



**Australian  
Koala  
Foundation**

A.C.N. 010 922 102

## **Federal Environment Minister Frydenberg Shirks Responsibility to Save the Koala**

Monday, 6 February 2017

Australian Koala Foundation asks State Governments whether there is an orchestrated strategy that further threatens the survival of Koalas and their habitat.

Both the New South Wales and Queensland Governments have curiously chosen Friday 3rd March as the closing day for public submissions on their Koala 'strategy' with both States cherry-picking consultants for inclusion in their respective plans.

The matching timing has raised eyebrows at the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) with CEO Deborah Tabart OAM questioning the 'convenient coincidence' of the closing dates. She adds that it seems the enormous challenge of ensuring the Koala and their habitat's survival is being left to the States, despite a Senate Report that the States are "incapable" of undertaking this task.

Ms Tabart has asked Federal Minister for the Environment Josh Frydenberg whether he and the Federal Government are abrogating their responsibility for a Koala Recovery Plan, as mandated by a federal listing under the EPBC Act in 2012. The Koala Recovery Plan was due to be finalised by the end of 2014.

"It seems to me that the Minister is more intent on approving coal mines in Koala habitat than actually doing his job; to protect the Koala," Ms Tabart said.

Shockingly, Koalas in the South-East Queensland Regional Plan (SEQRP) have been reduced to a mention of less than 50 words. While the New South Wales plan fails to take any definitive action to save Koalas. The SEQRP will use the findings of their panel to finalise decisions on development in the region until 2031, while the NSW Government's Community Consultation process ends on 20 February, giving the community less than a fortnight to consider submissions. All very rushed, and with huge consequences for the Koala, everyone has to slow down, Ms Tabart says.

The governments are asking for interested parties to make their submissions toward a strategy aimed at saving Koalas. Yet the AKF, as the principal non-profit, non-government Koala and Koala habitat conservation organisation, is best-placed to provide advice but inexplicably has not been consulted. Ms Tabart has written to Mr Frydenberg, questioning his willingness to take responsibility to protect the Koala populations of Australia.

"Is Mr Frydenberg even aware that the Senate inquiry was of the opinion that the States are incapable of protecting the Koala? The AKF is very fearful that the Minister is asking the States to take over his role as custodian of the Koala," Ms Tabart said. "It's hard not to believe that Mr Frydenberg is shirking his responsibilities as Minister for the Environment by refusing to write a Koala Recovery Plan which should have been finalised in 2014."

Recent changes to government policies on land clearing and to the SEPP 44 regulations in NSW have already weakened laws that pave the way for unchecked development and



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massive land clearing Ms Tabart says. Over the last two years, 80,000 hectares of Koala has been cleared on the eastern seaboard.

The Report of the Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Key Areas of NSW: December 2016 by Chief Scientist and Engineer to the Government of New South Wales, Professor Mary O’Kane, covers much the same ground as previous reports and lacks strategic direction and critical thinking in all areas of Koala research and survival.

The report makes several recommendations, but these stem from inexperienced sources and already disproven research. It offers broad and vague concepts such as ‘sharing information’ among conflicted interest groups; i.e. land managers and local government, but fails to provide a strategy that will benefit the Koala.

Meanwhile in Queensland, an analysis of changes to the Urban Footprint in the released draft of the SEQRP show that an additional 5,900 hectares of preferred Koala habitat will be made available for development. An additional 1,500 hectares will be classified as Rural Living Areas which further threatens the Koala. The AKF’s request to the Queensland Premier to enforce a moratorium on the removal of all Koala habitat has thus far been ignored and given her own Minister for the Environment Steven Miles has said the Koala is in dire straits and functionally extinct – you have to wonder why?

“What is needed is a Federal Koala Protection Act, including a recovery plan that will give the Koalas and their habitat the best chance of survival, but what we’re getting time and time again is watered down laws, platitudes and complete ignorance of the real issues at hand,” Ms Tabart says. “It is clear to me that industry is setting the agenda in both States.”

The AKF, as the peak independent funding body for Koala research in the country, has for 30 years collated reliable scientific data on Koala numbers and habitat.

“Rather than focus on vegetation available for the Koala, current State Government plans are based on ‘predictive Koala habitat mapping’ produced by industry for the Queensland Government several years ago, which bases its findings on sightings, a flawed methodology that does not represent the true distribution of Koalas,” Ms Tabart said. “This sort of thinking leads to an overestimation of numbers, inaccurate mapping and we absolutely refute there are 36,000 Koalas in NSW as predicted in the Chief Scientists Report.

“Using proven and tested research methodologies, the AKF estimates Koala numbers in Queensland to be sitting as low as 12,170 and NSW numbers to be as low as 8,500. These figures should be sending shockwaves across all levels of government. What will they do when Mr Putin visits again; Koala diplomacy may be difficult to enact.”

The AKF is disappointed that current State Government plans fail to adequately address key factors that continue to threaten the Koalas and their habitat. It takes this opportunity to repeat its call for the implementation of a Federal Koala Protection Act and the enactment of a Federal Recovery Action Plan to ensure the survival of a national icon.

### Contact:

**Deborah Tabart OAM | CEO Australian Koala Foundation | 0407-750668**