

**Submission
No 296**

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

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Date Received: 2 August 2019

The NSW koala population is in crisis and urgent action is needed to ensure these iconic species remain in healthy, viable community in the wild. Ensuring the survival of koalas, as well as the over 1000 other species threatened with extinction in NSW, is an issue which must go beyond politics. I therefore encourage the committee to work together to develop a cross-party consensus on genuine solutions to protect the future of our koalas.

Koala populations are in steep and steady decline. Current Government policy fails to address the number one threat to koala populations - habitat loss and fragmentation of the habitat. Land clearing continues with only three year reports - not regular enough - and no distinct details on to the specific reasons for the land clearing. If the Queensland land clearing (yearly) reports are any indication, then the vast bulk (93% in Qld) is due to animal agriculture.

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 expansion to the NSW National Park network under the current Government.

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

- Transition animal based agriculture to plant based agriculture. This will result in much less land being needed as already cleared land in many locations can be used for plant based ag and the excess land can be re-vegetated to enable expansion of habitat for koalas and other native species. Obviously planning and research would be needed to select the best locations to start with.
- Immediately and permanently protecting all 'koala hubs' from clearing for agriculture, logging or development.
- Investing in the future of koalas by expanding the NSW National Parks network, including creating the Great Koala National Park on the NSW mid-north coast.
- Immediately put in place protection for koala corridors, such as the Appin area where development is planned and no safe crossings are planned for the disease free koala colony there.
- Investigate areas where high kill rates occur for koala crossing roads and work to put in place protection, including signage, and safe crossings.
- Developing a transition plan to end the logging of native forests on public land
- 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
- Urgently protecting koala habitat in the Sydney Basin from development - there is plenty of already cleared land that should first be looked at for where development is actually needed, not cutting down existing bushland and treed areas which can sustain koala habitat.

- Ending wood chipping 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 one of our iconic Australian mammals, or make urgent changes to protect vital habitat and restore our native forests. I urge you to work together to save koalas for future generations.

Thank you.