

CASE STUDY 3

HABITAT LOSS KOALAS AND THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

Almost 300,000 hectares of native bushland is cleared every year in Queensland. Eastern Australia is now one of 11 global deforestation fronts. Many of the ecosystems being cleared are ostensibly protected as threatened ecological community listings under the federal EPBC Act, and are incredibly important habitat for native species and biodiversity conservation.

Habitat loss continues to be the key threatening process to the long-term survival of the koala and is being compounded by numerous other threats that are acting synergistically.

Failure of the current system

The Queensland Government changed its land clearing laws in 2012 and clearing rates have since skyrocketed. Between 2014-2016 the Queensland Government allowed 84,000 hectares of koala habitat to be cleared. This is despite the koala being a protected threatened species under both Queensland and federal law.

Brigalow woodlands were the most cleared threatened ecological community in Queensland with more than 55,000 hectares of non-remnant and 12,000 hectares of remnant vegetation proposed for clearing or already cleared between 2013 and 2015. This is despite Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla dominant and co-dominant*) being protected as a threatened ecological community under the federal EPBC Act.

Clearing significant tracts of threatened woodlands and koala habitat should trigger intervention from the federal environment minister to assess clearing proposals. The law fails on two fronts. It fails because landholders neglect to refer their clearing proposals and because the Federal Government neglects to enforce the law. Or it fails because the law does not



deal well with cumulative impacts and each individual act of clearing falls under approval thresholds, leaving precious habitats to suffer death by a thousand cuts.

How the new system will help koalas and threatened ecological communities

The intention of our national environmental law is not being realised. Relaxed land clearing controls at the state level are causing serious impacts on threatened species and ecological communities and the Federal Government is not enforcing the law.

New laws will require the Federal Government to adopt a policy to end deforestation in Australia. A priority action for the Federal Government is to stop the clearing of threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat and ensure these critical areas are protected. There will be much stronger protection for critical habitats for threatened species. All levels of government will be required to cooperate with species and threatened ecological community recovery.

The new National Environment Protection Authority will have the power to identify illegal clearing and undertake investigations and prosecutions, independent from political influence. The Sustainable Australia Commission will report to parliament and the public on clearance rates and on performance to achieve recovery indicators for threatened ecological communities and species.