

**Koala Action Group Gympie region**

**Gympie 4570**

**27 April 2016**

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000  
*Email: [vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au)*

Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

The Koala Action Group (KAG) Gympie region is a community group formed in January 2015 to work on ways to help secure the future of koalas in our region, which extends west to Goomeri. Hence the reform of this Bill is very important to our group.

The Bill, in its current form, is failing our State whose community expects that vulnerable species will have optimum protection in any vegetation management frameworks.

There is ample evidence available to indicate koala habitat IS being cleared, that wildlife services are being further stretched by the impacts of clearing on native animals, and that koala numbers continue to decline in Queensland.

Please keep in the front of your minds that the koala is our State's fauna emblem and is listed by both State and Federal governments as vulnerable in the whole of our State. This means vulnerable to extinction in the wild unless we do enough to stop that happening.

Please also consider that despite the various interest groups you will hear from, many farmers are conservationists, do great conservation work, and are concerned. As a Committee you need to consider your duty of care to our State's natural assets and to future generations.

What do we see here in our region?

***1. Ongoing community reports and concerns about uncontrolled land clearing.***

The Koala Action Group has often fielded community concern regarding clearing in known koala habitat areas. It is often a cause of great distress to residents when they experience this in their immediate locality, where they are aware of the residence and movement of koalas and other wildlife in that landscape. It is especially disheartening for those who have invested much personally and financially in caring for the biodiversity on their properties. When we extrapolate that across the State we despair for koala populations that already struggle with fragmentation, disease, drought, wild dogs and human impacts such as death by car strike and domestic dogs. This group and local wildlife carers and rescuers have known and dealt with cases of all of these in the past year.

- In most cases, an enquiry or complaint to DNRM regarding clearing in known koala habitat, has been met with the response that current vegetation mapping and guidelines do not provide any protection. DEHP advise they can only act if a koala is injured in the clearing.

- In one 2015 case in the neighbouring region, long-term residents outside Kingaroy were distressed to see a long corridor of mature eucalypts cleared for fencing, where for many years they had enjoyed seeing several koalas there. It was known and enjoyed by the local community as a koala corridor. They found a koala injured when a tree was felled. It died several weeks later at the RSPCA Hospital in Brisbane.

## ***2. Regrowth is often providing essential koala habitat.***

Group landholders can all attest to koalas on their properties using regrowth. Many members have noticed increased populations of koalas where the bushland has been given the opportunity to regenerate and/or where members have planted appropriate koala food trees. One group member wrote: 'I particularly like the part about the importance of regrowth vegetation. My place is not recorded as being of any significance yet I have a lovely population of koalas'.

Given koalas have historically lost so much prime habitat to agriculture, pastoralism and housing, they use lesser quality, marginal, and fragmental patches of bushland and road corridors. These have now become critical koala habitat.

## ***3. Drought and high temperatures are taking a severe toll on koalas; hence access to quality habitat becomes more critical***

Koalas have been named as one species that is most endangered by climate change. This is not surprising when we consider their very restricted diet, and the low nutritional and moisture content of eucalypt leaves.

Our group has seen disease and mortality in our koalas, from dehydration and malnutrition, especially during and after droughts. We realize that in Western Queensland there have been historic major losses in koala populations due to drought.



This female koala died a few hours after photo taken. The baby she was holding disappeared (possible predation) before rescuers got there. Carers believe her condition indicated malnutrition and dehydration (July 2015 Glastonbury, west of Gympie-this area is highly cleared for grazing but has remaining fragmented bushland and a known koala population)

**4. Some State Government legislation to protect priority koala habitat from development, and to place controls on developers, does not apply outside SEQ (such as the Koala SPRP)**  
Koalas outside SEQ deserve no less protection. A whole of State review and approach to this species is required.

### **Recommendations:**

The Koala Action group fully supports the restoration of responsible and sustainable tree-clearing laws that offer much more protection to koalas, other wildlife species and to our environment.

KAG specifically seeks the restoration of protection for high value regrowth. The group does not believe this goes far enough to protect the areas in which koalas live, but is a minimum and essential step.

KAG wishes to emphasize the urgency for better protection of koala habitat given the reality of climate change.

Therefore KAG strongly supports the proposed Bill's focus on more protection of riparian vegetation, as these areas provide higher quality koala habitat, and are increasingly important in a climate change environment.\*

Beyond the Act, there needs to be strong support for landholders to protect wildlife, healthy soils and pure water supplies. We are environmental custodians for our children and this country. Changes to the Act will receive more support if there is adequate and accessible advice to make sound decisions on the land to balance farming activity and biodiversity.

### **Conclusion:**

The Koala Action Group realizes there is also a role for local government and individuals, in koala conservation, and our group works constantly in this space at the local level. However, we need a State Vegetation Management Act that does what it says it will do: to prevent loss of biodiversity, and provide a sustainable plan for our State's environment.

At a time when the koala Borobi has been chosen as our mascot for the Commonwealth Games, our State needs to demonstrate to the world that it is being proactive in conserving this unique and most loved animal, in the wild, for future generations.

Your Committee and our State representatives have this opportunity, now, to make a difference to the future viability of the koala's survival in the wild in Queensland.

The Gympie Koala Action Group is available to speak with, or appear before, the Committee if any members would like further information or input from the group.

Yours sincerely,

**Michelle Daly**

Co-Ordinator, Koala Action Group Gympie Region

\*Studies in Western Queensland have shown that in droughts koalas contracted to critical riparian habitats. Land-clearing and further fragmentation reduces the ability of koalas to move between habitats for their survival. **Drought-driven change in wildlife distribution and numbers:**

**a case study of koalas in south west Queensland** Leonie Seabrook<sup>A,E</sup>, Clive McAlpine<sup>A,B</sup>, Greg Baxter<sup>A,B</sup>, Jonathan Rhodes<sup>A,B</sup>, Adrian Bradley<sup>C</sup> and Daniel Lunney, **CSIRO PUBLISHING Wildlife Research**, 2011