



**Australians
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Reg. Charity No. CFN12644

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FEBRUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER



NSW GOVERNMENT UNLEASHES WAR AGAINST KOALAS

The Berejiklian government has condemned koalas remaining in NSW to extinction.

There's simply no refuge for these precious, iconic creatures who are utterly defenceless. No national parks, no safe places. No political recognition of the environmental holocaust which resulted in an estimated 3 billion animals killed by the dreadful bushfires.

In spite of strong recommendations from the NSW Upper House Inquiry into koalas and their habitat, the destruction is escalating.

Take Southwest Sydney koalas. This colony numbering possibly as high as 500 animals but certainly around 300, are the largest, healthy expanding colony left in the state after the catastrophic bushfires and drought.

But they're in the way of massive urbanisation projects.

Right now, at Mt Gilead, Campbelltown, koala habitat is being cleared by LendLease in preparation for the construction of 1700 houses. No proper corridors as recommended by the Chief Scientist have been included in any plans, nor have overpasses and/or underpasses which would potentially provide some protection from car strike.

The driver of this destruction is a massive urbanisation plan developed at the request of Berejiklian (and no doubt Baird the previous premier) to the Greater Sydney Commission. At the time, under the leadership of Lucy Turnbull, PM Turnbull's wife.



CAMPBELLTOWN KOALA

50 MILLION PEOPLE?

The goal? A population of 50 million people in Australia. Turnbull and her commissioners developed the plans for what is known as the Greater MacArthur growth area which includes three city metropolises.

The Western Parkland City is one of the three city metropolises which includes: Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly.

Then there's also the Western City District Plan which includes a 20 year plan for the region focused on growth, infrastructure, "liveability"..... whatever that means with current temperatures rising to over 40 degrees.

Realising what this plan involves is

shocking. A colleague well described the authors of the plan as NUTS.

The Greater Sydney Region Plan identifies the need for an additional 725,000 dwellings within the Western City District. Campbelltown Local Government Area is located in the Western Parkland City and the Western City District.

The 725,000 houses will be built from 2016-2036. They will comprise 29 per cent of Sydney growth.



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MT GILEAD IS JUST THE BEGINNING

According to the documents AFA obtained, Mt Gilead is located within the growth area and has been identified as a land release area for urbanisation.

The Campbelltown growth area is projected to provide 39,000 dwellings and Mt Gilead has potential for 15,000 homes. Stage 1 of Mt Gilead with a mere 1,700 dwellings is just the start of this massive, mind boggling plan.

The Western District Plan includes 184,500 residences.

The entire area contains important koala habitat as well as habitat for a host of wildlife species. Included in this insane project is the western Sydney international airport with more clearing of bushland involved.

AFA has been involved in this battle for some time. But given our geographical location on the far north coast, it has not been possible to get to Campbelltown. Covid 19 has made traveling a nightmare particularly with Covid hot spots in western Sydney.

In any event, in spite of AFA organising a community strategy meeting last year, and making never ending efforts to engage Environmental Defenders

Office (EDO) lawyers, the charity has been stymied by the lack of communication, divisions in the community, and an inability to obtain relevant legal documents.

AFA understands that there is a legal challenge against the Mt Gilead project taking place but it's been impossible to find out who is launching the challenge, who the lawyers are, or the grounds for the challenge or any likely outcome.

Last year AFA organised meetings with Environment Minister Matt Kean's senior advisor, with Planning Minister Rob Stokes senior advisor, to discuss the southwest Sydney koala government sanctioned wipe out. We ensured representatives of conservation organisations and an experienced scientist were involved... all to no avail.

The EDO will now only take on one client. A conservation organisation that doesn't engage in lawsuits was the client. As the time frame for the



STOCK IMAGE - SYDNEY URBAN SPRAWL

start of bulldozing of koala habitat drew close, AFA again attempted to engage EDO lawyers since no legal action was apparent and some potential violations of Federal legislation had been identified.

We called a senior lawyer and asked whether EDO was still involved in Campbelltown koalas with the same client. The lawyer didn't know. Our emails requesting this information have not been answered. AFA's hands are tied.

The EDO has completely changed its method of operation, making life a lot more difficult for community groups unfortunately.

LendLease's Mt Gilead project is just the beginning of Australia being flooded with immigration (when the pandemic is finally over).

The carrying capacity of this ancient land is extremely limited because of the shortage of water and agricultural lands. A population of 50 million will live in a concrete desert, devoid of wildlife, bird song and nature.

Through our Facebook Koala Crisis page we have encouraged thousands of people who regularly visit the page to send protest emails to LendLease, Berejiklian and relevant Ministers.

All protests are ignored. This is one arrogant government!

NSW COASTAL FORESTS LOGGING TO ENSURE WILDLIFE EXTINCTION

For the past several months, AFA has been deeply involved in researching the potential to run a major lawsuit which would be a precedent, focused on ending logging in remaining, unburned forests.

Although we were confident that a lawsuit could be filed late last year, the complexities of pulling together a legal challenge have been extraordinarily difficult. Fortunately, we have been able to engage some highly qualified senior counsel to provide advice.

AFA is also working with EDO lawyers (thankfully) and we've already had a long conference call which will soon be followed by more discussion as we try to pinpoint a challenge. Just to give you an example of the complexities, our Coordinator explained to AFA Chairman, the issues involved in the potential lawsuit.

It took nearly 45 minutes. Chairman of AFA is former Senator Dr Norm Sanders who is well versed in legal

and political action. He's still shaking his head over the difficulties and the sheer extent of destruction.

Under NSW legislation, the Forestry Act contains a provision which completely prohibits any legal standing. In other words, this provision prevents any legal challenge by the public. Finding a way to get around this prohibition has involved lawyers working on High Court matters, academic lawyers, finding barristers who might be willing to act on AFA's behalf, researching the provision in case law which prohibits public citizen legal challenges.

In the meantime, the Forestry Corporation is targeting remaining primary koala hubs. A very significant loss of biodiversity is happening every day logging continues.



LOGGING A NIGHTMARE FOR WILDLIFE

An in depth analysis of the wildlife species impacted by the logging operations by AFA shows that almost every animal targeted by logging is either listed as vulnerable or endangered under NSW and federal legislation.

Koalas, Greater Gliders and Yellow Bellied Gliders are copping the brunt of these logging operations. Almost every logged compartment has Koalas and Yellow Bellied Gliders, animals with no chance of surviving the bulldozers.

The Environment Protection Authority requested a report on timber harvesting in burned landscapes from Dr Andrew Smith, a top scientist. He delivered his report in mid September, 2020.

This is what he had to say:

- In 2019/20, extreme wildfires burnt 37-42% of public forests in NSW and caused unprecedented reduction in the distribution and abundance of key threatened species including the fire sensitive Koala.
- The primary effect of fire and past

logging was to restrict fauna populations to a series of small, fragmented and isolated patches of unburnt or lightly burnt forest.

- Fauna populations surviving in fire refuges in state forests are at risk of elimination by timber harvesting under normal approvals which could prevent recovery, and cause catastrophic population decline in species such as the Koala, Greater Glider and Yellow Bellied Glider.
- The time required for recovery of threatened and sensitive species after average fires ranges from around 10-120 years. Up to 45 years for the Koala and 20-120 years for the Greater Glider and Yellow Bellied Glider.

In September 2020, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that two thirds of "harvestable" native forests



YELLOW-BELLIED GLIDER (PETAURUS AUSTRALIS)

were damaged by summer fires. According to data compiled by the department of regional NSW shows that almost 430,000 hectares of harvestable native forests were damaged by fire or about 62 per cent of the total.

Dr Smith's review recommended the implementation of a whole new suite of standards that take into account the impacts of both wildlife and timber harvesting largely focused on regulation of biodiversity impacts at logging compartments.

He also recommended new conditions that focus on permanent protection of large forest patches

which provide wildlife oases after fire.

Dr Smith's most important recommendation was for the EPA to create Site Specific Operating Conditions to provide temporary protection from logging for all unburnt and lightly burnt forests for 12 months. This pause would at least give forests and wildlife a chance to recover.

Needless to say, the Forestry Corporation and the Berejiklian government have ignored the recommendations, instead discussing ways of increasing timber harvesting to make up for the major financial losses incurred in the bushfires.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PATHETIC

The Federal Government's Threatened Species Scientific Committee is currently assessing whether the Koala and the Greater Glider should be upgraded to endangered status under the EPBC Act. No decision will be made until October 2021. There's no provisions in the EPBC Act for emergency listing.

Not only is the time frame for any decision to upgrade outrageous but... if the Federal Minister for Environment, Sussan Ley, decides not to upgrade these two species, that's the end of the story. Any upgrade, in the final analysis, depends entirely on the whim of the Minister.

Forestry Corp should not be logging in areas where Koalas and Greater Gliders have their habitats as a result of the assessment by the Federal Scientific Committee. A responsible state government would halt any logging in these habitats at least until the Federal Committee and the Minister have made a decision.

In the meantime, the Morrison government is doing everything in its



GREATER GLIDER
IMAGE BY ESTHER BEATON

power to further weaken environmental protection for any wildlife species. So far, their efforts to ram weakened legislation through Parliament have failed.



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POLITICAL CHOICES

There's strong rumours that there will be an early Federal election this year. Voters options leave poor choices. Labor's Anthony Albanese pushed the environment to the bottom of policy concerns and is no friend of wildlife. Latest news is that he intends to remove Mark Butler from the Climate portfolio and downgrade any Labor efforts to make climate change a priority policy.

PM Morrison and his cabinet have zero concern for climate change, its impacts on wildlife or the environment. Federal Green Party appears to have completely discounted wildlife as an issue, with the only action yet another petition to save koalas, doomed to end up in a ministerial wastepaper basket.

Australia is at a critical crossroads. The catastrophic bushfires incinerated 3 billion animals according to scientists from the University of NSW who investigated the death toll. In spite of promises by the Federal government to provide millions of dollars to help wildlife recover, the Koala missed out completely.

Not one dollar was allocated in bushfire relief funds. In November 2020, Ley announced an \$18 million koala package to fund health research, medical support weed control, fencing and a national audit of koala populations. \$2 million was

for a national audit of koala populations.

What a disaster. \$2 million would go nowhere in terms of estimating koala populations in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. Estimates were to be undertaken by citizen scientists, sigh... No proper methodology, no likelihood of any scientifically acceptable estimate.

And no dollars for the acquisition of habitat. The only solution likely to save koalas.

In 2018, AFA researched every single local government area in NSW with koalas to establish the most current estimate of koala populations. Some of the studies were years old, a few were more current. But at least the research provided a baseline of how many koalas remained in NSW.

It was hard to get past 12,000 koalas. Then the catastrophic bushfires preceded by drought followed with massive losses. Scientifically, the best



DISTRESSED KOALA OUTSIDE GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY ON THE GOLD COAST

way to get a handle on the number of koalas left in NSW is to use the 2018 baseline to find out how many local government areas were impacted by koalas and how many have been lost from that area.

Unfortunately, this was just too simple for the government. Particularly one hell bent on spending taxpayer dollars on the most insignificant policies destined to ensure ongoing extinction.

THE LINE IN THE SAND

This is where we are today. Unless we stop these governments with massive public protests and lawsuits, Australia's iconic wildlife will be a memory.

Zoos and shelters with koalas and other unique wildlife will be the only reminders of what we have lost.

AFA is doing everything we can. We have a lot of help from scientists and lawyers but what we're attempting to do is create an historical precedent.

The Bob Brown Foundation is trying a similar precedent in Tasmania and Friends of the Leadbeater Possum are also in court in Victoria.

NSW is a legal nightmare! Please stay with our journey and support AFA.

Sue Arnold & Friends.



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HELP
SAVE
THE
KOALAS**

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