

Dr Mehreen Faruqi
Greens Member of the NSW Legislative Council



Koala Strategy Submissions
Office of Environment and Heritage
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3/3/2017

Dear Madam/Sir

Re: Greens NSW Submission to the Proposed NSW Koala Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the proposed NSW Koala Strategy. I do so in my capacity as Greens NSW spokesperson for the Environment and Animal Welfare.

Koalas in New South Wales are under unprecedented threat from climate change, habitat destruction, land clearing for expanding coal and coal seam gas mining and urban development, vehicle strike and other causes. The 'Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Key Areas of NSW' by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer revealed that there are just 36,000 koalas estimated across the whole state and an estimated decline of 26% over the past three koala generations and the next three generations. Other estimates, such as from the Federal Threatened Species Committee, have suggested a one third decline in numbers in NSW between 1990 and 2010. Across the thirteen regional koala populations in NSW, nine were estimated to be in decline, three stable and only one increasing.

Whilst the Greens welcome a commitment to a koala strategy we are deeply concerned that the strategy will be overly focused on research, symposia and mapping with little to no concrete action to protect koalas. While research and mapping are essential tools to inform a solid strategy, without real action, their value is diminished. We know that stopping land clearing, habitat destruction and urgently reducing greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change are essential to saving the koala, and must be included in a koala strategy to seriously and genuinely protect and enhance koala populations. Unfortunately, the current Government's actions to date have indicated that the processes that are a risk to koalas are in fact being accelerated.

Climate change will increase the intensity of bushfires and droughts; we are already experiencing record high temperatures and extremely hot days. These are significant threats to koalas directly as they may be unable to bear the higher temperatures and extreme weather events but also indirectly as their food sources are impacted both in quality and quantity. The IUCN has warned that koalas are highly vulnerable to malnutrition and starvation as the quality of their food source deteriorates. For these reasons it makes it even more important to protect their habitat. For example, parcels of bushland which are koala habitat are being destroyed for urban development, when in fact they are vital as biodiversity corridors providing connectivity and a safe haven for koalas as climate conditions become harsher.

Recommendation 5 of the Chief Scientist and Engineer's independent review states that "Government improve outcomes for koalas through the Biodiversity Conservation Act and associated Regulations". However, it is very concerning that this Act and the cognate 'Local Land Services Amendment Act 2016' are some of the biggest threats facing koalas and will facilitate the removal of large parts of koala habitat. Even if the Chief Scientist's recommendation to ensure that koala habitat is mapped on the Native Vegetation Regulatory Map as Category 2 (Regulated Land) and even if impacts on best quality koala habitat are declared as 'serious and irreversible impacts', under these new laws there would still be a pathway to

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clearing that habitat. Modelling from the World Wildlife Fund has found that more than 2.2 million hectares of koala habitat could be cleared under just one self-assessable code, the Equity Code.

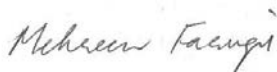
The concept of biodiversity offsetting, which is being expanded, does not work and merely leads to a loss of overall biodiversity. The process contained in the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 sets a very low bar and proponents can merely pay into a fund if they are unable to secure appropriate offsets. This will inevitably lead to the loss of koala habitat and drive koalas closer to extinction.

The Government needs to commit to permanent conservation of koala habitat, especially under the National Parks and Wildlife system. In particular, two priority projects that would make an enormous difference and demonstrate the NSW Government's commitment to preserving koala populations: The Great Koala National Park and the Great Southern Forest. The Great Koala National Park would be centred in the Coffs Harbour Region and encompass 315,000 hectares, and include two nationally recognised koala meta-populations that are estimated to contain almost 20% of NSW's remaining wild koalas. The Great Southern Forest connects national parks, state forests and private land in the South of the state and provides an opportunity for state forests to be managed for conservation, not environmentally destructive and economically unviable logging of native forests. It would also allow koala populations which have been decimated by logging to re-establish in this area.

The survival of an iconic species such as the koala is critical and this strategy needs to boldly commit to repealing the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and the Land Services Amendment Act 2016 and replacing them with legislation and regulation that strengthens protections for native flora and fauna, including the koala. The NSW Government needs to start taking climate change seriously and commit to a large expansion of permanent protection of koala habitat, including the Great Koala National Park and the Great Southern Forest proposals.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my office for further information.

Kind Regards



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Greens NSW MP