species, including the many escalating risks and impacts they continue to face. Responses to these previous reviews has included evidenced and detailed reports and comprehensive submissions lodged by a range of experts which the NSW government has largely ignored.

Furthermore, the NSW government has repealed legislation designed to protect the koalas and their environment, giving priority to industries and development which pose the greatest risks and impacts to koala populations and habitat.

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Of equal concern, government at state and federal level is increasingly introducing undemocratic legislation in an attempt to hinder public protest and exposure of government failures with the protection of many animal species and ongoing environmental vandalism.

The current status of our vulnerable koalas in NSW is now so significant that unless urgent action is taken, we face a future where we will not be able to halt or reverse the rapid decline in koala populations across NSW. Once gone, they are gone forever. We must implement urgent, decisive and meaningful actions and most importantly, government must adopt a dramatic shift in government priorities, policy and legislation.

Like our native kangaroo, koalas are very much the face of Australia. They are synonymous and instantly recognised throughout the world along with our unique and diverse landscape and indigenous history. Koala populations are in crisis and we must take urgent action to ensure future generations can enjoy this iconic species in their natural habitat.

The NSW Koala Strategy recognised that koala populations are in steep decline and identified habitat loss, connectivity and fragmentation as a key issue impacting koala populations. Koala habitat in NSW has been cleared by approximately 70-90% since European colonisation and at last estimate, only 15-28,000 koalas remain in NSW. We must stop the destruction of koala habitat and prioritise the recovery of koala populations in NSW.

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.

At the same time, lack of action by the NSW Liberal National Party Government has witnessed historically low level of additions to our National Parks network.

Australia's loss of animal species has been labelled an 'functionally extinct' or an 'extinction crisis' by both the World Wildlife Fund and the Australian Conservation Foundation Koalas'.

At the same time the NSW government is allowing this genocide to continue as this most recent media confirms:

*Environment Minister Matt Kean and Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall announced today that the government would not prosecute breaches of the old Native Vegetation Act if the actions would have been legal under the government's new laws. The Berejiklian government has caved into the demands of big agribusiness and dealt another blow to nature and its already appalling record as environmental managers.*

*The new law, known as the Biodiversity Conservation Act, brought in a self-assessment system based on maps that showed the most sensitive areas of land. Farmers could self assess before clearing and only the most sensitive areas required prior permission.*

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*The amount of land being cleared for agriculture in NSW soared before the new system came into force and farmers apparently anticipated they would not be prosecuted under the old law.*

*In 2013-14 9,200 hectares was cleared for new pastures and cropping in NSW. Following the announcement of a review of the Native Vegetation Act, the number of hectares cleared doubled to 20,200 in 2016-17 and in 2017-18 – the first year of the new laws – it had hit 27,100.*

[https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/01/nsw-farmers-granted-amnesty-for-illegal-land-clearing?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/01/nsw-farmers-granted-amnesty-for-illegal-land-clearing?CMP=share_btn_link)

### **Required Immediate Actions**

- Immediate provisions to be included in the Biodiversity Conservation Act and Local Land Amendment Act to protect habitat, end self assessment, and enable opportunities for legal challenges in the public interest.
- Status of koalas to be upgraded from vulnerable to endangered in the Biodiversity Conservation Act.
- Critical habitat should prioritised and declared as Areas of Outstanding Biodiversity Value.
- Reject the government's proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forests for logging on the north coast of NSW.
- Repeal the 'offset' policy and immediately end all native forest logging on public and private land.
- Stronger state laws introduced to prevent koala habitat destruction through land clearing.
- Legislate immediate and permanent protection of all known and suspected koala hubs from clearing for logging, agriculture and development on public and private land.
- Regional Forest Agreements must be repealed and all native forests protected from logging, burning for electricity, and wood chipping, particularly in southern NSW, to allow koala populations to recover.
- Development and budgeting for a NSW transition plan to end logging of native forests on public and private land.

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- Grants provided by the government through the Koala Research Plan are confined to disease, translocation and the medicalization of koalas, and fail to address the primary issues, conservation and habitat loss. The grant criteria must be expanded.
- 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.
- We must urgently protect the koala habitat in the Sydney basin. The south west Sydney koala population is at serious risk as a result of major urbanisation. Roads & Maritime Services have an appalling record of koala and wildlife mortality and 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 roads network.
- Undertake an immediate inquiry into the Roads & Maritime Services failure to provide overpasses and underpasses for koalas in the construction of the Pacific Highway Upgrade with particular reference to the Ballina section.
- The NSW Koala Strategy ignores the impacts of climate change on koalas, identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as one of the ten most vulnerable species globally to climate change. Climate change considerations must be incorporated into all government planning, policies and legislation as it applies to koalas and native wildlife.
- We must urgently invest in the expansion of protected areas including expanding our National Parks network, and the creation of the Great Koala National Park on the NSW mid north coast of NSW.
- Budget for increased funding to the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust and Saving Our Species Program for the restoration of koala habitat on private land.
- Budget provisions to support NSW councils taking legal action against illegal logging, native species habitat destruction and all acts of environmental vandalism.

In NSW we face a critical juncture which will either save koalas, protect vital habitat, enable koala population recovery and restore our native forests or, will enable the rapid decline and possible extinction of one of our iconic Australian mammals.

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

I consent to the committee making my submission and my name public.