

**KOALA ACTION INC.
QUEENSLAND KOALA CRUSADERS INC.**

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To The Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Email: vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

22nd April 2016

Dear Chair and Committee Members

**Submission to the Committee on Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other
Legislation Amendment Bill 2016**

I have been asked to write to you and provide this submission on behalf of all the members of Koala Action Inc. (KAI) and Queensland Koala Crusaders Inc. (QKC). Our objectives are related to the conservation and sustainability of the koala and subsequently center on the retention of all remaining koala habitat which includes 'regrowth', the rehabilitation of koala habitat by the removal of exotic species to facilitate natural regeneration to increase its carrying capacity as well as replanting koala food trees and other natives wherever possible.

Within the urban footprint and the peri urban regions of South East Queensland residential koalas and those displaced from the loss and fragmentation of habitat rely on remaining vegetation to survive. Increasingly koala populations on the eastern seaboard where the highest populations live are at risk and in some urban areas of the Sunshine Coast and within the Moreton Bay region are at risk of extinction.

Members of both groups are concerned about the ongoing and escalating reduction in the koala population. This decline has come about fundamentally as a consequence of habitat loss and fragmentation which forces koalas to the ground in search of food, shelter and dispersal opportunities. If we are to turn this situation around the consequences of habitat loss and fragmentation must be addressed. This submission focuses on some of the relevant issues that impact negatively on koalas and other native wildlife.

When habitat is cleared and fragmented, koalas have to come to ground where they are put at risk of being struck by motor vehicles and attacked by domestic, feral and wild dogs. The stress of dealing with the above situations on a regular basis negatively impacts their immune system which renders koalas vulnerable to a range of diseases.

The koala has been listed as “vulnerable” to extinction all over Queensland and if we are to halt the escalating decline of the koala population it is essential that vegetation clearing be curtailed and even brought to a halt in important habitat areas. Unfortunately, we can provide numerous examples where land has been cleared for development in urban and peri urban areas. That detailed below is just one recent example.

Tree Clearing Example – Lawnton Pocket Road, Lawnton, a population of approximately 40 koalas lived and dispersed into adjacent residential surrounds over many years until the trees at that site were cleared to the ground for a development. At the time appeals focusing on ensuring a future for these koalas were made to the developer, the local council and the state government to no avail. We even contacted the Federal Government who stated that a population of 40 koalas was not considered “significant”. Perhaps on a national scale such numbers are not significant but KAI and QKC consider 40 koalas to be highly significant in the Moreton Bay Region.

A concession was made in that the koalas in question were relocated elsewhere within the 5 km range demanded by DEHP. Unfortunately statistics obtained over the intervening months have confirmed that the majority of that adult population died or were injured trying to get back to their home range.

The development in question has not as yet been built even though the clearing was undertaken a few years ago. Those koalas could have utilised that site throughout this time until perhaps other more sustainable solutions could have ensured a future for those animals that died in their efforts to get back to their home range.

Drought - The impact of tree clearing on the increasing issue of drought in this state and a reduction in the amount and regularity of rainfall in our region is of concern to us as it impacts on the survival of the koala as well as other native wildlife. If mature trees are to survive, less water is provided to the leaves and defoliation takes place. The remaining leaves become harder to chew resulting in greater tooth wear which shortens the life of koalas. The tannin and phenol content of the remaining leaves increases making it more toxic and less palatable. This overloads the efforts of the kidney and bladder to get rid of harmful components, shortening the life in the process. The leaf itself no longer contains sufficient nutrients to maintain optimal health in koalas and many other arboreal species. Scientific research supports the notion that the more trees we have, the more rain will fall, the less stress that particular ecosystem will experience and the greater the ability of that ecosystem to adapt to harsher climatic conditions.

Increasing atmospheric CO₂ - many of our members hold strong environmental principles and the impact of tree clearing on climate change is supported by the majority of scientists in our community. Tree clearing causes millions of tonnes of CO₂ to be released into our atmosphere and once again scientific research is supporting the hypothesis that the very survival of koala food trees in the more marginal regions of Queensland may be called into question. Tree growth, leaf growth and the chemical content of leaf does change dramatically with increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere though more research and evidence is required to fully support this hypothesis.

The Great Barrier Reef (TGBR) – some KAI and QKC members are heavily involved in ensuring the TGBR remains sustainable for present and future generations and the media of late has clearly illustrated the escalating problems of coral bleaching. The impact of tree clearing on or near catchments does result in land/soil erosion and run off into river catchments. You don't have to be a scientist to know that erosion and run off caused by clearing along the Great Barrier Reef catchment banks is a leading cause of negative impacts such as coral death on our Reef.

In conclusion, KAI and QKC members support the passing of the bill in order to protect Queensland's ecosystems and wildlife. We believe this bill is important because it can:-

1. reinstate the protection of high value regrowth on freehold and indigenous land;
2. removes provisions which permit clearing applications for high value agriculture and irrigated agriculture;
3. broadens protection of riparian vegetation, especially in the Great Barrier Reef catchments of Burnett Mary, Eastern Cape York and Fitzroy Great Barrier Reef;
4. reinstates the application of the riverine protection permit framework to the destruction of vegetation in a watercourse, lake or spring; and
5. reinstates a broader requirement for environmental offsets to be required for any residual impact, not just 'significant' impacts as is currently provided for in offsets legislation (and has led to only 1 offset being registered for vegetation impacts since 2014).

As Secretary of both groups I would like the opportunity of being able to appear before the committee in their hearing into this enquiry.

Yours sincerely Vanda (aka Wanda) Grabowski,
President/Secretary, Koala Action Inc.
Secretary, Queensland Koala Crusaders Inc.