



Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

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January 20, 2020

Honorable Matthew Kean
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

To the Honorable Mr Kean,

The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and its members would like to thank you for your decision to expand Heathcote National Park with the addition of 140 hectares of land adjacent to the Garrawarra Centre and for your response to our October 8 letter that expressed concerns about increased land clearing. It is heartening to hear of the NSW government's target of adding 200,000 hectares of land to National Parks within the next two years and of funds dedicated to purchase and preservation of habitat for threatened species.

The ongoing bush fires have devastated populations of native flora and fauna along with their habitats, making the existence of wildlife corridors, such as Garrawarra, even more critical. It is also encouraging to see a rapid assessment of impacted areas by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/fire/park-recovery-and-rehabilitation/recovering-from-2019-20-fires/understanding-the-impact-of-the-2019-20-fires>.

It is clear that the extent of these fires is unprecedented and will require prioritizing habitat conservation over agricultural, development and resource extraction interests if there is to be any chance of preventing a massive and permanent loss of our unique flora and fauna. The website that you referred us to for vegetation loss shows a tripling of land clearing for agriculture for 2017-18 (most recent) compared to 2014-15, before the announcement of the Biodiversity Act Legislation. In a meeting with Mark Speakman a few months ago, he indicated he was aware of this problem, so I hope some rapid solutions are being implemented.

The impact of the fires on koalas is already apparent. The speed and intensity of burning through areas with some of the largest and healthiest koala populations has added to the uphill battle to prevent extinction of this iconic species. According to the DPIE, fires have burnt through more than 24% of all koala habitat in eastern NSW. Our members are

concerned and are requesting us to advocate for protection of koala-suitable habitat. We are working with the National Parks Association, Nature Conservation Council and several other local environmental groups on this campaign and would be greatly appreciative of your assistance.

Briefly, we suggest four avenues that can be taken in the short term to bolster the recovery of koalas:

1. Introduce a moratorium on clearing of native vegetation until effective systems for monitoring and ensuring compliance are in place. Clearing and logging of recognised koala habitat must be halted immediately.
2. Urgently address hotspots for koala roadkill by installing crossings and supporting infrastructure. Heathcote Road, is one such spot for which the Southern Branch of the National Parks Association is advocating the addition of a funnel-shaped structure at Deadman's creek to guide animals to a safe crossing.
3. Acquire additional land for inclusion in National Parks. We have reiterated areas in the Sutherland Shire, which we recommended to you via Mark Speakman include unburnt koala habitat. See (a-c) below.
4. Assist with the nomination of the Royal National Park for World Heritage status as it has supported healthy koala populations prior to the 1994 fires and is likely to do so in the future. When we met at the National Parks Association Dinner on November 9 last year, you responded enthusiastically to the request to nominate the Royal National Park for World Heritage Status. A follow-up letter with detailed justification for the nomination was sent to you on November 22 from our Spokesperson, Bob Crombie.

Suggested Acquisition for National Parks - Koala Habitat in the Sutherland Shire

- a. 50 Otford Road - a section of wet sclerophyll/closed forest is for sale for ~\$1 million. It doesn't adjoin the Royal NP but has important ecological value in providing wildlife corridor linkages between Royal National Park, Garawarra State Conservation Area and the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area and catchment of the Hacking River. Species such as the greater glider which is effectively extinct in Royal National Park after the disastrous 1994 fires, may well depend on recolonisation from the Southern moist forests. Also linkages south need to be maintained to enable species migration as average temperatures increase due to climate change.
- b. Woronora River - there are multiple sections that could be acquired to form a Woronora River Regional park.

c. Menai West - land belonging to the local Aboriginal land council could be acquired and added to the Georges River National park, if the land council is amenable.

Lastly, we greatly appreciate your strong public statement about the need to address climate change by reducing emissions as it is evident that climate-change induced drought is a major threat to the survival of the koala as well as numerous other species. The majority of the public is greatly concerned about climate change so politicians, like yourself who recognise that we can and need to do more are to be commended.

We thank you for the dedication you show to your portfolio!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tassia Kolesnikow', positioned to the left of a vertical line.

Tassia Kolesnikow

Chair, Sutherland Shire Environment Centre