

## THE NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (NSW)

## Policy on Koala Conservation

**Preamble**

Current trends suggest koalas could be extinct in New South Wales within 30 years unless urgent effective action is taken. It is estimated that at the time of British colonisation of Australia there were about 10 million koalas. By the early 1900s millions of koala pelts (8 million by estimate) had been exported from eastern Australia to Europe and North America. Before native vegetation clearing codes were introduced in March, 2018 the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) warned the NSW Government that less than 1 per cent of identified koala habitat in New South Wales was protected from clearing under the proposed codes. Since the introduction of the codes, landholders have given notice of 51,000 hectares of clearing and Local Land Services have approved a further 288,000 hectares of clearing for agriculture. This includes thousands of hectares of koala habitat. The Office of Environment and Heritage has identified more than 100,000 hectares of core koala habitat (koala hubs) across New South Wales, however at the present time only 16 percent of this land is protected as part of the National Parks estate.<sup>1</sup>

In a document provided under the Government Information (Public Access) Act [GIPAA] request, the Office of Environment and Heritage responding to the draft Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals [IFOA] stated “The scientific basis for proposed tree retention rates in the coastal IFOA is not clear and rates are less than half of those originally proposed by the expert formal panel. While koalas will use small trees, research has shown that they selectively prefer larger trees. In our experience the proposed minimum tree retention size of 20 centimetres (diameter) will be inadequate to support koala populations.”

The koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) has become extinct in 21 of the 47 Federal electorates in the State of New South Wales and, due to vegetation clearance, its remaining suitable habitat is less than 50% in another 13 electorates with the total koala population in the State now estimated to be in the range from 11,555 to 16,130 individuals (including the Australian Capital Territory).<sup>2</sup>

**Policy**

1. The National Trust urges that urgent action be taken to prevent koala habitat loss and fragmentation from agriculture, forestry, industry and urban development through
  - i. immediate prohibition of the clearing of koala habitat, including legislative prohibitions on the destruction and degradation of mature forest and woodlands, and regrowth vegetation, known to be highly likely to be needed or used by koalas;
  - ii. completion of Koala Plans of Management and comprehensive and precise koala habitat modelling state-wide;
  - iii. Amendment of relevant legislation to include a broader definition of koala habitat, which includes lands that support feed trees, shelter trees, dispersal corridors and climate refugia.
2. The Trust supports investment in large-scale restoration of koala habitat through
  - i. enhanced funding to support restoration and expansion of koala habitat, including to build resilience to climate change, across land tenures and to ensure connectivity between existing habitat,
  - ii. reforestation of over-cleared landscapes with a focus on expanding koala habitat corridors and dispersal routes and modelled climate refugia.
3. The Trust supports the prevention of habitat loss from forestry through
  - i. the phasing out of native forest logging on public land and transition timber sourcing to plantations established on long cleared land of low biodiversity importance;
  - ii. ensuring private native forestry is subject to assessment and approval before licenses are granted, that logging is genuinely selective and avoids known koala tree species;
  - iii. the ending of all exemptions from the need for application, assessment and approval via ‘self-assessable codes’;
  - iv. rejection of the NSW Government’s proposal to open up thousands of hectares of old growth forests to logging on the NSW North Coast;
  - v. Ruling out the burning of native forests for electricity, including as exports.
4. The Trust supports the safeguarding of koala habitat in national parks and other protected areas through
  - i. Establishing the Great Koala National Park on the mid north coast and Georges River Koala National Park in south-west Sydney;
  - ii. Establishing new National Parks and other protected areas, including private and indigenous protected areas; to protect and connect koala populations and habitat across New South Wales, strategically choosing areas to also maximise representation of all New South Wales wildlife and native plants and ecosystems.

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Approved by National Trust Board:

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Legislative Council Inquiry, evidence presented by Mr Jack Gough, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Dr Oisín Sweeney, National Parks Association and Mr Stuart Blanch, World Wildlife Fund, 16 August, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Australian Koala Foundation, Act or Axe – Koala numbers in your electorate ([www.savethekoala.com/our-work/act-or-axe-new-south-wales](http://www.savethekoala.com/our-work/act-or-axe-new-south-wales))