

NSW allowed logging on koala habitat

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The NSW Government has allowed 2000ha of koala habitat to be logged at Coffs Harbour in northern NSW, despite a local koala conservation plan endorsed by the local council, a Senate inquiry has heard.

One of Australia's leading koala researchers, Alistair Melzer, has accused federal environment bureaucrats of doing little to avoid "an escalating conservation crisis" as koala populations decline.

Dr Melzer, who heads Central Queensland University's koala research centre, told the Senate environment committee inquiry it appeared that Canberra's bureaucrats "do not seem to be sensitive to the real state of the environment".

The six-month inquiry, into the conservation status and sustainability of Australia's koalas, is investigating threats to the future survival of the species.

In his submission, former Coffs Harbour City Council deputy mayor Rod McKelvey said the NSW Department of Environment's private native forestry division granted logging permits which resulted in the loss of 2000ha of "core koala habitat" protected by the council's koala conservation plan. Mr McKelvey said the department subsequently argued the plan "did not fall under" NSW environmental planning policy.

"I do not want to be included in the generation who stood by and did nothing while we systematically destroyed koala habitat, making it almost impossible for them to live here," he said.

Gunnedah farmer Susan Lyle, who has koalas on her three properties, raised concerns about a mining exploration licence issued for open-cut coal mining in the region.

"Our koalas will be decimated. This mining licence is primarily in isolation and to allow such a development is sheer lunacy ... There are many, many other resources that can be used for energy, but there is no replacement for the koala," she said.

For more on this story, including details of the impact of road kill, dog attacks and suburban fences on the koala population, see the print edition of today's Canberra Times.



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