

**Submission
No 275**

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

Name: Mr Jim Morrison

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.

I have been a rural resident of NENSW for more than thirty years. I have seen a dramatic decline in koala numbers over this period both around my own property and beyond. Most of this decline in my local area has been the result of forestry activities in both public and private native forests.

It is sad to know that Koalas, along with a raft of other forest dependent species are rapidly heading towards extinction in the wild. This is not surprising as it is well known that habitat removal and fragmentation is a primary driver of animal extinction. When displaced from their primary habitat koalas face multiple threats such as dog attack, vehicle accidents as well as stress related disease. The impacts of climate change are also exasperated by key habitat loss. The increased incidence of intense wildfires which scorch canopy trees is also a key management challenge for appropriate koala habitat management.

The weakening of land clearing and native forestry legislation over the past decade has no doubt dramatically increased the habitat removal, the primary key threat to koala survival. Recent changes to the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals which will allow more intensive logging of our public native forests with less requirements to appropriately survey for and protect threatened species will only lead to greater declines in koala numbers.

Huge areas of once productive moist native forest habitats on the NSW North Coast have been logged to the point of ecosystem collapse due to Bell Miner Associated Dieback (BMAD). A recent independent literature review concluded that canopy disturbance ie logging is the primary causal factor initiating BMAD, yet Forest Corp continues to log forests at risk of BMAD at greater intensities, with no viable plan to ensure their recovery. In fact forests in the Border Ranges region, once good koala habitat, have been abandoned by Forest Corp as 'no longer commercially viable'. This belies the claim of sustainable management of our forests by Forest Corp and accelerates the loss of forest dependent species.

In many areas the choice has to be made between propping up an unsustainable and outdated forest industry and seeking to ensure the ongoing survival of koalas and other native forest fauna.

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. We also have historically low levels of additions to our National Parks network under the current Liberal National government.

I therefore call on the committee to prioritise solutions which prevent ongoing habitat destruction. This includes:

- Immediately and permanently protecting all '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.
- Developing a transition plan to end the logging of native forests on public land.

-Seriously addressing the threat of Bell Miner Associated Dieback through not disturbing BMAD 'at risk' forests and putting a major emphasis on rehabilitating the hundreds of thousands of hectares of forests already affected by BMAD.

- 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 which will become a driver of accelerated habitat loss.
- Urgently protecting all core koala habitat areas across the state from development
- Ending wood chipping in southern NSW to allow koala populations to recover

-Implementation of appropriate fire management which seeks to reduce the incidence of crown fires and includes rapid deployment of resources to areas of koala habitat under immediate threat of fire. (The recently developed Tweed Shire Koala management plan has considered this threat in some detail and developed management actions should wildfire threaten key koala habitat on council lands.)

(The utilisation of Indigenous Ranger Teams to implement low intensity cultural burning practices across public lands could, over the longer term also help mitigate this threat.) I fully support the submissions made by the NSW Nature Conservation Council and also Friends of the Koala Northern Rivers who in particular have years of experience and understanding of the reasons for koala decline and solutions to reverse this trend.

Yours Sincerely

Jim Morrison.