



Submission: The Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

This submission relates to the Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (“the Plan”), which concerns approximately 200,000 hectares from north of Windsor to the south of Picton, and from the Hawkesbury—Nepean River in the west to the Georges River near Campbelltown in the east. The Plan has been developed to offset the detrimental environmental impacts of the new urban growth centres of Greater Macarthur, Wilton, the Greater Penrith to Eastern Creek Investigation Area and to some extent the Western Sydney Aerotropolis.

The region’s environmental significance is well documented, with eight threatened ecological communities, 25 flora species and 24 fauna species. Many of these species are unique to this precious subregion. I fear the Plan will put these ecological communities in jeopardy, including the thriving and still expanding South West Sydney koala population – which may well be placed on a path to extinction.

Earlier this year, I sat as Deputy Chair of a parliamentary inquiry into koala populations and habitat in NSW. The inquiry found koalas could be extinct in NSW before 2050 unless we act now. The inquiry tabled 42 recommendations including creating new national parks and ruling out logging of trees in old growth forests.

As a Parliamentarian, knowing that the Cumberland plain is home to the largest koala population in Greater Sydney and one of the only chlamydia-free populations in NSW, it is disheartening to see the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan rejecting several of our koala inquiry’s recommendations. As an individual, it is infuriating.

I write this submission as an individual, not a Member of Parliament, and in doing so, I echo Save Sydney’s Koala’s concerns about the plan, particularly the following points:

- The Plan proposes massive urban development on the Cumberland Plain, a region previously designated as a “first priority” biodiversity offset area for two other major Growth Centres.
- The Plan will reclassify a total of 10,014 hectares of rural land as 'urban capable' while setting aside only 5,475 hectares of native vegetation in new conservation lands.



- The Plan is being developed in order to facilitate strategic biodiversity certification from the state and federal governments. Once approved, 10,000 hectares of 'urban capable' rural land can be released for development without the need for any further environmental impact assessments. Effectively, this means that further opportunities to protect more of this environment from development will be lost.
- The Plan will impact 1,014.6 hectares or almost 16% of the critically endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland. Only 6,400 hectares or 6% of the original 107,000 hectares of Cumberland Plain Woodland still exists. The Growth Centres Biodiversity Offset Program is meant to protect at least 2,400 hectares of Cumberland Plain Woodland or other 'grassy woodland' communities. Its most recent Annual Report acknowledges that cost and suitability constraints may impede its ability to secure high-value biodiversity offsets on the Cumberland Plain. To date, this Program has only protected 715 hectares of native vegetation, of which 369 hectares is Cumberland Plain Woodland. Because land purchases and biodiversity stewardship agreements are primarily funded by Special Infrastructure Contributions (SICs) levied on developers, they are staged to coincide with the rate of development instead of being secured upfront.
- The Plan fails to set aside enough land to properly protect a thriving population of 600 to 1,000 koalas, the largest chlamydia-free koala population in NSW.
- The Plan's proposed construction of 120 km of koala exclusion fencing will isolate and fragment koala colonies, especially because the Plan protects only one of the six east-west movement corridors recommended in the Chief Scientist Koala Report.
- The Plan acknowledges that conservation land will only be secured slowly over time. No firm commitment has been made about how much land will eventually be protected.

Koalas are facing the largest ever threat to their species: humankind, and our relentless, reckless appetite for land and profit. It is up to us to fight for the survival of the last remaining koalas, and ensure the continuation of the species for generations to come. So far, we are failing.



The Hon. Mark Pearson, MLC



We must use every opportunity available to us to protect and preserve wildlife and their habitat, including koalas. On this front, the Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan is severely lacking. Commitment within the Plan to preserving koala habitat, including vital corridors is not strong enough. Further, the Plan's goal (to enable development within the specified 10,000 hectares without the need for any further environmental impact assessments) is fundamentally reckless. Community consultation, including with peak bodies and independent environmental experts, should be mandated for all stages of development that could impact koala habitat.

I reject this Plan in its current form.

Mark Pearson MLC

