

**Submission
No 321**

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

Name: Supporters of Proforma No 3 - 357 people

Date Received: 18 September 2019

**Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment
Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales**

- Inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

Supporters of proforma submission (#03) – 357 people

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission in response to the Government's Inquiry into Koala Populations in NSW. I consent to the committee making my submission and my name public.

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

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 their populations across NSW. At state and federal government levels, a number of reviews have identified that koalas (and around 1,000 other species), are facing many escalating risks. Responses to these previous reviews have included evidenced and detailed reports and comprehensive submissions lodged by a range of experts, which the NSW government has largely ignored.

Once koalas are 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.

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.

My recommendations include:

- Provisions to be included in the Biodiversity Conservation Act and Local Land Amendment Act to protect habitat, end self-assessment, and enable the provision of opportunities for legal challenges in the public interest.
- The status of koalas should be upgraded from vulnerable to endangered in the Biodiversity Conservation Act, and critical habitat should be prioritised and declared as Areas of Outstanding Biodiversity Value.
- We must reject the government's proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forests for logging on the north coast of NSW.

- We must repeal the 'offset' policy and immediately end all native forest logging on public and private land. Stronger state laws must be introduced to prevent koala habitat destruction through land clearing and we need to 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.
- 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 southwest 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.

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.