

**Submission
No 21**

**INQUIRY INTO LOCAL LAND SERVICES AMENDMENT
(MISCELLANEOUS) BILL 2020**

Organisation: Science for Wildlife

Date Received: 5 February 2021



Portfolio Committee No. 7

Planning and Environment,
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000.

Attn: Committee Chair

Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC

RE: Local Land Services Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2020

Dear Committee Members,

Science for Wildlife undertakes scientific research to ensure that conservation actions are evidence based and effective. I have been involved in koala research for over a decade and during that time, like many other scientists and stakeholders, I have witnessed a continued trend of decline in koala populations across NSW, ACT and QLD. That is despite updated draft koala SEPPs. The key driver of decline for the majority of koala populations has persistently been habitat loss, and no legislative changes have altered the business as usual model that has resulted in the ongoing net loss of habitats.

Given the losses last summer, with billions of animals dead and one third of koala habitat burnt in NSW alone, this is not the time to weaken legislative protections for the koala or any other species. On top of habitat loss, climate change is now a key threat and is compounding the impact of the other extant causes of decline for this species.

We experienced first-hand the devastation wrought on koalas during last summer's bushfires. We had identified five sites in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area as important for koalas. Four of those five sites were burnt. The sites comprise a mix of land tenures, with koalas occurring inside protected areas but also in and around developed land. At our sites and many others, areas on private property, which include rural farming lands, have become even more important for koala conservation because many of them are asset protection zones and did not burn, thereby providing a refuge for koalas and other species.

The scale and intensity of fires last summer showed us a future where National Parks and protected areas are not necessarily going to be effective biodiversity refuges under climate change. The risk has changed, bushfires are becoming more frequent and more intense. To conserve the koala, it is critical to focus on cross-tenure conservation of native vegetation across all remaining habitats, without exception.

The proposed Local Land Services Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill will set koala conservation back decades and is likely to play a role in ensuring the continued decline of the species.

The Bill will mean newly identified koala habitat in rural areas identified under the new koala State environmental planning policy [SEPP] will not be regulated or protected. Through our research we are still learning where koalas occur and finding new habitats they depend upon. There have been multiple enquiries and reports at both the State and Commonwealth Government level (eg, Chief Scientist's Report of the Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Key Areas of NSW, 2009 National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy) all identifying that more knowledge of koala distribution and habitats is required for effective conservation to occur. This Bill will limit koala habitat protection based on a current lack of knowledge and will therefore guarantee protections are insufficient into the future.

The Bill will also mean that private native forestry operations will no longer require council approval for clearing native vegetation, putting the conservation of koalas, their habitats and many other threatened species in peril without oversight or triggers for protection. The only way to prevent the ongoing decline of koalas is to change business as usual and strengthen rather than weaken protections for koala habitats.

In that regard the Bill ignores recommendations in the 1998 National Koala Management Strategy, the Chief Scientist's Report of the Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Key Areas of NSW, 2009 National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy and the 2020 report from the Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in New South Wales, all of which call for a coordinated approach to stemming koala habitat loss.

The latter report outlines clear recommendations around approving comprehensive Koala Plans of Management in NSW, ensuring all councils with koala populations develop such Plans, and strengthening the ability of consent authorities to protect koala habitats including in regard to Private Native Forestry. The proposed Bill contravenes the intent of these recommendations.

We therefore oppose this Bill, and recommend that any legislative changes adhere to the recommendations in the Report from the Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in New South Wales aimed at increasing protection for koala habitats.

Yours sincerely

Kellie Leigh (PhD)
Executive Director, Science for Wildlife