

Public submission

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I am writing to strongly urge the immediate cessation of native forest logging in New South Wales (NSW). This practice is not only ecologically unsustainable but is actively contributing to the decline and possible extinction of numerous species that rely on these forests, including the iconic koala, the greater glider, and the Glossy black cockatoo. Native forest logging, compounded by the impacts of bushfires, land clearing, and climate change, is pushing these species to the brink of extinction. Effective and immediate management of our native forests is critical, and the government must act now to protect these irreplaceable ecosystems and their inhabitants.

Native Forest Logging is Ecologically and Economically Unsustainable

The relentless logging of native forests in NSW is not only detrimental to biodiversity but is also economically unsustainable. The Forestry Corporation of NSW has consistently overestimated the amount of harvestable timber, leading to intensified logging efforts to meet quotas, which in turn diminishes forest health and resilience. Since 2010, the yield from public native forests has declined by 40%, indicating the extent of ecological exhaustion and the unsustainable nature of current practices.

Logging of mature trees depletes biomass, reduces carbon storage, and removes critical food sources and hollow-bearing trees that are essential for 174 species in NSW, including the greater glider and the glossy black cockatoo. Research shows that these hollow-bearing trees, once removed, cannot be replaced within human timescales, leading to permanent habitat loss for many forest-dependent species (Lindenmayer et al., 2021).

Moreover, native forest logging increases fire risk by creating drier, more open conditions, disrupts water cycles, and reduces the overall health and functionality of our waterways. These ecological damages, combined with the ongoing loss of habitat, pose a direct threat to the survival of many species and compromise the environmental integrity of the regions in which logging occurs.

Flawed Research Justifying Continued Logging

One of the key justifications for the continued logging of native forests in NSW is the reliance on flawed research, particularly the work of Bradley Law, which has been used to suggest that logging can coexist with the conservation of species like koalas. However, multiple ecologists and conservationists have criticized this research for being scientifically inadequate, often failing to account for the long-term impacts of habitat fragmentation and degradation.

According to Sue Higginson's review of Law's research, the methodologies applied do not adequately measure the real effects of logging on wildlife populations. The NSW Forestry Commission has utilised these findings to argue that their operations are not harmful to biodiversity, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. The research fails to reflect the cumulative damage caused by the continued removal of mature trees, which serve as critical habitats for endangered species like the greater glider and the glossy black cockatoo (Higginson, 2022). Independent studies have repeatedly shown that logging leads to habitat loss, increased fire risk, and the depletion of carbon stores, all of which exacerbate the threats to biodiversity (Lindenmayer et al., 2021).

Devastating Impacts on Koalas and Other Threatened Species

The koala is a flagship species for the urgent need to protect our native forests. Findings from the "Koala Populations and Habitat in New South Wales Inquiry," based on over 300 submissions, indicate that koalas in NSW could face extinction by 2050 without immediate government intervention. Habitat destruction and fragmentation, predominantly driven by land clearing and logging, are the primary threats to their survival. Koala populations have declined by an estimated

26% over the past three generations (approximately 15-21 years), a trend that is expected to continue if current management practices remain unchanged (NSW Chief Scientist Report, 2020).

Alternative estimates suggest a population loss of up to 50% since 1990, leaving as few as 15,000 koalas remaining in NSW. The once-thriving populations that numbered between 8 and 11 million koalas in the early 1900s have been decimated, primarily due to human activity, including large-scale deforestation and habitat conversion. A stark example is the Coffs Harbour region, where ongoing logging activities continue to destroy critical koala habitat (WIRES, 2020). Given these grim realities, any further clearing or logging of known koala habitats must be immediately halted to prevent the irreversible loss of this iconic species.

Threats to the Greater Glider and Glossy black cockatoo

The greater glider (*Petauroides volans*) is highly dependent on mature, hollow-bearing trees for den sites. Recent research has shown that habitat fragmentation, logging, and the compounding effects of climate change have resulted in severe population declines. Due to its slow reproductive rate and specific habitat requirements, the greater glider is highly sensitive to environmental disturbances, making it unlikely to recover without targeted conservation measures (NESP Threatened Species Recovery Hub, 2022).

Similarly, the Glossy black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) relies heavily on mature casuarina trees for feeding and large hollow-bearing eucalypts for nesting. Habitat fragmentation and loss are the main drivers of its decline in NSW. The ongoing clearing of these habitats for logging and development poses a direct threat to the long-term viability of this species. Protecting and expanding suitable habitats, particularly casuarina stands, is critical for ensuring the survival of the Glossy black cockatoo (NSW Environment and Heritage Report, 2023).

Immediate and Proactive Government Action is Imperative

The NSW Government has pledged to double koala numbers by 2050. To achieve this, immediate action is needed to halt the clearing of koala habitats, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas. Protecting existing habitats, establishing a comprehensive Koala National Park, and expanding wildlife corridors are essential steps to prevent extinction and support population recovery. The proposed Koala National Park would encompass over 315,000 hectares of public forest, providing a secure refuge for koalas and other threatened species.

The government must:

- Immediately prohibit the clearing of all known koala habitats, including those areas highly likely to be used by koalas.
- Immediately cease all logging in the proposed Koala National Park by State Forests.
- Protect existing habitats through inclusion in National Parks and other protected areas.
- Invest in large-scale restoration of koala habitat and expansion of wildlife corridors to a minimum width of 450 metres, ensuring connectivity between isolated populations.

The Role of Native Forests in Climate Change Mitigation

Protecting native forests is not just about conserving biodiversity; it is also crucial for climate change mitigation. Native forests in NSW store large amounts of carbon, and logging releases approximately 3.6 million tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere each year. Ending native forest logging would equate to taking 840,000 cars off the road annually. Allowing logged forests to regrow and mature would

enable them to regain lost carbon and contribute significantly to meeting NSW's emission reduction targets (Keith et al., 2022).

The future of NSW's native forests—and the species that depend on them—depends on immediate and decisive action. The cessation of native forest logging will safeguard critical habitats, protect vulnerable species like the koala, greater glider, and Glossy black cockatoo, and contribute to climate change mitigation. It is time for the NSW Government to prioritize ecological integrity over short-term economic gains and to honour its commitments to protect our state's precious biodiversity.

I implore the Independent Forestry Panel to recommend an immediate end to all native forest logging in NSW and to prioritize the establishment of permanent, well-managed protected areas for the benefit of current and future generations.

References:

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