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DECEMBER 2017 NEWSLETTER



VOICELESS VICTIMS

Animals can't speak so they rely on humanity to be their voice. The situation facing koalas in NSW and Queensland is so dire that AFA has to ask whether humanity has lost its voice.

Let's take the situation facing koalas at the Ballina Pacific Highway Upgrade who are struggling to survive. The Upgrade is creating a precedent which will prohibit any legal action to protect not only koalas but our precious wildlife.

If these koalas could communicate, can we imagine what would they say?

Imagine if we were dealing with human families who have lost their homes in a war zone, who were struggling to find food and water, who can no longer find the tried and true pathways that take them to familiar places, who can't clean themselves because they're covered in dust, their eyes gritty with dirt and grime, and there's no water nearby to wash their eyes.

Imagine how the Ballina koalas deal with massive clouds of dust covering their fur, their food, their young as 300 plus heavy vehicles thunder up and down the road bordering their habitat. Already some koalas have been brought into care because they're suffering from conjunctivitis.

Imagine how a human mother would feel trying desperately to protect her young, to make sure there's food, comfort, a place to sleep in peace, to feel safe in the warm comforting hug of Mum.

Imagine the fear and the awful never-ending stress of not knowing where to find shelter, of listening to the forest crash around you, feeling the earth vibrate as loud sounds disturb everything nearby. Watching in horror as noisy massive heavy



Koala mother and joey seeking refuge on a bulldozed logpile © Briano / WWF-Aus

vehicles take over the trashed forest blasting the now bare earth where in the past you and your friends crossed back and forth, sampling the delights of fresh green leaves. Knowing there is no safety anywhere, that death is around the corner for you and your young.

Imagine trying to climb your favourite food and shelter trees, only to find your way blocked because of a big metal collar which prevents you and your baby accessing the safety of branches. Or finding another favourite tasty tree with its leaves now dead, or searching frantically for food but you're unable to climb the fences which

now imprison you and your friends.

Imagine their thirst and hunger as the fresh leaves provide for their moisture and food needs and there's no substitutes.

The situation at Wardell is almost beyond words. This week AFA was taken down Thurgate's Lane, a beautiful place of peace with magnificent old growth forests on either side of the local road, a few houses nestled in between the trees. Ancient cabbage palms, Aboriginal scar trees, countless birds, wallabies, koalas, gliders, lizards, all the creatures that bring the forest ecosystem to life.

At one end, the natural peace of the forest is a blessing of Mother Nature, at the other end lie the stumps of once living trees, the earth ripped to pieces, machinery tearing down more and more trees, more and more habitat.

In another area which is part of the Upgrade, last week a magnificent forest graced the earth with many koala feed and shelter trees.

A week later, the forest has been leveled to the ground. Big machines came in ripping every living thing out of the ground to make way for the Highway Upgrade.

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The loss of koalas and other wildlife will be a national tragedy. But the damage goes much further. Mark Graham, an ecologist with the Nature Conservation Council has written about the immense damage the route of the Ballina Upgrade with cause to biodiversity and precious ecosystems.

“Following the initial clearance of a massive swathe of native vegetation (most of it Endangered Ecological Community and all of it threatened species habitat) will be huge modifications to the structure of the landscape.

“This will involve converting parts of a coastal mountain range into fill for recently cleared wetlands (most of them Endangered Ecological Communities) and to eventually build massive embankments across the sensitive floodplain landscapes in the Bingal Creek catchment which has a positive influence on the health of the Richmond River.

“The last thing the Richmond River needs is massive destruction of coastal wetlands and degradation of coastal

floodplains. There's abundant evidence the Richmond River is very sick.

“The RMS will go down in history as a major destroyer of the globally significant biodiversity of the North Coast. It didn't have to be this way because there is so much cleared land on the North Coast entirely lacking conservation or cultural values across which the freeway could have been built to prevent impacts on this biodiversity.”

This is the legacy of the NSW and Federal governments. Destruction, death and a catastrophic loss of biodiversity.

There is one, one only licensed koala rescuer on the ground. That's it. What will happen to the forest creatures is an issue that's been completely ignored by the RMS.



ABORIGINAL ELDER SPEAKS OUT

AFA met with Mickey Ryan, Chairperson of the Bundjalung Elders Council on site.

Horrified by the sight of hundreds of burned hectares in koala habitat, exclusion fencing to prevent animals moving back and forth from their habitats, Mickey was outspoken in his condemnation of the Roads & Maritime Services and the NSW government.

“The site of the burned area along Old Bagotville road is one of the saddest things I've ever seen,” he said. “The fences appear to have been designed to ensure animals have no chance to escape. These fences are preventing koalas from getting to their food on the other side of the road.

“Putting up exclusion fences in a burned area where everything is so dry, there's so much fuel and no escape route is plain wrong. Another major fire could break out any time. The way the fences are set up animals can't get over them. The escape hutches are ridiculous, no koala is going to use

them. The RMS have created a death trap, the fences and escape hutches are amateurish. Animals that don't climb wouldn't be able to get over.

“Witnessing the situation broke my heart, for this to be allowed is just not on. Seeing the reality here brought tears to my eyes. I'm told that almost 600 feed and shelter trees have been ring-barked, I can see they're dying. All these trees are to be clear-felled, Where are koalas going to get their food and moisture needs? It's shocking to realise we're in the middle of breeding season. What kinds of stress must be happening to these animals.

“To deliberately kill their food supply by ring barking trees is just slaughter. All I could think about what who would allow this murder of native animals? What Minister would allow this?

“If you don't have trees, you don't have rain. I'm seeing damage to



koalas habitat everywhere. Things have got worse in the last couple of years, you can see koala colonies dwindle. I used to see them everywhere, now I'm flat out spotting any.

“My people had an Aboriginal Reserve in the 1920's at Modanville. When I was a child, my grandma used to take me there. The trees were full of koalas, we would cuddle them. It

was a wonderful thing to do.”

What would Mickey say to the NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian?

“Have a look around you. Get your head out of the sand and see what's going on!

“Our wildlife is becoming vulnerable everywhere. We're losing the soul of the country.

What's happening here is downright murder.”

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS REFUSE TO RESPOND TO ANY COMMUNICATION

There's a deep and growing sense of unease that Australia is, in effect, experiencing a coup d'etat by massive corporate interests who now control the destiny of this country.

An almost complete shutdown of the mainstream media on environmental issues is compounding the problems.

A common theme of concern is the complete refusal by Ministers to respond to any communications. The destruction of koala habitat at Ballina is a major focus of community and conservation organisations.

The buck stops with National Party MLC Melinda Pavey, Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight. But protests to the Minister are well nigh impossible as they can only be sent via social media or in a form on her Ministerial website which states:-

"You can send the Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight, Melinda Pavey, a message by completing the form below."

No point in waiting for a quick response. Unfortunately, there's no law in Australia that obliges Ministers to respond to communications from the public. Her staff don't respond to emails or phone calls.

No email is available for this Minister or any other NSW Ministers.

Given the immense destruction by the RMS of koala habitats, endangered ecosystems, countless numbers of threatened and endangered species as well as old growth forests as the Pacific Highway Upgrade continues its destructive path, her failure to respond to important scientific and environmental criticism and concern is shocking. Her lack of



any focus on the environmental impacts smacks of appalling ignorance or a deliberate refusal to countenance the irreversible damage which will be inflicted on the critically important biodiversity of the North Coast.

Similarly the NSW Minister for the Environment, Gabrielle has a similar form on her website with Facebook and Twitter as the only other options of contact. Her previous website insisted that only voters in her electorate may make contact.

Ms Upton worked as a solicitor at Sydney law firms which represent major corporations as well as acting as a Wall Street investment

banker at Deutsche Bank. Hardly appropriate credentials as an Environment Minister. She was previously Attorney General in the Baird government and is the member for Vaucluse.

Her continuing refusal to engage with conservation organisations or to inspect the massive damage which is being created as a result of recent legislation which repealed the Threatened Species Act, major sections of the National Parks & Wildlife Service Act and the Native Vegetation Act have left koalas and NSW wildlife completely unprotected. Conservation organisations in NSW are appalled by the complete failure of both Ministers

to engage, hold meetings, respond, or communicate.

Requests to the NSW Premier for meetings, delegations, responses to letters and submissions, can only be made via a form on her website. The usual response which may or may not arrive months later is "the Premier is too busy."

Letters to NSW bureaucrats, compliance officers and legal sections remain unanswered or brief letters are sent out by obscure politicians promising reports on investigations which never transpire.

Nor does the mainstream media press politicians for answers.



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PO BOX 414
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THE SITUATION IS DESPERATE

AFA has met with heads of some of the major conservation organisations in NSW as we rally support for the koalas throughout the state.

We've had meetings with IFAW, with the Jane Goodall Institute, W W F. We've had long discussions with the Wilderness Society, National Parks Association, North East Forest Alliance as well as engaging with many horrified scientists.

AFA has had endless meetings with lawyers at the Environmental Defenders Office and thus far, we're still seeking any possible legal action.

The RMS documents are so voluminous and complex that doing the necessary research is very time consuming and exhausting.

Our Co ordinator is at the site at least once or twice a week filming, photographing, taking scientists to see the damage.

AFA's koala crisis page on Face Book is proving a major tool in raising awareness with over 200,000 hits in one fortnight. But hits are not necessarily action and we need people to complain to their local State members.

We really need funds at this time. It is un-imagineable that we should lose the koala. The destruction has to END. Laws to protect habitat MUST BE BROUGHT INTO PARLIAMENT.

AFA is playing a critical role in this dreadful campaign. Please support the charity with your donations, we really need your help.

**For the Animals,
Sue Arnold - Co ordinator**



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