

The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC

Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy,
Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage,
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council



MD23/2203

Ms Helen Minnican
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

By email: laclerk@parliament.nsw.gov.au
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Dear Ms Minnican

I write in response to the petition lodged by Ms Tamara Smith MP and signed by 500 or more persons, indicating support of the National Parks Association of NSW's Great Koala National Park proposal and requesting a moratorium be placed on native forestry operations in the proposal area.

I commend Ms Smith's constituents for their advocacy. Like them, I share a strong commitment to ensuring effective action is taken to protect our endangered koalas.

That is why I am pleased to reconfirm the NSW Government's commitment to protecting key koala habitat on the mid-north coast near Coffs Harbour by creating a Great Koala National Park. Our commitment is an important element of an overall strategy to save koalas in the wild, recognising that large and well-managed protected areas are critical in protecting biodiversity.

As noted in the petition, the 2020 NSW Legislative Council Committee Inquiry (of which I was a committee member) found that without urgent government intervention to protect habitat and address other threats, koalas would become extinct in NSW before 2050. The Inquiry recommended investigating the establishment of Great Koala National Park.

Initially, we are setting aside \$80 million to support the development of the Park. The development will be informed by expert scientific advice and include an independent economic assessment and inclusive consultation process with stakeholders, including the forestry industry and workers, local government, tourism, environment and local community groups, and Aboriginal communities.

Initial planning processes for the Park have commenced. When established, the Park is set to become a centrepiece of koala conservation in NSW as well as a must-see destination in the area, attracting visitors and contributing to the local economy.

Prior to the election in March, Labor gave an election commitment to create the Great Koala National Park, but also that there would not be a moratorium on forestry activities.

We are committed to providing security to regional communities and will first undertake the economic assessment to guide the necessary support for local jobs and communities.

We are working on the steps towards creation of the Great Koala National Park and hope to announce these soon.

In the interim, the Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW) must comply with koala protections set out in the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals when conducting operations, which

includes specific provisions for the identification and protection of koalas and koala habitat, including retaining important feed trees, and the exclusion of forestry activities from areas of active koala use.

The Environment Protection Authority will work closely with FCNSW to encourage them to take precautionary approaches to where and how they conduct forestry operations, particularly in regions with highly suitable koala habitat, and ensure such values are maintained if forestry operations are necessary in these areas.

Again, I thank Ms Smith's constituents for their support and look forward to providing the Ballina and wider community with updates as the project progresses.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Penny Sharpe', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Penny Sharpe MLC

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14/6/23