



Rockhampton 7<sup>th</sup> April 2021

**Koala Research – CQ**  
**a community funded research program**  
**hosted by CQUniversity**

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Save the Koala) Bill 2021**

Dear Secretary,

We are members of Koala Research – CQ, a research group at the Central Queensland University. Our group's focus is on koala conservation. Dr Rolf Schlagloth, Dr Flavia Santamaria, Dr Michael Hewson & Dr Alistair Melzer all have an extensive background in koala research.

Our research spans from Central Queensland to SE Queensland and Victoria.

We are fully aware of the risks associated with habitat loss, climate change and drought, koala populations are facing throughout their range (including populations in Victoria). We agree that something needs to be done to ensure the long-term survival of this Australian endemic marsupial flagship species.

While we generally support the idea of protecting koala habitat, it is not clear what the full purpose of the moratorium is. We acknowledge that a temporary suspension of habitat clearance is proposed, but no specifics are given on time limit or the conditions under which the moratorium would be lifted.

A blanket national moratorium, albeit inspirational, is a difficult goal to achieve in our society, given the different circumstances for, and laws governing, the different states and councils. A targeted moratorium, with clearly defined justification and consequent actions may be more achievable.

The apparent focus of the act is on land clearing or habitat fragmentation which are certainly, as already mentioned, major threats to koala persistence. However, climate change and variability are equally important. We would like to point to the need for recognition, and the role, of koala population and habitat refugia (some habitat may be currently unoccupied but needed in future), as the appropriate

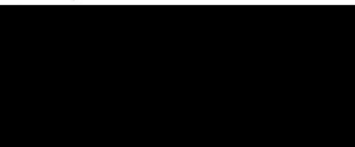
management of the vegetation (in relation to fire and clearing) in those refugia or, in the case of offsets, recovering habitat on landscapes that previously would have acted as refugia. We note that the majority of koala populations and koala habitat is retained on private lands, and in Queensland under a rangeland grazing regime. We believe that one mechanism that may be applied to encourage habitat protection is providing a package of incentives for property owners who currently retain, or are willing to retain, koala habitat.

We observe that the proposed moratorium on the clearing of koala habitat will require substantial inter-governmental dialogue if the current Australian Government plans to devolve the environmental regulation to State Governments under legislative changes planned to the EPBC Act take place. In the past, on matters of Ecological Sustainable Development (ESD), such multi-lateral dialogue has been reportedly ineffective (EIANZ 2020). Although Samuel (2020 p. viii) notes that; ‘legally enforceable National Environmental Standards are the centrepiece of the recommended reforms’ to the EPBC Act, recent media reporting on the mooted environmental legislative devolution to State Governments works against the aspiration of the proposed amendments. It is difficult to imagine that a moratorium on koala habitat changes will be effective without the recommended *Samuel centrepiece* securely intact.

Further, Binskin et al. (2020) note that Australia needs a national approach to natural disasters, given the deleterious bushfire effects on koala habitat. The role of the Commonwealth in ‘whole-of-nation’ cooperation and coordination would appear to be imperative.

Thank you for considering our submission, we are, of course, willing to expand on our submission if required, in person if preferred.

On behalf of Koala Research – CQ



Dr Rolf Schlagloth, KR-CQ, CQUniversity, Central Queensland Innovation and Research Precinct (CQIRP),



## References

Binskin, M., Bennett, A. & Macintosh, A. 2020. *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

EIANZ, 2020. *EIANZ EPBC Act Review Submission*. The Environmental Institute of Australia and New Zealand, Balwyn.

Samuel, G. 2020. *Independent Review of the EPBC Act - Final Report*. Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra.