

Martine Holberton



26 September 2022

Submission: Inquiry: The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Save the Koala) Bill 2021

How can we continue to allow the logging of native forests in Australia when the koala and other native animals are on the brink of extinction?

According to an article in the Journal for Conservation Biology 06/11/19, Australia's threatened species continue to decline or go extinct at an alarming, world leading rate. Alongside land clearing and invasive species of flora and fauna, inadequate laws and insufficient funding are the cause. The article shows that annual spending on targeted threatened species recovery is around one tenth of that spent by the U.S.

The koala is an Australian icon however our state and federal governments continue to do NOTHING to protect its existence. We don't do enough to manage fuel loads to mitigate uncontrollable bushfires, and we continue to log native forests – HABITAT to our precious native animals.

A more recent article, [published 30/08/22](#), presents an utterly terrifying view of how the environment has been monetised under the guise of so-called 'biodiversity offsets'. The auditor general's report shows that the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme is a rort, and no wonder developers aren't using it as a last resort when they are allowed to run riot over the state because the NSW Government allows them to do so.

Don't tell me this is a state matter though. This is an extinction crisis matter under the responsibility of the Federal Government and there should be no-go zones across the entire country that are off limits for developers. We rely on biodiversity for our existence so why are we continuing to cut it down, kill it and destroy it at a time when we need it more than ever?

"Key concerns around the scheme's integrity, transparency, and sustainability are also yet to be fully resolved. As such, there is a risk that biodiversity gains made through the scheme will not be sufficient to offset losses resulting from the impacts of development."

[According to a 2020 government report, NSW will have lost half the species now listed as threatened within 100 years without effective protection and management.](#)

How can the NSW Government, and other states in Australia, be allowed to pedal offsets as a measure to protect the environment? They don't work – clearly, as the corruption of the Emissions Reduction Fund has demonstrated. Offsets are now siloed and do not provide any net-positive benefit for the environment. Soon we will have renewable energy proponents fighting to 'lock up' endangered remnant and SSI classified vegetation – there won't be enough left for koala habitat, let alone enough trees to filter the air.

Projects should be blocked from developing anything near critical habitat, full stop. They should be seeking out areas where the least amount of vegetation already exists.

In the last two years, one billion native animals have been lost in the bushfires and floods. This is a conservative estimate. It is my view that the Australian government should be tightening environmental laws and spending billions, not millions, to save our irreplaceable natural heritage.

Monitoring, compliance, enforcement under the EPBC Act is ineffective. In the past, most projects have received approval and poorly designed environmental offsets have been abused. The Federal Government must establish and enforce National Environmental Standards and not 'cherry pick', to use Professor Samuel's own words.

Along with climate change, land clearing and introduced species our wildlife is being killed on the roads and through the issuing of 'crop protection permits'. We must ask ourselves whether this killing is necessary and whether there are sustainable ways we can live with our wildlife.

The Victorian state government has apparently committed to ending native forest logging by 2030. THAT IS TOO LATE.

Tasmania continues to log and clear forest for mineral extraction – these forests are irreplaceable. While the koala doesn't live in Tasmania, we are on the verge of biodiversity collapse and industry will use 'greenwashing' to tell us native forests need to be cleared if we want minerals for EVs.

It's not good enough. The environment has compromised enough.

We have reached a point where we can no longer continue 'business as usual'. There is something wrong with our environment laws – they are not robust and they are not enforced – mainly due to the vested interests of developers, farmers and miners and the unabated urban sprawl. Our wildlife, plants and animals, have reached a critical point.

The Australia State of the Environment 2021 report's key finding is summarised thus: **'In a rapidly changing environment, with unsustainable development and use of resources, the general outlook for our environment is deteriorating'**.

On a visual scorecard on page 54, under the headings of Biodiversity, Threatened species and Threatened ecological communities the grade is POOR and the overall trend DETERIORATING. The heading of this submission says it all – **this is a CRISIS**.

Action to turn round these distressing assessments can no longer wait. For future generations of Australians and for the biodiversity of the planet, I implore the Australian government to adopt the recommendations of the Samuel report; in particular, National Environmental Standards with Commonwealth oversight and the provision of human resources and funding that will stop the race to extinction of our unique native plants and animals. I also urge you to work closely with Traditional Owners as the longest living custodians of this precious country. We owe it to them, at the very least, to try to turn this around.

I await your response and YOUR ACTION.

Sincerely,

Martine Holberton