

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

Name: Ms Claire Bettington

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SUBMISSION TO THE NSW UPPER HOUSE KOALA INQUIRY, 2-8-2019
by Claire Bettington

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to write about the status of Koalas in NSW – which is ***dire***.

Introduction:

Koalas in NSW are badly in need of protection. They are dying in great numbers due to multiple pressures including disease, stress, lack of food trees, climate change drying out their leaves, destruction of Koala habitat, lack of legal protection, dog attack, car strike, drowning in swimming pools and other examples of general human carelessness.

How did we come to this?

The Koala is beloved by all. They are a National Icon. They are so precious we hardly ever let them go overseas. They are our precious living heritage.

It is utterly beyond comprehension that we should be having yet another inquiry and another report on the sad plight of the Koala, while ***still doing nothing to protect them***.

It is time for action. It is well past time for action. Everyone who has anything at all to do with Koalas knows this; anyone who has read any news report or video on Youtube etc knows this. The evidence is everywhere – anecdotal and scientific. This is a Koala Emergency!!

If we cannot save the Koala, what can we save?

Comments:

The first cause must be sheeted home to the Liberal Government ***who have deliberately ignored the plight of Koalas***, whatever they may say in their own defence, in favour of land clearing for crops or grazing and logging, by revising the laws which prevented these activities so that landowners are not only allowed to clear land, they are more or less *encouraged to do so*.

The recently announced Koala policy is what people used to call a “Clayton’s” Policy, but which would now be called a FAKE policy – *one that pretends to do something to help Koalas but in actual fact does nothing of the sort*.

This is in the face of solid science which the government is aware of which tells us that Koala populations in NSW are in deep trouble and steeply declining. The NSW Koala Strategy 2017 states that:

“...koala populations... have declined in NSW by an estimated 26% in the last 15-20 years.”¹

How is this an acceptable statistic? The answer to that is that ***it’s NOT!*** This is ***ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE!***
THIS IS A KOALA EMERGENCY.

In just 231 years we have actively killed millions upon millions of Koalas, with those remaining being afforded no protection of any sort, but especially the protection we owe them to their habitats, for without their home trees Koalas die like flies.

¹ <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/programs-legislation-and-framework/nsw-koala-strategy>, web page accessed 2-8-2019



Above: graphic of Koalas killed for the fur trade.²

Right: Koala pelts on a truck, in the great Koala massacre, Queensland, August 1927. Image source: John Oxley Library Brisbane



True, the worst of the Koala fur trade hunting was in Queensland, as it had ceased in NSW by the time of the Queensland massacre (lack of Koalas).

But that means NSW has had perhaps two more decades than Queensland to work out how to protect Koalas, and still nothing has been done. Koalas are still dying in vast numbers in Queensland as well as in NSW.

This is **ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE!** **This is a KOALA EMERGENCY.**



Photo: Five koalas lay on an steel bench at a clinic after being euthanased. (ABC TV: Four Corners) - RIP poor little creatures.

² <https://www.savethekoala.com/about-us/news-events/akf-shocking-figures-reveal-devastating-impact-koala-fur-trade>

After the release of the NSW Koala policy last year, the Nature Conservation Council and others assessed the new biodiversity laws and the Koala policy and found that **98% of remaining Koala habitat is now able to be logged or cleared for development!** The government of NSW is literally condemning all remaining NSW Koalas to death and **extinction**.

This is **ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE! THIS IS A KOALA EMERGENCY.**

Even the recent purchase of land in Wollondilly for a Koala sanctuary with Koala funds was a sham, in my opinion. The land for sale was Tuggalong Station, which had been a cattle or dairy farm in the past, then a horse trail riding business, and after that a dirt bike circuit riding business. I would call that a “clapped-out” piece of land. I am sure that if anyone went to inspect it there would be no Koalas living there, no Koala food trees and very little likelihood of there being either in the near future. This government is shameless, and I fully blame them and their policies over the last few years for this disaster.

Once again, this is **ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE! THIS IS A KOALA EMERGENCY.**

At the newly purchased Tuggalong Station, if the intention is to grow some Koala food trees there and then remove Koalas from habitat that a developer wants to trash, it won't work. They tried this in Coomera on the Gold Coast, Queensland: up to 200 Koalas were rounded up, their trees were bulldozed for a housing estate and the poor Koalas were dumped in a forest 40km away. Some died of dog attack, some were literally ripped to pieces by dogs, but of the poor creatures just starved.

When someone did a survey there were only **TWO** left alive! Yet the Queensland government and the NSW Government are currently considering taking on the policy of “translocating” Koalas as their core policy. This is a mean and nasty policy which panders to developers, and THIS MUST NOT BECOME LAW IN NSW or anywhere else while there is this rapid rate of decline.

If the world knew how we let our governments treat our “precious” wildlife, there would be a massive international scandal.

Again I say, this is **ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE! THIS IS A KOALA EMERGENCY.**

“Translocation” fails because Koalas become very attached to their “home tree” and their “home range” area; they each have a territory, they do not like to move. They will move if forced to by lack of food or by lack of moisture in the leaves they eat – then they are driven from the trees to the ground to the next tree, or in search of water. This has been proven in Gunnedah, where the drought and/or Climate Change is drying out the trees to such an extent that the local residents are placing drinking stations in or near the Koala trees. Koalas are using them.

Here are some words from the group “Koala Crisis” about translocating Koalas³, a policy it is **imperative** to avoid:

1. Koalas are faithful to their home ranges. Carers have witnessed distressed koalas walking round and round their previous food and shelter trees, **sometimes crying**.
2. No matter where koalas are translocated to, there is NO legal habitat protection and therefore no protection.
3. Capturing and translocating koalas is very stressful to the animals and involves serious trauma which can result in disease caused by stress.
4. As virtually all wildlife is losing major habitat as a result of deforestation, urbanisation, mining, and infrastructure, moving more animals into already crowded islands of habitat causes major problems including:-
 - a) disease
 - b) loss of genetic diversity
 - c) loss of corridors and home ranges

³ https://www.facebook.com/koalacrisis/posts/1382577811881040?_tn=K-R

- d) competition
- e) starvation

5. Coomera – once the heartland of SEQ koalas is probably the worst example of translocation outcomes. Some 180 koalas (the numbers keep varying) **were translocated to facilitate 30 developments** – all approved by the Gold Coast City Council.

6. The wildlife returns obtained by Australians for Animals Inc. on the translocated koalas demonstrated that **2 survived**. 23 were ripped to pieces by dogs.

7. The NSW government has adopted a translocation policy which:

“are only undertaken where necessary or beneficial for conservation of the species...” this sentence is completely contradicted by the next provision... **“or as part of an approved offset arrangement.”**

This sentence should give every concerned koala activist a MAJOR ANXIETY ATTACK.

Translocations for offsets? This is code for moving koalas [which are] in the way of development.

To be very clear, the **International Union for the Conservation of Nature** has guidelines for translocations. They are allowed for TWO ONLY REASONS.

- 1. Conservation Translocation - To improve the status of the species or**
- 2. Conservation Introduction - To avoid population extinction at any scale.**

What is now blatantly obvious is that in NSW – for example – the southwest Sydney critically important koala population could potentially be captured and dumped somewhere else as part of an OFFSET for the developers.

In Queensland, in spite of the catastrophes in Coomera and the Moreton Bay Rail Link, the government is considering translocations.

The RSPCA CEO is promoting translocations. In his capacity as Chair of the Koala Advisory Council, Mark Townend, CEO Chair has switched from calling for habitat protection to translocation. [One has to ask WHY?]

There is NO PLACE for SEQ koalas to go. They're facing extinction as habitat is destroyed on a daily basis.

For those of you who raise the translocations of koalas to Kangaroo Island, in just the latest period for which data are available (November 2017 to March 2018) **475 Koalas were sterilised and/or translocated** to southeast SA at an annualised cost of somewhere between \$725 K and \$1.4 M for the program that year.

And from one of Australia's best koala scientists: [Reference missing]

“- it is completely indefensible to compromise the survival of struggling Koala populations by misconstrued and ill-conceived populist 'rescues' - involving inflicting on them translocated animals with badly compromised genetic diversity; as well as the welfare atrocity of dumping chlamydia-naïve Koalas (e.g. those from artificial populations such as the ones on KI) into populations (virtually all natural mainland ones) where chlamydial infection is endemic (prevalence essentially 100%) and to which the introduced animals have no resistance or tolerance.”

“translocation CANNOT 'work' in favour of Koalas - it is a 'zero sum game'. The only sense in which it 'works' is for developers and their apologists: to foster the total myth that developers can keep destroying habitat and nobody loses - not even the Koalas - which is just absurd!”

SO THE BIG QUESTION. IF KOALAS CAN'T BE TRANSLOCATED AND APPROVED DEVELOPMENTS WILL DESTROY THEIR HABITAT – WHAT DO WE DO?

In Queensland, there is no organisation that has the ear of government or apparently the time or will to organise mass demonstrations outside the Premier's office.

In NSW, Australians for Animals Inc. has tried to get a judicial review of translocation policy BUT policies are not able to be challenged in court.

Although the comments and quotes above are mainly about the dire plight of Koalas in Queensland and South Australia, the same sort of things are happening to our remnant Koala populations in NSW. Consider the Koala colony in South West Sydney. The amazing thing about this colony is that they are **disease-free** at this time. They do not have **Chlamydia** which is ravaging almost all Koala populations. And during the last 5-10 years, the colony has been expanding, with the young ones wandering far and wide to establish their own territories or find a mate.

We know this because they have been extensively studied since 1989 by Professor Robert Close⁴. There is no lack of scientific data in SW Sydney, and the local community are heavily involved in monitoring, protecting and caring for injured Koalas. However, there is an utterly shameful lack of political will to protect these Koalas, despite years of heartfelt lobbying on such things as protection fencing, Koala signage, and the utter refusal of The Roads Department to consider constructing just one under- or over-pass for Appin Road, scene of so many Koala deaths.



Just one of the healthy disease-free Koalas killed in the last couple of years on Appin Rd, SW Sydney, where a known Koala corridor crosses the traffic. Held by wildlife carer Ricardo Lonza. RIP poor creature.

I agree with Save the Koala group that we urgently need a **“Koala Protection Act”**⁵, which will not only protect every Koala still alive, but it will protect all their food trees from being trashed, for any reason.

Drastic times call for drastic measures, and I repeat: **THIS IS A KOALA EMERGENCY!**

⁴ https://campbelltownkoalaresearchanddatabase.com/?fbclid=IwAR3j32HbHQUp4TGXXma7QWu3wS-iPRw_2GHoNF2_465MBQxc9JQtxcdjKl4

⁵ <https://www.savethekoala.com/our-work/koala-protection-act>

At right is a map of some of the SW Sydney area. The light green area is Holsworthy military area, which is almost entirely covered in native vegetation; the names on the map indicate town centres; the darker green “caterpillars” indicate Key **Koala HLAs** – **Habitat Linkage Areas** which are Koala corridors between preferred trees.⁶

Here are two rivers, the Nepean and the Georges River, very close together, lined and linked by good mature Koala food and habitat trees.

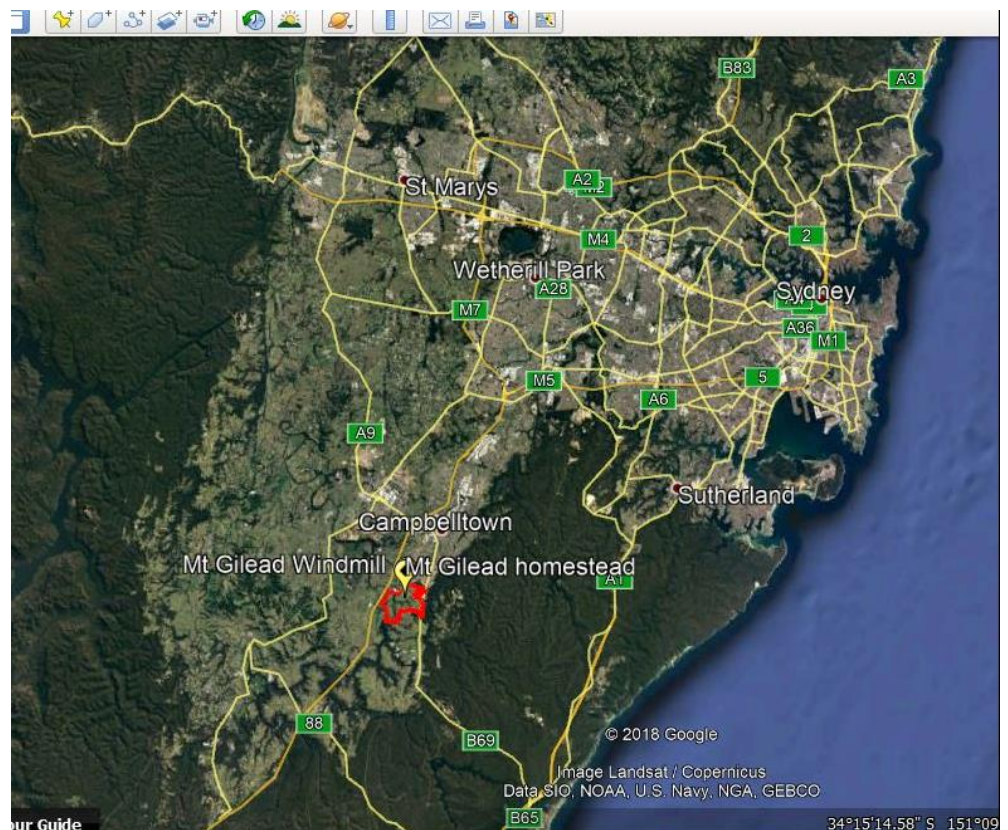
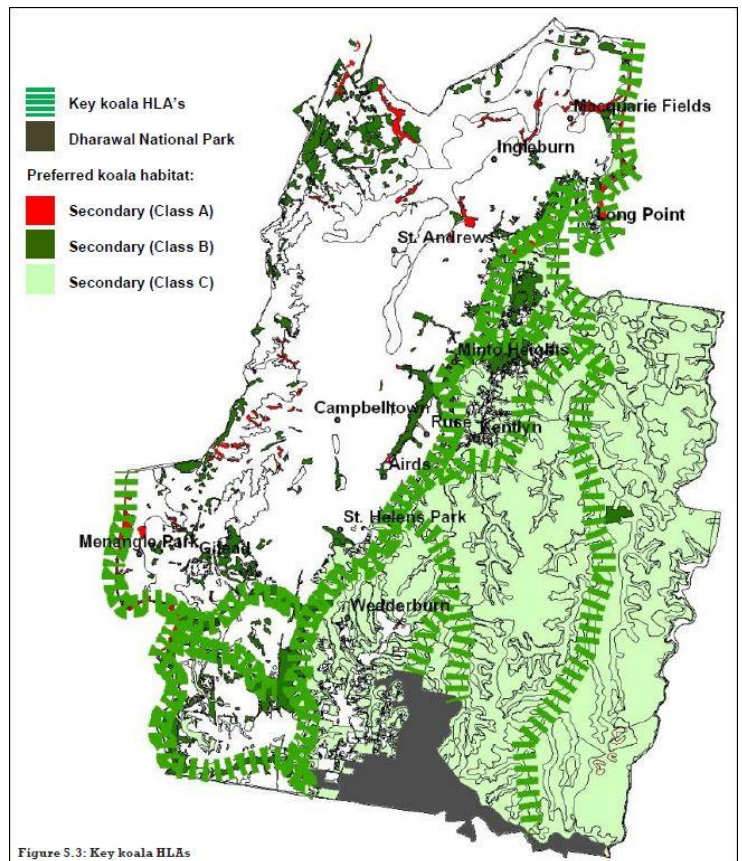
Appin Road and other roads traverse and intersect these Koala HLAs, hence the high number of road deaths of Koalas crossing the roads at night, as they search for territory, food trees and mates.

Until the last 20 years, this area was relatively untouched by the urban sprawl being experienced in other parts of greater Sydney. But all that is about to change of course.

One relatively untouched property is Mt Gilead, in Appin. It is site of a very early colonial land grant, 1810, and has remained a working farm until this day, with a relatively intact curtilage, convict built buildings, house, and the earliest stone windmill built in Australia.

Unfortunately, Lend Lease are about to turn it into yet another cookie-cutter housing estate. This fact alone would be tragedy enough, considering the excellent tourism potential being lost, the heritage being lost. But added to that, Mt Gilead estate is slap bang in the middle of the two rivers, has many hundreds of mature Koala food trees, and has been used as a corridor from time immemorial by Koalas on their way between the two rivers.

At right is a map indicating the location of Mt Gilead estate (in red) in relation to Campbelltown and the City of Sydney; this screen shot from Google Earth can be matched to the previous one above: the dark green area to the right (east) of Mt Gilead is the Holsworthy military area; the Nepean and Georges Rivers tree-lined valleys and gorges can be seen surrounding the estate, as dark green fuzzy lines and scribbles.



⁶ Phillips, S (2016) Campbelltown Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management. Prepared by Biolink for Campbelltown City Council. Extract p31.

The map at right is an enlargement of Mt Gilead estate represented above by a red line. It shows the two rivers bracketing the estate, with primary Koala habitat indicated in blue.

Mt Gilead would make the most amazing National Park – a safe place for wild Koalas to cross from one river to the other; intact early colonial heritage, sweeping rural landscapes, the opportunity to see a Koala in the wild, so close to Sydney city. The tourism potential is enormous. Many people have proposed this idea, the new National Park to be named the “Two Rivers NP”. But alas, it seems that we are to destroy all this for housing (DAs approved last week).



At the very least, when Appin Road is widened, at least one Koala overpass should be constructed as part of the job. It could look like this (screen grab of newspaper article below ⁷) – the new Mona Vale Rd West wildlife crossing, the first in Australia. **A similar wildlife crossing at Appin Rd would save an awful lot of Koalas' lives!**

\$7.5 million for north shore animal crossing but still nothing for Campbelltown

Ben Chenoweth



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Overpass: An artist's impression of an animal overpass that will be build along Mona Vale Road West. Picture: NSW Government

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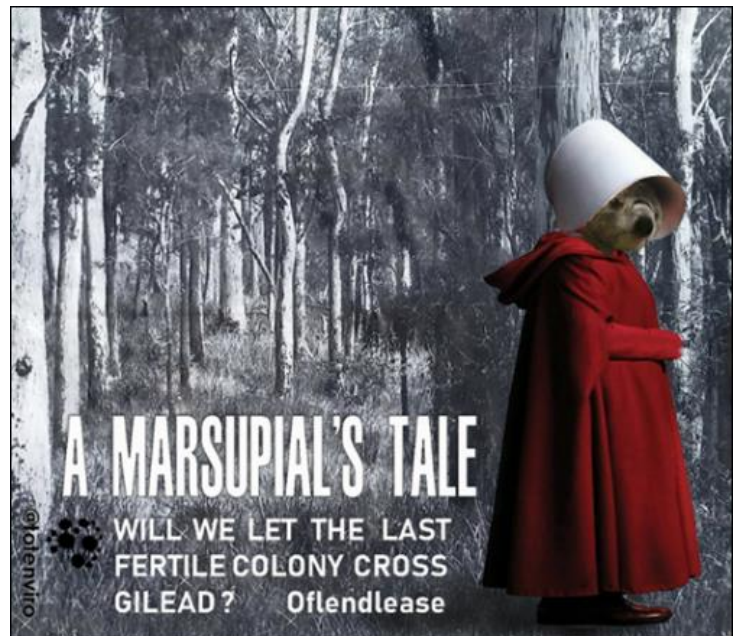
⁷ <https://www.macarthuradvertiser.com.au/story/5300397/75-million-for-north-shore-animal-crossing-but-still-nothing-for-campbelltown/>

Local residents feel very strongly about their resident Koalas; there are several groups dedicated to wildlife rescue, saving Mt Gilead, protecting the local environment. Please don't let their efforts go to waste. Here's a very creative graphic from Save Mt Gilead's FB page (at right).

One of their points should be stressed when considering the future of Koalas anywhere in NSW or Australia – Koalas need **mature trees**:

*"New plantings of eucalypt trees, although deserving, will not be functional for koalas for another decade, and cannot in anyway compare to the importance of old growth forests."*⁸

This is especially important given that governments seem to think it is OK to "create" new Koala reserves on land that has hitherto not been used by Koalas.



There are many other things to say, and many other points to make about this **KOALA EMERGENCY**.

Here are a few made by the International Fund for Animal Welfare⁹ group, which I fully endorse:

- Core koala habitat needs to be permanently protected via the establishment of a connected system of existing and new national parks including the **Great Koala National Park** in [the Northern forests of] NSW.
- Similar protected areas of core koala habitat in other range states should be established and protected into the future. All koala habitat in public state forests needs to be permanently protected in the reserve network and koala habitat should be exempt from code-based clearing under the current legislation.
- The government's proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forests to logging on the NSW North Coast should be rejected.
- An urgent transition plan needs to be developed to end the logging of native forests on public land.
- Koala habitat and connectivity in the Sydney Basin needs to be protected from development, particularly the large-scale housing development in the Campbelltown area which threatens one of the state's only recovering healthy koala populations.
- Wildlife corridors need to be restored to allow koalas and other animals to move freely about the landscape and prevent human-wildlife conflict. This could be achieved by purchasing private land, changing the tenure of public land, and restoring habitat. It can also be achieved through increased support of voluntary conservation initiatives such as Bangalow Koalas in the Northern Rivers, with whom IFAW is working to restore a koala corridor from Bangalow to Repentance Creek.

*I urge you to work together to protect koalas for our future generations. Please don't let them go **extinct** on your watch. Their future is in your hands."*

⁸ https://www.facebook.com/save.mount.gilead.inc/posts/2318997048348848?_xts=%5B0%5D=68.ARCIQCY-5J5iSQxaC8ewXrTwaHUNVvgUKTgu7Q-rrL759AMVK8y1lhRgB4--90pZ3TM2asNDDLv06V0_F30XBTEBDzpJUNuIniiHpYhy7xO9h8A-DHTWWEKJVYrSrisiTkvwqjfpzP-3C6ruTTEGCQ9cABmld2ciqHsflp7JCHZbUPgDk2ocXYfVvFwbM0Ay6Lid662xRAM8PI59KaQVW0BCsWH5y_JUNelLqfuW9qE_gDzDleNXIWARy-0Bs1xgv2y-1bYOld7XQaByFACjgJFm2h_zLjr8Mz3_7cKmN5QSXsuSzLPRBL9qTwgQQv-kvrGgqGEmst7aSoVG9yutQdCOINOTs&_tn=K-R

⁹ https://action.ifaw.org/page/46172/action/1?utm_source=SFMC&utm_medium=email&ms=AONDG190720002&cid=7012A0000012uRc



Above: photos of 4 Koalas killed on Appin Rd, near Mt Gilead, SW Sydney, in 13 days before 5th April 2018.¹⁰

Again I say, this is **ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE!**

THIS IS A KOALA EMERGENCY.

Please "SAVE ME" from EXTINCTION.

Yours very sincerely,

Claire Bettington.



¹⁰ Help Save the Wildlife and Bushlands in Campbelltown FB page, 5-4-2018