

Submission
No 285

INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Meg Everingham

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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.

A few years ago, my partner and I moved to what was known then as a koala 'hotspot' in NSW- the Tilligerry Peninsula in Port Stephens. Nature lovers, we set about planting hundreds of koala food trees on our threadbare acreage, hoping to support our local population and eventually encourage some koalas back onto the land we were occupying.

Last weekend we went to our local native nursery at the wonderful volunteer-run Tilligerry Habitat, to buy some more trees. We knew things weren't good for our local koalas. But one of the volunteers told us that a recent survey had confirmed that the population of koalas at the Tilligerry Habitat Reserve is down to three. Three koalas.

We went home with heavy hearts. I had a cry in the shower, and then I got angry, really angry. I'm a young woman with a wonderful life that I am grateful for, but like many of my peers I have reached a point where I am ashamed to be Australian. I am utterly ashamed to be a citizen of such a greedy country where blindingly obvious solutions to environmental crises are sidestepped. One of our national icons is about to go extinct in one of its traditional strongholds. Please, really stop and think- what does this say about you as a government?

The solutions are known and widely reported, but they still don't seem to be understood, so let me spell them out for you. Koalas don't need shopping centres. They don't need retirement villages. Koalas don't need tiny useless imported tubestock seedlings planted by developers as a trade-off for clearing. They need food, and they need mature trees to live in. They need the right species of trees, grown from genetically local stock. Koalas need funding for research into the widespread disease which is rendering them infertile. Koalas need penalties for dog owners who do not control their dogs in sensitive Koala habitats. Koalas cannot climb colourbond fencing, so they need property owners to use timber fencing in their habitat areas, so that they don't become trapped and unable to forage or breed.

It is important to note that this issue isn't unique to koalas. Old growth eucalypts provide crucial habitat for numerous hollow-dwelling species, which are also declining rapidly. Few people realize that the coastal population of the emu- featured in our national coat of arms- is also about to become extinct in NSW. The hypocrisy of that is astounding. But the point is that the decline of koala populations is symptomatic of a widespread biodiversity crisis in our state.

To be honest, I feel foolish now, looking out at the food trees we planted on our property which are now two metres tall, and which will probably never be used by koalas. I also feel incredible grief. And I feel utterly betrayed.

Meg Everingham