



**Australian  
Koala  
Foundation**

ACN 010 922 102

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **‘The Koala Woman’ calls on the Prime Minister to honour his COP26 pledge by enacting the Koala Protection Act now**

**Thursday 11 November 2021**

As the COP26 Summit draws to a close, the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) has issued a message for all global citizens that the Australian Government is not telling the whole truth about land clearing in Australia; one of the key issues that affects our carbon emissions.

After reluctantly agreeing to attend the Summit in Glasgow, Prime Minister Morrison was left with little choice but to join the 100+ world leaders who pledged to end and reverse deforestation by 2030. On face value, this would appear to be an incredible step forward – but, AKF has warned that this pledge is nothing more than ‘smoke and mirrors’ disguising a barrage of bulldozers.

Our Government data on deforestation is notoriously dodgy - understated, inaccurate and swayed to make land clearing look like a non-issue.

- Australia’s Federal Government considers land with 20% tree cover to be a ‘forest’. So, land completely covered by trees can be cleared by up to 80% and still not be considered ‘deforestation’.
- Trees only need to reach the height of 2m to be considered ‘forest’ – yet, trees this size do nothing for the environment in terms of carbon storage nor providing safe animal habitat.
- Australia is releasing far more emissions from deforestation than reported to the United Nations.

If you read the ‘fine print’ of the COP26 deforestation pledge, AKF notes:

- The pledge has no basis in reality unless individual nations legislate to make deforestation illegal.
- It only applies to the international definition of deforestation: forest which is permanently lost to other uses like agriculture, resource extraction, or housing. This is despite the best scientific minds in the world agreeing the natural forest is irreplaceable and replanting is not simply the ‘solution’.
- Similar pledges, eg. The New York Declaration on Forests in 2014 not only failed to reduce deforestation, but saw land clearing accelerate at alarming rates.

AKF Chair, Deborah Tabart OAM, said “I have been watching this smoke and mirrors approach when I first saw the National Carbon Accounting Scheme mentioned when it stopped the Koala being listed under the EPBC Act in 2006. That Minister for the Environment argued that there were more forests than there had been in 1980. I remember thinking ‘what the heck is going on here?’. Now, 15 years later and the same old game is going on still. Suggesting that a two metre high tree is a forest or of any use for a healthy koala population is just nonsense.”

“The COP26 deforestation pledge by Australia is yet another addition to the Government’s game of cat and mouse. Laden with loopholes and lacking any legal basis whatsoever, this is nothing but a token gesture to distract us from the barrage of bulldozers that will continue to roll out towards 2030. That is why we need a Koala Protection Act and now .”

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Deborah, who has been in her role at AKF for over 30 years said she has sadly seen it all before.

“Over the years, Ministers have written to me and justified their inaction to protect the Koala, on the basis of a ‘lack of evidence’, whilst assuring me that although they know it will be ‘disappointing’ news to me, they still said no to a listing. It took 6 more years to get the Koala listed as Vulnerable under federal laws in 2012. The Koala is in trouble now and needs protection right now. Australia is not the third world and we theoretically have the right governance to achieve this pledge but do we? When I was in Copenhagen I remember one session where it argued that unless you have true governance and enforcement of laws in any country, that any pledge will just not work unless governance is front and centre. Let us hope the Prime Minister does mean what he says and I call on him to enact the Koala Protection Act in 2022 – that will prove he means business in this space.”

**For further information about AKF’s stance on the protection of natural forests, including the Koala Protection Act as a legislative basis, visit [savethekoala.com](http://savethekoala.com)**

### FAST FACTS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL FORESTS:

- Once intact forests are gone, it’s impossible to regain the carbon lost. This is known as ‘[irrecoverable carbon](#)’.
- When we cut down large amounts of big, old forest that has been storing carbon for thousands of years, half of that storage is in the soil and half of it is in the trees. When cut down, immediately 60 per cent of stored carbon is released into the sky.
- Replanting is better than a permanent loss, but it is not the solution. It can take 2000 saplings over 2000 square metres of land just to replace 1 tree the size of a telegraph pole.
- NSW & QLD have amended legislation in recent years to make land clearing easier, not harder.
- In 2018 AKF conducted studies which revealed Koala habitat was being cleared at twice the rate of other landscapes here in Queensland.

**SOURCE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** [Australia’s emissions from land clearing likely far higher than claimed, analysis indicates, The Guardian.](#)

### VIDEO & GRAPHIC ASSETS:

- AKF explainer video: [‘When Carbon and Koalas Collide’](#)
- AKF website: [Carbon Capacity Of Koala Forests](#)
- AKF explainer graphics: [Here](#)

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