



South East Region Conservation Alliance

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The Senate: Environment and Communications References Committee
Inquiry into the Status, Health and Sustainability of Australia's Koala Population
Report: The koala—saving our national icon. September 2011

AN EVALUATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SE NSW FORESTS

Chapter 3 of the Senate Inquiry's Report, *Threats to koala habitat: urban development, forestry, mining, drought, bushfire and climate change*, found forestry practices to be detrimental to koala population.

“Habitat loss is the most significant cause of koala population declines and reductions in long-term population viability...”¹ (3.2)

A review has been made of evidence in Chapter 3 of the Senate's Report which highlights the detrimental impact of logging on the koala population as it has affected, or as it could similarly affect, the forests of SE NSW. The Report's data which relates to the impact of logging on koala populations includes: cause and effect of habitat loss; impact of forestry practice on migration corridors; and general and specific concerns related to the impact of forestry practice on koala habitat. (Appendix 1)

Recommendations from the Inquiry are included. An evaluation was undertaken to identify which of these Recommendations addressed declining koala population in SE NSW's forests. (Appendix 2) It was found that only two of the 19 Recommendations had this potential.

1. Recommendation 12 states that the Australia Government consider further wild dog control options in priority koala areas.
Implementation of this recommendation may benefit koalas in SE NSW forests.
2. Recommendation 17 states that the committee recommends the Environment Minister consider options to improve the conservation status of the diverse and rapidly declining koala populations in New South Wales and Queensland to ensure a nationally resilient population is maintained. These options include listing the koala as vulnerable under the EPBC Act in areas where populations have declined significantly or are at risk of doing so.
Implementation of this recommendation would only be useful if logging activities within habitats where koalas now exist, once existed or may yet re-exist, cease.

None of the Recommendations supported research into logging activities within these forests nor supported working towards the cessation of logging of SE NSW's native forests where koalas had once lived, now live or could live again. The Report also failed to capture or address the fact that the destruction of areas in the SE forests of NSW and thus koala habitat, is perpetuated by regulations which permit 90% of logged native forest timber to be supplied to Nippon Paper for woodchips for paper production.

¹ Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009–2014*, Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra, 2009, p. 19, www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/koala-strategy/pubs/koala-strategy.pdf (accessed 30 June 2011).

Thus, the Senate's Inquiry failed to incorporate evidence of detrimental logging activities in SE NSW's forests in its Recommendations. It seems that the urgency of the situation has been overlooked: the situation has reached a critical level. Evidence given by Chris Allen (3.72), John Hibberd (3.73) and others whose credible, in depth knowledge of remnant koala populations also seems to not have been taken into account in this respect.

Most of the Recommendations (Appendix 2) may be helpful from a long term perspective but they do not address the specific circumstances of the SE Forests of NSW which need immediate protection from logging activities to save fragile, and imminently threatened, remnant koala populations. The dire predicament of a known remnant population of 50 koalas in the SE NSW forests is not addressed.

For the forests of SE NSW, these Recommendations may have been useful had they been implemented 100 years ago. Whilst not wishing to detract from the Inquiry's benefit, for those who witness destruction of the forests and all it means from an environmental perspective including the destruction of koala habitat, it is thought that the funding of research projects which may serve to prove what is already known and has been known locally for generations, create a diversion from immediacy.

The South East Region Conservation Alliance thanks the Senate for its attempt to protect the koala and their habitats by conducting this Inquiry, but, for the forests of SE NSW, the outcomes seems to provide only another opportunity for theoretical posturing and not practical objectives to save our remnant population and their, and other wildlife species', habitats.

Dr Bronte Somerset, 6 October 2011

APPENDIX 1

In instances where the Report repeats the same or very similar points, only one is cited.

CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HABITAT LOSS

1. Loss of koala habitat due to forestry practice and clearing or fragmentation of forests and woodlands² causes koala population declines in Qld and NSW. (3.2)
2. Loss of habitat stresses koalas and impacts on their ability to recover from disease. (3.17)
3. The loss of food trees, destruction of home ranges and death or injury from the felling of trees were seen as threats to the survival of forest-dwelling koala population. (3.55)

IMPACT OF FORESTRY PRACTICE ON MIGRATION CORRIDORS

4. Koala's limited movement capability means that they are unable, or reluctant, to move across gaps in vegetation and move within or among fragmented habitats.³ (3.12)
5. The removal of even one tree can break a chain making it difficult for koalas to visit the next link.⁴ (3.12)
6. Logging causes fragmentation of koala home ranges and disruptions to migration and breeding corridors.⁵ (3.60)

² Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009–2014*, Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra, 2009, p. 19, www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/koala-strategy/pubs/koala-strategy.pdf (accessed 30 June 2011).

³ Humane Society International, *Submission 26*, p. 3.

⁴ Koala Action Group Queensland, *Submission 17*, p. 4.

⁵ Mr Robert Summers, *Submission 19*, p. 2.

GENERAL CONCERNS RELATED TO THE IMPACT OF FORESTRY PRACTICE ON KOALA HABITAT

7. Lack of monitoring of forestry operations, the planning and approval process for the logging of state forests. (3.57)
8. The exclusion of forestry activities undertaken in accordance with a Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) from the approvals and enforcement provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 was a concern. (3.57)
9. Industrial level logging causes great destruction of forest habitat and it is unlikely that koalas would survive in logging coupes. The level of logging activity is likely to have some impact upon any koalas in adjacent unlogged coupes, through noise and human presence.⁶ (3.59)
10. Fragmentation and degradation results from some logging regimes and from regular fuel reduction burning.⁷ (3.63)
11. Logging causes loss and compaction of topsoil, the reduction in species diversity and structural complexity, and an increased fire hazard associated with the drying out of the forest floor.⁸ (3.60)
12. Felling of trees, and logging trucks kills koalas.⁹ (3.61)

SPECIFIC CONCERNS RELATED TO THE IMPACT OF FORESTRY PRACTICE ON KOALA HABITAT

13. Disease, hunting for the fur trade, land clearing, fire and logging has brought the koala to its current perilous state, but logging has the potential to bring them to extinction. For example, Mumbulla State Forest contains a koala population and logging is imminent there¹⁰ (3.72)
14. The next logging event will render this population extinct¹¹ (3.73)
15. Non-application of principles in a Koala Management Framework and breakdown of communication between FNSW and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and the community exists¹² (3.74)

APPENDIX 2

Recommendations of the Inquiry including explanations as to why they do not address current koala habitat threatening logging activities in the SE native forests of NSW.

Recommendation 1

2.144 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into the genetic diversity of the koala including a population viability assessment of the southern koala and determining priority areas for conservation nationally.

- For SE NSW, this is already established.

Recommendation 2

⁶ Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 61*, p. 7.

⁷ Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009–2014*, Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra, 2009, p. 19.

⁸ Mr Chris Allen, *Submission 35*, p. 18.

⁹ See: Name withheld, *Submission 20*, p. 1; and Australian Koala Foundation, *Submission 25*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Mr John Hibberd, Executive Director, Conservation Council ACT Region Inc, *Committee Hansard*, 19 May 2011, p. 30.

¹¹ Mr Chris Allen, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 19 May 2011, p. 16.

¹² Mr John Hibberd, Executive Director, Conservation Council ACT Region Inc, *Committee Hansard*, 19 May 2011, p. 32.

2.147 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund a properly designed, funded and implemented national koala monitoring and evaluation program across the full range of the koala.

- This would assist in ascertaining location of koalas, but would not immediately secure their habitat in SE NSW forests.

Recommendation 3

2.153 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a nationally coordinated and integrated program for population monitoring of threatened species and other culturally, evolutionary and/or economically significant species.

- Remnant koala population of SE NSW is already threatened.

Recommendation 4

2.155 The committee recommends that the Australian Government assist the koala research community and interested organisations to work towards a standardised set of methodologies for estimating koala populations.

- This is already established in SE NSW.

Recommendation 5

2.160 The committee recommends that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee provide clearer information to the Environment Minister in all future threatened species listing advices, including species population information, and that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee review its advice to the Minister on the listing of the koala in light of the findings of this Inquiry.

- This will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 6

3.127 The committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake habitat mapping across the koala's national range, including the identification of priority areas of koala conservation, with a view to listing important habitat under the provisions of the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

- This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 7

3.129 The committee recommends that the habitat maps be used to identify and protect important habitat in known koala ranges.

- This knowledge is already understood in SE NSW.

Recommendation 8

3.131 The committee recommends that the Australian Government review its land holdings which contain koala habitat and consider biodiversity, and specifically koala populations, in the management and sale of Commonwealth land.

- This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 9

3.134 The committee recommends that the Australian Government actively consider options for recognition and funding for private land holders for the conservation of koala habitat.

- This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 10

4.44 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into koala disease, including the viability of vaccination programs and the effect of changes in leaf chemistry.

- This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 11

4.46 The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund the Koala Research Network's request for a Research Liaison Officer.

- This will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 13 4.90

The committee recommends that local and state governments:

- introduce appropriate speed limits in priority koala areas; and
- that where appropriate, build or retrofit underpasses or overpasses for major roads in priority koala areas as well as installing koala fencing adjacent to major roads.
 - This is likely to be useful were koala populations permitted to rehabit the SE forests of NSW.

Recommendation 14

4.92 The committee recommends where the Australian Government provides funding for roads or other infrastructure in or adjacent to koala habitat, it be contingent on the provision of adequate koala protections.

- This is likely to be useful were koala populations permitted to rehabit the SE forests of NSW.

Recommendation 15

4.94 The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the states to develop new national guidelines to ensure that all new roads and upgrades in or adjacent to koala habitat are koala-friendly.

- This is likely to be useful were koala populations permitted to rehabit the SE forests of NSW.

Recommendation 16

5.78 The committee recommends that the Environment Minister consider the evidence provided to this Inquiry when making his final decision on listing the koala as a threatened species.

- This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 18

6.46 The committee recommends that an independent external review be conducted on the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy to monitor the adequacy of progress. The review should assess and Report on the progress made at the strategy's midpoint.

6.47 The review must include an assessment of the:

- strategy's implementation to date and prospects into the future;
- strategy's effectiveness in stabilising koala numbers in areas of declining population, and in reducing the pressure of overabundant populations;
- strategy's level of ambition, including whether new elements are required; and
- adequacy of the Commonwealth's and the states' respective roles and funding commitments.
 - This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.

Recommendation 19

6.52 The committee recommends that the Australian Government adequately resource the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy, and ensure that it is properly implemented through committing to a much stronger leadership role.

- This may be helpful for the future but will not ensure immediate protection of koala habitat in SE NSW.