

KOALA ACTION INC.

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Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
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21st March 2018

Dear Committee Members

Submission to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 ('VMOLA Bill') Inquiry.

I have been asked by members of Koala Action Inc. (KAI), Moreton Bay Koala Rescue Inc. (MBKR) and Queensland Koala Crusaders Inc. (QKC) to write a submission on the above bill and provide feedback as to its content. We are doing so in order to voice our deep concerns about the escalating decline of koalas in Queensland in particular but also the decline of other native wildlife species. This decline is predominantly related to the ongoing loss/destruction and fragmentation of habitat which includes 'High Value Regrowth' crucial to providing ongoing resources of food, shelter and dispersal opportunities for koalas and other native wildlife.

The background of the members of KAI, MBKR and QKC is varied in that some members raise orphaned koala joeys from their homes whilst others are involved in the rescue and/or care of sick and injured adult koalas as well as other wildlife. Free koala education and awareness presentations are provided to the community by all these groups. In addition, members are involved in the replanting of koala food trees and other natives in parks, reserves and open spaces as well as in the rehabilitation of secondary habitat to increase its carrying capacity.

The main objective of KAI, MBKR and QKC is to ensure the sustainability of the koala population throughout Queensland. By protecting this state's faunal emblem, an Australian animal icon also considered "a flagship" species drawing tourists from all over the world and from within this country, we are in fact protecting all the native wildlife that utilise those same ecosystems. KAI, MBKR and QKC point out that the clearing and fragmenting of habitat for development of any sort, particularly within the urban and peri urban foot print where the highest densities of koalas remain has a negative impact on koalas, both directly and indirectly ultimately affecting the sustainability of the population.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry in *Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018*. We would like to acknowledge at the onset that there are a number of good things in the Bill, and these

need to be locked in. There are also several deficiencies in the Bill, and these need to be addressed. Unfortunately, there are also some serious omissions which the Committee needs to be made aware of.

Queensland has witnessed an escalating increase in land clearing since laws and policies were seriously weakened by the Newman LNP government. It is now time to ensure our native woodlands, the native wildlife that relies on them for their habitats, and the iconic Great Barrier Reef are afforded much better protection. Over time, the community needs to see reforms leading to land clearing rates falling significantly. However, it is crucial that remaining habitat including regrowth is retained within the urban and peri urban footprint. Koala surveys undertaken over many years confirm the importance of retaining this type of 'mature' vegetation for the remaining residential koala populations. These sites also become 'sinks' for displaced koalas and other wildlife coming from areas previously cleared for development and its related infrastructure.

KAI, MBKR and QKC strongly support the government's intention to substantially strengthen Queensland's land clearing laws. Overall, we note and endorse the Bill in seeking to achieve:

- The removal of high value agriculture as a relevant clearing purpose and the scrapping of that permit process;
- The protection of high conservation value regrowing woodlands, under a broader definition that includes ecologically significant woodlands that are 15 or more years old;
- The scrapping of the Thinning 'self-assessable' accepted development clearing code;
- The extension of riparian area protections to the last three Great Barrier Reef catchments;
- The capacity to reclassify Category X into Category A;
- The reinstatement of Riverine Protection Permits; and
- The termination of current Area Management Plans.

While KAI, MBKR and QKC would prefer see the total removal of provisions for 'managing thickening', and would strongly endorse changes to the Bill in that regard, KAI, MBKR and QKC recognise that a second-based option is to have the revised processes and tests that would be established under the Bill as a means of delivering a greater level of protection for native woodlands particularly along water ways and in water catchment areas.

Notwithstanding the above support, KAI, MBKR and QKC is disappointed that the Bill includes provisions that could be used to allow new self-assessable codes (Clause 4 of the Bill); create new Area Management Plans (Clause 14 of the Bill); delay the removal of existing Area Management Plans for up to two years (Clause 14 of the Bill) and see reverting protected woodlands to unprotected Category X (Clause 13 of the Bill).

KAI, MBKR and QKC is also disappointed that the government is not proposing to substantially tighten up fodder harvesting provisions, including major restrictions and tying any clearing to official drought declaration.

There is also a deep concern that existing mapping fails to accurately define what is considered by us as 'essential koala habitat' crucial to the survival of this species along water courses, drainage swales and in regrowth areas. This applies to areas with the urban and peri urban footprint.

KAI, MBKR and QKC wish to see the Bill and associated policies strengthened to address each of these deficiencies, and respectfully ask that the Committee examine options for recommending changes to the Bill and codes accordingly.

Finally, KAI, MBKR and QKC is anxious to ensure that with the passing of the Bill, protected vegetation, be it Category B (remnant), Category C (high value regrowth), or Category R (Reef riparian), is fully, properly and accurately mapped and protected across Queensland.

While not a specific focus for this Bill, KAI, MBKR and QKC look forward to additional specific action under the Planning Act to better protect threatened species habitats in key areas of Queensland, including koalas and their habitats in southern and central parts of the state as well as within the urban and peri urban footprint.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these matters. KAI, MBKR and QKC would welcome any invitation to appear in front of the Committee or to assist your Inquiry in any other way. Should you require any further information about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

For your information, KAI, MBKR and QKC support a holistic development approach that incorporates the needs of koalas by retaining as much mature koala habitat and high value regrowth as possible, rehabilitating secondary habitat to increase its carrying capacity and replanting koala food trees and other natives to meet the needs of the residential population now and hopefully a growing koala population into the future. Members would like me to point out once again that any development will have a negative impact on the koala via reducing the amount of habitat available to them for food, shelter and dispersal opportunities. It is our ardent wish that you incorporate the ethics of the above approach into the legislation.

KAI, MBKR and QKC thank you for allowing us to provide this submission in the hope that the government will use good science to facilitate the best possible outcomes for this state's unique fauna and flora.

Should you require any further input I would like to offer myself as an 'expert witness' at any subsequent hearings on these matters? I have attached some background information that details my experience and level of expertise. It is also pertinent that I am representing three volunteer not for profit incorporated associations whose members devote a great deal of time, effort and resources to the rescue, care and rehabilitation of koalas in particular as well as other native wildlife. To date their interests and concerns do not appear to have been considered or addressed.

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

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VANDA (AKA WANDA) GRABOWSKI BACKGROUND INFORMATION

My area of expertise lies in the area of wildlife and human interaction with a particular focus on Queensland's "vulnerable" koalas. I gained a Bachelor of Science Degree majoring in Australian Environmental Studies from Griffith University in 1993. I was honoured to be nominated a finalist in the Environment Category of the Pride of Australia Medal in 2010.

My obsession with koalas began as a volunteer carer at the Moggill Koala Hospital (MKH) from August 1993 to May 2004. I continued my volunteer work at the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital (AZWH) in Beerwah from May 2004 till September 2013 taking care of sick, injured and orphaned koalas admitted from all over Southeast Queensland. I have been undertaking koala rescues for over ten years.

I am a founding member of Koala Action Inc. (KAI) formerly named Koala Action Pine Rivers Inc. (KAPR) which began its work in 2004. KAI is 'action-based' committed to "doing" rather than paying lip service to koala conservation. A key component of our work is educating the community about the koala and the perils it faces living in close proximity to humans.

KAI concentrates its activities on retaining remaining bush land habitat, rehabilitating secondary habitat to improve its carrying capacity and replanting cleared areas with koala food trees and other native trees, shrubs and grasses. KAI is committed to supporting its koala orphan carers by facilitating the creation of koala food tree plantations and subsidising costs related to raising koala joeys.

I am also actively involved in raising sick and injured orphaned koala joeys from my home. My volunteer works includes liaising with Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay Regional Council, private enterprise and other community groups to ensure the sustainability of the koala in our region.

I research, write and present papers at conferences on a range of koala related matters. As a spokesperson for Koala Action Inc. newspapers, radio and television have been utilised to encourage individuals and groups to **“retain native vegetation, rehabilitate bush land, replant koala food trees and other natives, restrain domestic animals and reduce speed on our roads when passing parks, reserves and bush land particularly at night”**.

I am a long term member of Moreton Bay Koala Rescue and have undertaken the role of Secretary for Queensland Koala Crusaders Inc. since its inception in 2012. I have held the position of President/Secretary of Koala Action Inc. for several years and continue to do so.

I was also a founding member and spokesperson for the Pine Rivers Koala Care Association which began its work in 1995. As part of our interest in the care and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned koalas I helped establish the Pine Rivers Koala Rescue Unit in 1999. I undertook rescue activities with the unit for over 5 years, before I resigned from the Association and the Rescue Unit at the end of 2004 due to unresolved “duty of care” and “animal welfare” issues.