

**Submission
No 326**

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

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Submission to the Upper House inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales

Dear Ms Faehrmann and all committee members,

We, the public, thank you for the opportunity to express our views and concerns regarding the likely extinction in our lifetime of our national icon, our beloved koala.

Your work is sorely needed, as previous projects from the NSW government to 'look into' the problem of swindling koala populations have not delivered on any improvement in the chances of koala species survival and have served only to give them content for their PR departments in an attempt to appear to care. Previous projects such as the Koala Strategy have resulted in nothing more than edges-tinkering and the favourite activity of the Premier's office of boasting how much money they are spending on the issue (yet, missing the crucial root cause of population decline because that would weaken her political support).

The Berejiklian government continues to fail our native animals and it is now incumbent on you to see through their cultivated veneer of 'doing something', and help Australia save our national icon.

The koalas' biggest threat is loss of habitat, and that comes down to state laws on forestry. The current Liberal government relaxed laws in 2017 that were already tipped in the favour of widespread land clearing, and made it even easier to clear land. Since 2017, deforestation in some areas on NSW has tripled.

The people of NSW are tired of smokescreen PR stunts and the Premier's attempts to appear that she cares by splashing taxpayer money. I advocate for investment into this crisis, but if the money does not go to the core of the problem, it is at best a flimsy bandaid, at worst a total waste of money in a vain effort to protect her reputation. I am not suggesting a new national park in the Southern Highlands won't help protect a tiny, fraction of koala habitat, but it is token – it protects 2,200 hectares, which is a mere 0.03% of koala's habitat in New South Wales and does not make up for the other 36 populations around the state that are in desperate decline because of tree-clearing. And I am not suggesting it is a bad thing to give money to koala hospitals, but given that every koala expert in the country points to land clearing as the core driver of the koala's likely extinction, might I venture that there wouldn't be so many homeless and injured animals if we addressed the root cause of why koala populations are diminishing?

WE CANNOT HAVE A SERIOUS AND CREDIBLE DISCOURSE ABOUT PRESERVING NATIVE SPECIES WITHOUT IT BEGINNING WITH – AND CENTERING ON – LAND CLEARING LAWS. EVERY OTHER TACTIC IS JUST PLAYING AROUND THE EDGES AND IS JUST FOR SHOW.

This premier and her cabinet that attempt to pass themselves off as a crusaders for koalas, ARE the reason we have a koala crisis. They did not inherit poor forestry laws, they weakened them themselves.

And in case you're not angry enough yet, the current government's attitude to native animals can be further summarised as follows:

- They changed the authority to sign-off on land clearing from the environment minister, to the minister for primary industries and planning.
- Their deputy premier wants to revoke the Murray Valley's status as a national park so they can log it (merely deferring the pain of necessary change to the next generation)

- They have been caught trying to remap areas of north-east NSW in order to log old-growth forests to supplement a so-called ‘timber shortfall’.

There is nothing in any of these actions that depicts a government even vaguely serious about preserving native species. What I see is a government compromised by political donations and forming alliance blocs to protect their own power, and trying to prop up industries that a world facing climate change and the sixth extinction cannot continue to artificially support. When an industry can only be supported by declassifying national parks and sneakily re-zoning old growth forests, I think we have hit a new low in NSW politics and ethics. And this same government tries to pass itself off as koala champions. I don't have the words to accurately describe my scorn.

People of the committee, I realise I have knowingly criticised two of the parties to which some of you belong. I believe my criticisms to be fair. But I have to believe that amongst this misguided blindness that has taken NSW so far down this destructive and shameful path, that there are people within every single party that want to do the right thing, that have the courage to be disliked – even by their own colleagues if need be – in order to stand up for what's right. I hope with all my heart I am addressing those very people in this letter.

Australia has the shameful crown of one of the worst deforesters on the planet, despite our beautiful continent being so critical for global biodiversity. I want our native species to have a chance at existing into the next century. There is no more time to sit on our hands. This generation, us, now, we are the guardians of the planet, of the future. These creatures are vulnerable, and defenceless. They deserve better guardians than what we, the people of today, have proven to be. Please, we can change this, but only if we listen to the intuition deep inside that says, ‘this isn't right’, and we act with urgency.

This single issue informs me everything I need to know about the character of those supposedly representing the values of the people. Please find the courage inside you to withstand peer pressure. A whole species is at stake, our national icon no less. If not for compassion for a defenceless animal, if not for your children's children, do it for your own legacy. Please think how history will judge this era and the participants of this issue, those that could have genuinely done something, and those who just wanted to appear to be doing something, or simply looking away and pretending it's not happening. Please think how history will judge you.