

MASCOT TOWERS

Return to Order

The CLERK: According to resolution of the House of Wednesday 18 May 2022, I table documents relating to an order for papers regarding Mascot Towers investigations received this day from the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, together with an indexed list of documents.

Claim of Privilege

The CLERK: I also announce receipt of a return identifying documents received this day which are considered to be privileged and should not be made public or tabled. According to standing order, the documents are available for inspection by members of the Legislative Council only.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE NSW

Return to Order

The CLERK: According to resolution of the House of Wednesday 11 May 2022, I table documents relating to an order for papers regarding school infrastructure planning documents, received this day from the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, together with an indexed list of documents.

Claim of Privilege

The CLERK: I also announce receipt of a return identifying documents received this day which are considered to be privileged and should not be made public or tabled. According to standing order, the documents are available for inspection by members of the Legislative Council only.

Bills

GREAT KOALA PROTECTED AREA BILL 2021

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from 18 November 2021.

The Hon. PETER POULOS (18:06): I thank Ms Cate Faehrmann for her advocacy and initiative in introducing this bill. The bill reflects widespread concern about the plight of koalas in this State and a deep desire to make sure we take effective action now and in the future. It is a concern held across the New South Wales community and by this Government. We know that without strong and decisive action, koalas are at risk of extinction. The evidence is indisputable. This year we have seen the Australian Government upgrade the koala's conservation status from vulnerable to endangered in New South Wales, Queensland and the ACT. The NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee followed suit, upgrading the species to endangered under the New South Wales Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

It is a decision that is both shocking and welcomed for the spotlight it has shone on the need for urgent action. The bill reflects good intentions. However, dealing with koalas on the North Coast alone will not stop the decline of the species. We need a comprehensive strategy. This Government can and will do more. In 2021 we made a commitment to double the number of koalas in New South Wales by 2050. Since then we have been working hard to make sure we have the best possible package of initiatives to deliver on our commitment.

On 9 April the New South Wales Government released its new Koala Strategy. This five-year plan provides a comprehensive road map that will help to deliver our long-term ambition to double the number of koalas in New South Wales by 2050. It will be no surprise to anyone that finalising this strategy has not been easy. We have been criticised for seeming to delay key actions. But it takes time to undertake detailed analyses and extensive negotiations to do important things well. This bill has been introduced without the necessary groundwork.

Any proposal to transfer 175,000 hectares of State forest land into the reserve system around Coffs Harbour inevitably will have significant social, cultural, economic and environmental implications that cut across a range of communities and industries. This is not to say it should not be done but, in this case, those implications have not been rigorously considered. The present bill is not backed by a thorough examination of the operational and financial implications of transferring State forest land to the protected area estate; the cultural, social and economic implications of new land acquisitions as well as implications for existing land uses; the additional resourcing requirements associated with new reserve acquisitions, including for the management of fire, pests, weeds and visitation; and local and Aboriginal community perspectives.

For example, the bill provides for a transition plan to be developed within 12 months. The transition plan must provide for, among other things, the transition of persons employed in connection with forestry operations on relevant land to alternative employment. The Government welcomes this attempt to recognise that there will

be an impact on the forestry industry and its workers. The bill allows only 28 days for consultation. These are real families, businesses and communities facing life-changing events. If the bill was passed into law, those families and communities could be forgiven for thinking that their aspirations, concerns and livelihoods are unimportant. That has the very real potential to deliver a perverse and unnecessary outcome, creating deep divisions among communities who all support the important goal of koala conservation.

What about funding? As Ms Cate Faehrmann has noted, the best the bill can do is include a recommendation for the appropriation of funds out of the Consolidated Fund to support the implementation of the transition plan and compensation for relevant workers. They have a right to expect greater certainty and clarity about what the bill will mean for them. The broader community has a right to know what level of government funding will be needed to implement this proposal, as well as the potential financial and other benefits it could bring. The introduction of this bill is premature. Ms Cate Faehrmann has asked where the Government is up to regarding the key recommendations made by upper House inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales, particularly recommendations 7 and 15.

They are legitimate questions. The recommendations focused on koala habitat protection, including on private land and through the transfer of State forest land to national parks. Ms Cate Faehrmann concluded that the bill is the action that koalas need now. This Government respectfully disagrees. Koalas need much more, and we will deliver it. Rather than create a single great koala protected area on public lands in northern New South Wales, the Government will take action across the State, including supporting landholders to protect koalas on private lands. Since 2018, the Government has committed more than \$244 million for koalas in New South Wales. It has committed \$193.3 million over the next five years towards delivering its goal, of doubling the number of koalas in New South Wales by 2050.

That is the biggest financial commitment by any government to secure the future of koalas in the wild. That funding will be invested under our new Koala Strategy, which was developed in consultation with the Deputy Chief Scientist and Engineer, and an independent expert panel. It is informed by the best available science and expertise. The strategy includes detailed targets and expenditure. It builds on the previous Koala Strategy 2018-21 and maintains a focus on conserving habitat, supporting communities to conserve koalas, improving the safety and health of koalas, and building our knowledge around this iconic species. Crucially, our strategy is fully funded.

The previous strategy was a resounding success but the list of achievements it delivered is too long to outline. It included more than 25,000 hectares in total of koala habitat that was purchased for the national park estate or set aside and committed for parks and reserves, and protected through conservation agreements on private land; developing new databases and electronic systems like the Koala Habitat Information Base and the I Spy Koala app, which will allow us to better track and understand koala spatial data; investing more than \$3.5 million to fix priority roadkill hotspots across New South Wales through the construction of koala exclusion fencing and wildlife underpasses; establishing partnerships with Aboriginal community organisations to develop knowledge and skills on protecting koala habitat; strengthening a network of wildlife hospitals; establishing training programs for vets and vet nurses in koala and wildlife care; and much more.

The Taronga Conservation Society has partnered with Koala Conservation Australia to establish a dedicated koala conservation breeding program. This work is part of a broader program that will strategically reinforce or reintroduce koala populations in areas of suitable habitat within New South Wales, to build up the resilience of koala populations to ensure the future of koalas in New South Wales. There is no doubt that the magnitude of the 2019-20 bushfires resulted in sudden, significant losses of koalas and habitat. The bushfires struck some regions particularly hard, especially the South Coast of New South Wales, increasing the vulnerability of many species, including koalas. In the wake of the fires the Government delivered a range of immediate, medium- and long-term actions to support koalas and other vulnerable species. They included post fire surveys, caring for injured wildlife, monitoring initiatives, undertaking research and many other actions that are ongoing as those affected communities heal.

The Government has created a new Private Native Forestry [PNF] Codes of Practice that introduce a better framework for protecting koalas. The codes put in place robust protections for koalas, including maintaining forestry exclusions in more than 10,000 hectares of core koala habitat identified in existing Koala plans of management and applying koala protections to more than 2.8 million hectares of potential PNF land that has highly suitable koala habitat. The Government is working with landholders to restore and conserve koala habitat on private land and build community knowledge. It is also supporting the acquisition of koala habitat to add to the national park estate. There is much more that can and is being done by this Government. Anything worth doing is worth doing right. This Government is delivering on its commitments by using evidence-based approaches, consulting with communities and taking into account the broad range of interests and concerns that need to be balanced. The Government is striving to move in the right direction. On that basis, the Government respectfully opposes the bill.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (18:17): I am not sure where to start after that contribution from the Government member. I lead for the Opposition on the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021. It was only a few weeks ago that koalas in New South Wales were officially listed as endangered. This new classification upgrades the koala's threatened status from vulnerable to endangered. That means that koalas are at serious risk of extinction. The New South Wales listing for koalas comes after the Federal listing in February that declared that New South Wales koalas are endangered. Koalas were previously listed as vulnerable 10 years ago in 2012. Ten years ago, this Government was in office and it put in place its first koala strategy. It was not the resounding success that the Government astonishingly claimed today. It has taken koalas backwards.

Recent research that has informed us that over 90 per cent of koala populations in New South Wales are in decline, while some have vanished altogether. Members who were on the koala inquiry sat in front of ecologists who wept as they talked about the forests that previously had koalas but now no longer do. It is a serious matter. Our koala populations, like millions of other native animals, were hit very hard in the Black Summer bushfires. It is estimated that over 5,000 koalas were lost and 24 per cent of their habitat across New South Wales was severely impacted. In some places over 81 per cent of habitat was lost. Research and tracking tells us that in just over 20 years the population of koalas in New South Wales has halved. The trajectory is getting worse, not better. In just over a decade, koalas have gone from no listing to being listed as vulnerable and then listed again as endangered. While we do not know for sure, the number of koalas in New South Wales could be as low as 12,000 to 15,000. In short, koalas are in trouble.

The endangered listing comes after the cross-party koala inquiry spent 12 months taking submissions, conducting public hearings and making a series of site visits to assess the health and wellbeing of koalas and their habitat in New South Wales. The committee made 16 findings and 42 recommendations. It found there is an urgent need to protect habitat for koalas and that fragmentation and loss of habitat is the biggest threat to them. The committee found that climate change, drought, bushfire, and urban and peri-urban development contribute to pressure on koala populations, and that koalas are also significantly impacted by being knocked over on the roads and killed by dogs. The evidence from the inquiry led to the most challenging finding: That koalas are on track to be extinct in the wild by 2050.

The 42 recommendations provide a blueprint for turning around koala numbers in New South Wales. They recommend action to preserve wildlife corridors; support local government to protect koalas; offer stronger protections for koalas in private native forestry operations; reshape activity in State forests to protect key koala habitat; include koala-friendly infrastructure such as overpasses and underpasses; offer better support for private landholders to preserve koala habitat; finalise the State environmental planning policy for koalas; reinstate stronger land-clearing rules; and make changes to biodiversity offsetting. Recommendation 41 was the investigation of the establishment of the great koala national park. The New South Wales Government's response noted 14 of the recommendations, supported 10 and said it supported 18 in principle. When it came to recommendation 41, the New South Wales Government noted it. There has been no further action that anyone can discern as a result of this.

Two Government approaches have been evident since the release of the koala inquiry report. On the one hand, the previous environment Minister, Matt Kean, went on his usual public relations offensive, talking about how much he cares about koalas. He even admitted that his Government had not done enough. His solution was to make a bold commitment by setting a new target to double the number of koalas in the wild by 2050. This target would be welcomed if it was backed by any demonstrable action that would assist in dealing with the key threatening process for koalas: the loss of the trees they need to live in. On the other hand, the reality is that in the past decade the New South Wales Government has done everything it can to undermine the prospect of ever meeting this target.

Let us look at the record. In addition to cutting over \$120 million out of national parks, the creation of national parks was almost at a standstill for the first eight years of this Government. More recently there have been important additions to the national park estate in western New South Wales; however, these are not where there are any koalas. The gutting of land clearing laws has led to a 13-fold increase in land clearing on private land. There have been none of the promised reviews or monitoring of the impact of these changes on koalas and other threatened species and zero willingness to even discuss tightening the rules. The Nationals almost tore the Government apart over modest planning policy changes that would assist in protecting koala habitat on private land. I note that the Hon. Catherine Cusack has had a bit to say on this, and I am sure she will contribute to this debate later tonight. I will not go into the detail of it, but she will. She points to the deals done behind closed doors over koala protection. Suffice to say, the koalas have not won under that arrangement.

Over the past 11 years there have been ongoing changes to forestry operations in our State forests. The changes to the forestry rules have chipped away at habitat protection, and that too is having a negative impact on koalas. One of the most egregious issues is the failure of the Government to respond to the report of the special

review undertaken by the Natural Resources Commission on the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approval, investigating the health of our forests after the Black Summer bushfires. The review revealed an extreme impact on the health of our forests and made several recommendations for action. The Government has not made this report public and has failed to respond to any of the recommendations. Just last week, The Nationals Minister responsible for forestry announced that he would extend wood supply agreements from 2023 to 2028 with no environmental assessment of the health of the forests, the availability of the wood supply, the impact on koalas, or even an assessment of the cost to taxpayers if they are unable to meet those supplies. It is simple: If we are to save koalas in the wild, the single biggest action that the New South Wales Government can take is to save the trees that koalas need to survive.

I now turn to the specifics of the bill, which is the result of years of dedicated work from the National Parks Association, the Nambucca Valley Conservation Association and the Bellingen Environment Centre. This group of dedicated people has developed the concept of a great koala national park. If created, it would bring together 140,000 hectares of national parks with 175,000 hectares of State forests to create a 315,000-hectare national park. Extensive scientific work done on the creation of the park as well as economic modelling shows the potential for employment as a result of its creation. The bill has been brought forward by Ms Cate Faehrmann on behalf of these groups and the many thousands of people who want to see the New South Wales Government take serious action to save our koalas. If established, the great koala national park would be an important step in protecting 20 per cent of the koala population of New South Wales.

The bill has been brought forward largely in frustration at the lack of action from the Liberal-Nationals Government. Labor shares this frustration. The objects of this bill are to:

- (a) establish the Great Koala Protected Area and include certain land within it, and
- (b) require the Secretary of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) to include further land in the Great Koala Protected Area that is land within State forests or state conservation areas by reserving the land as, or as part of, a national park, regional park, nature reserve or Aboriginal area, and
- (c) require the Secretary to prepare a plan of management for the Great Koala Protected Area to ensure the Area is managed in a way that promotes the conservation and growth of the koala population and koala habitat, and
- (d) require the Secretary to prepare a transition plan for the inclusion of land as part of the Great Koala Protected Area to provide for—
 - (i) the transition of persons employed in connection with forestry operations on the land to alternative employment consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and
 - (ii) opportunities for developing public understanding and appreciation of heritage values associated with the koala population

I acknowledge that there are at least 1,500 people and organisations who would like Labor to support the bill today. I know that many will be disappointed that Labor cannot support the bill in this form. I inform the House as to why. Labor's record on the creation of national parks when it was last in government was without precedent. Labor increased the national park and reserve estate by 75 per cent, adding 3.05 million hectares, equivalent to 3.8 per cent of all New South Wales land. I have been in this place long enough to remember the extensive work done to create those national parks. I also remember the extensive community consultation undertaken with industry, community, First Nations people and unions. There was not just consultation; there was serious negotiation and agreements made to establish those national parks.

When NSW Labor established the Riverina red gum national parks, I had carriage of the bill through this place. When presented to the House, it had already been through a rigorous process with the Natural Resources Commission. The bill created protected areas, but it also created the process for an Indigenous protected area. The bill was explicit in providing the local forestry industry with a transition arrangement that continued harvesting in some areas until new controls were put in place. Many millions of dollars in funding were allocated for park management, capital expenditure, support for First Nations communities, a regional community employment fund, industry development assistance, business exit, worker assistance and industry structural adjustment. This work can only be done from government. It requires resources, consultation and negotiation.

The bill before us today has not been through that process. Because it originates in this place—and Ms Cate Faehrmann knows this—the bill cannot allocate funding. The best we can do is recommend an allocation. That is not something that Labor can accept as the way to establish this protected area. That is not the way to establish national parks. Labor cannot support the bill because it is too limited in the way it sees the transition plan for workers in the forestry industry, and as a result does not allow a broader community-based approach to the transition. The bill, if passed, puts into the hands of an underfunded government department the creation of a national park that a hostile government does not want. Without being able to allocate the funds necessary for capital work, such as tourism and education centres or koala hospitals, or for ongoing park management, Labor

does not trust this Government to be able to deliver on the vision of the great koala national park. It is a risk that Labor is not willing to take.

In conclusion, Labor supports the urgent need to protect koala habitat for koalas. We know that this must mean the creation of more protected areas, curbs on land clearing, changes to the planning system, the protection of wildlife corridors and the implementation of infrastructure that supports koalas. I thank Ms Cate Faehrmann for bringing this important bill to Parliament and helping to push this recalcitrant Government to do what it says it wants to do and save koalas in the wild. I thank the community organisations and individuals who are working so hard to save koalas and the trees they need to survive. I thank those who continue to work to establish the great koala national park. I look forward to continuing discussions about the urgent need to increase the protected areas of koala habitat in the lead-up to the next election and, hopefully, in government, where strong and decisive action to save koalas can be delivered from a government that is committed to saving them.

The ASSISTANT PRESIDENT (The Hon. Rod Roberts): I will now leave the chair. The House will resume at 8.00 p.m.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON (20:01): I fully support and commend the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021 to the House. I thank my colleague Ms Cate Faehrmann for introducing the bill and for her incredible professional and tireless advocacy for the great koala national park and koalas. She is a champion of and for koalas. That is not just because, like millions of people around the world, she loves this unique ancient beautiful creature; it is also because she is connected enough to the non-anthropocentric world to know that the koala is an evolutionary phenomenon, which under our watch is on the very slippery slope to extinction.

The koala is one of the world's most iconic animal species. It is right up there with the panda, the tiger, the elephant, the dolphin and the polar bear. They are found nowhere else in the world but here in Australia. Koalas have great cultural significance to First Nations people. They feature in Dreamtime stories, songs and rock art. Through Ms Cate Faehrmann's expert and professional initiative and guidance, the upper House inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales shone the much-needed light on the very sad and tragic conservation state of our most iconic, unique little creature, the koala. I also acknowledge the incredible work that the Hon. Catherine Cusack has done in championing this iconic little animal, the koala.

That inquiry found that unless we do some serious work, the koala will be extinct in the wild by 2050, and that we are down to some 15,000 to 20,000 animals in the wild and the koala will not be here for my grandkids' kids—or yours, Mr Deputy President. The inquiry found that before the devastating fires of 2019-20 koalas were in trouble. Koala numbers plummeted by a third in the 20 years between 1990 and 2010. That is only three koala generations. Then came those awful fires. We saw those images; they are etched in our national psyche forever. With at least 5,000 koalas burnt to death in the climate fires, potentially many more, so much habitat was lost and damaged. It is no understatement to say the koala is literally on the absolute frightening edge of extinction.

In 2012 the Australian Government listed the koala as threatened. I seriously wonder whether people actually understand what that means. We say it. Do we understand it? Amongst other things, it is a very loud alarm bell. It was the chance to do something to turn things around for the koala. "Threatened" means threatened with extinction. It is the first part of the fast slippery slope to extinction. It is the alarm to do everything to recover the species, because recovery is very hard. But we did not act. We failed to understand the situation. We ignored the very law that intersects with conservation science that we are supposed to respect and uphold. We have ignored the science.

In February this year the Australian Government listed the koala as endangered on the basis of the very strong evidence of the koala's parlous state. Endangered—that means we are nearly at the bottom of that very slippery awful slope where we crash to extinction. I do not know about other members in this place, but I find that unfathomable. I find it unacceptable. I find myself outraged at our selfish, uncontrollable greed, our carelessness and our deeply callous anthropocentric way. A creature that has existed through ancient times, deep time, some 25 million years of genetic and evolutionary work, and we come along and take it all away in the face of its voicelessness. In this place we will show our true colours, each and every one of us. Here we are, able to do something, to really do something.

With the endangered listing of the koala, the Australian Government announced \$50 million to help the animal. Similarly, in 2018 the New South Wales Government invested \$44.7 million to stabilise koala populations. Money alone will not stop the koala becoming extinct. That is why less than a month ago, in spite of that \$44.7 million, the koala was listed as endangered here in New South Wales. In its determination, the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee found the koala "is facing a very high risk of extinction in the near future". The only way we reverse the extinction trajectory of the koala is through habitat protection, habitat restoration and habitat recreation. That is the mechanism, whatever that costs.

In direct response to the release of the report of the upper House inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales over 12 months ago, the State Government set the goal to double koala numbers in New South Wales by 2050. Like so many, I wished that was true. But it was clearly a crock. The Government soon went to war over the State's koala habitat protection planning instrument in what was an appalling and barbaric display of politics where the facts, the evidence, the science, the law and the public interest were all clearly completely ignored. The politics was vulgar and violent, and our poor defenceless, voiceless koala was the victim. Now is the chance for us in this place to do something really meaningful for koalas.

The great koala national park would be the world's first national park dedicated to protecting one of the world's favourite animals. It is a sensible vision to add 175,000 hectares of publicly owned forests to existing protected areas to form a 315,000-hectare reserve in the Coffs Harbour hinterland. We know it will make a huge difference for koalas because environment groups, koala carers and government scientists have all identified those forests as being excellent koala habitat. Most importantly—this is the fundamental aspect—it is where koalas are and the places that koalas use. The single most important first step to protecting the koala and saving it from extinction—if, in fact, that is still possible—is to protect the habitat where we know koala populations are currently living and using. That is exactly what the great koala national park will do.

Currently, most koalas live outside protected areas. Our national park network is made up of higher, more infertile country and does not include much of the habitat that koalas prefer: fertile, coastal forests that produce more nutritious leaves for the animal. The forests that make up the areas within the great koala national park are all publicly owned already. It is a cheap option for the State. According to one study, buying private farmland of that size would cost between \$1.2 billion and \$2.5 billion. The great koala national park would give an enormously good bang for buck, giving us maximum koala habitat for minimum cost. Some of the public forests that make up the areas within the proposed park are currently subject to industrial-scale logging, with many others earmarked to be logged in the coming years. In fact, more than 2,500 hectares of the area that has been identified is scheduled to be logged. Logging is identified scientifically and legally as a key threatening process to the survival of the koala. It further threatens the koala with extinction.

We all know that logging our public native forests is not going well for us as a State. In fact, it is a darn right shambles because it is actually costing us money. We have been subsidising the industry for decades now. I ask members to think about that for a minute: We are paying to destroy some of the most important koala habitat in the State at the same time as making our landscapes more vulnerable. The great koala national park would replace logging with sustainable tourism that will return millions of dollars in revenue to the region. It will add significantly to the growing regenerative culture of our northern regions. It will become an international showcase for our region. I am from the north. I will find it richly insulting if this regional opportunity is denied to my neck of the woods.

Everyone knows that creating the great koala national park is the right thing to do. As is so often the case, The Greens have listened to the community and the experts and have come up with a solution. It is a serious and good solution that will go a significant way to solving one of the wicked problems upon us: the loss of one of our internationally significant, beautiful, deep-time wild animals, the koala. I will be bitterly disappointed if the bill is not supported. To Government and Opposition members I say that if they do not support the bill, they will regret it—not just here in this place but outside this Parliament, and in their own hearts and minds. I ask all members in this Chamber to do the right thing now for koalas, for all of the other forest-dependent animals and for our grandkids and their grandkids. I urge members to support the bill and the creation of the great koala national park.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK (20:11): I support the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021 proposed by Ms Cate Faehrmann, based on the work of the conservation movement that I first became aware of 12 years ago. It is supported by many members of the community who are working passionately to support surviving koala populations in their area. It is not a radical bill; it is common sense. A measure of this order is urgently needed because we are sadly losing the fight to save our koalas. We are losing so many endangered species, including our adorable coastal emus. The initiative proposed by the bill will be a critical step to halt the ongoing logging of core habitat relied on by so many species, including koalas. The bill is consistent with Australia's decision at COP26 just last November to sign an agreement to end deforestation by 2030. The 124 signatories to the declaration pledge that their leaders "emphasise the critical and interdependent roles of forests of all types, biodiversity and sustainable land use in enabling the world to meet its sustainable development goals; to help achieve a balance between anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and removal by sinks; to adapt to climate change; and to maintain other ecosystem services."

Australia signed that declaration. The agreement explicitly recognises that retaining and restoring existing forests will store nearly three times more carbon than planting new trees. Of course, we must do both. The lopsided investment scheme here in Australia incentivises revegetation but not maintaining existing vegetation—and this urgently needs to change. In other words, currently you need to chop down the tree before they will pay you to

revegetate, which makes no sense to me. Some 200 years ago the Northern Rivers boasted a magnificent 750,000-hectare forest known as the Big Scrub. Sadly, 99 per cent of it is gone due to logging, land clearing and urbanisation. Only 1 per cent survives, and it is part of what our once-thriving koala population is clinging onto, against the odds, in order to survive. Between 1990 and 2010 koala numbers dropped by one-third, with habitat loss named as the main culprit. It is always the main culprit. Koalas have become locally extinct in many locations, from a small colony in Pittwater to an estimated 15,000 koalas in the Pilliga, which were referred to by the Hon. Penny Sharpe in her contribution earlier in the debate.

All our wildlife is threatened by climate change. The thinking in the environment agencies is that it will be especially challenging to maintain the species west of the Great Dividing Range. The range, including the Snowy Mountains and coastal regions, is likely to be the last refuge for koalas to survive in the wild—yet we are currently logging it to pieces. That includes core koala habitat trees that are clearly being used by koalas—where you can see the scratchings and scat—but have been approved for logging in pre-existing agreements. Those approvals, most of which predate the bushfires, have been grandfathered. Under the reforms announced a few weeks ago, those approvals can continue for another five years. We are killing koalas vicariously by destroying their homes in order to make power poles. There does not seem to be any cut-out point for the clearing and logging our remnant native vegetation. Even though the Black Summer fires killed one-quarter of North Coast koalas, 140,000 hectares of forest has become subject to intensive harvesting zones. Almost all the trees in those areas will be cut down. Last financial year 54,500 hectares of native vegetation were cleared in New South Wales, eroding soil and undermining water quality.

The logging industry runs at a loss and is heavily subsidised by taxpayers. In order to maintain logging in State forests, \$60 million has just been announced to restore North Coast logging roads and bridges destroyed by the floods. The costs of vegetation mapping are now being met by the State, as is the full cost compliance, which was found to be utterly deficient in a 2019 report by the Auditor-General. I support calls for an end to logging native forests. The ACT, Queensland and South Australia do not log native forests. Western Australia and Victoria have announced the intention to end it, leaving just New South Wales and Tasmania. I repeat that Australia has signed an international agreement to end deforestation by 2030 because we know it is such a bad thing. Allegedly it is going to end here by 2030, so New South Wales needs a plan to end it. If we do not have a plan, the logging will end itself. That is what is happening on the North Coast now. The logging is in the process of ending itself because there are no more trees. So much money has to be spent on roads and freight subsidies because the timber has become so expensive to collect.

Although the mid North Coast has national parks, only 14 per cent of koalas reside in them. Some 20 per cent live in State forests and 66 per cent live on private land. Koalas have recently had their threatened status upgraded to "endangered". How can this Government tell the New South Wales public with a straight face that its koala strategy is succeeding? The proposed great koala protected area would require an industry transition package estimated at \$169 million over 10 years. I will put that into perspective for members. During the Black Summer fires, the World Wide Fund for Nature raised \$120 million in donations, mainly from small donors overseas who were so distraught about what was happening to our koalas.

Mill owners would require compensation to buy back wood supply agreements. The proponents of the bill estimated this would cost up to \$30 million. However, that estimate may be out of date because a few weeks ago the Minister for Agriculture gifted a five-year extension to every single timber agreement in State forests. That has created new property rights for industry and will massively increase compensation. If we are ever to repair all that damage, I am so dismayed that the cost to taxpayers and the environment has just escalated by tens of millions of dollars at the stroke of a ministerial pen.

I understand the attitude of "ownership rights" held by The Nationals, where everything in the landscape is the property and entitlement of the landowner. However, in 2022 most of Australia is moving towards a custodianship model of ownership that recognises the connectedness of the landscape and our responsibility to future generations. In government, the Liberals are supposed to be curbing those excesses, but during the 2020 koala wars with the National Party we seemed to travel at lightning speed from a strong and principled position to total capitulation in the space of a few months. I am not a member of Cabinet, nor am I privy to the details, but I can share my own narrow experience, which left me utterly bewildered and gutted. I now realise there was more to the story than I had grasped at the time. I was minding my own business, re-establishing myself and my career as Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter, when on 3 September Matt Kean contacted me. He asked, "Have you thought about going out and slamming the Nats on this koala thing?" I replied, "Sure, if that's what people want."

Matt Kean assured me by phone that it was what Premier Gladys Berejiklian wanted, and he then contacted *The Sunday Telegraph*. Linda Silmalis phoned me for a comment. I never contacted the media; they contacted me—for which I received plenty of praise from Matt and other Liberal Ministers. The then Deputy Premier was obviously furious with me as the first story ran on Father's Day and, though I did not realise it at the time, his

father had died. He saw this as cruel and calculated by me. So fast-forward through the koala wars, which escalated, and the Premier appeared to stand her ground. The Deputy Premier went on leave and the matter reverted to then Acting Deputy Premier Paul Toole and Cabinet to resolve.

I had no inkling of what was going on, except that the most shocking legislation stripping environment controls and oversight for logging and clearing native vegetation was suddenly introduced to this Parliament. That obviously triggered an outcry, and for two weeks I tried to resolve the problems with Rob Stokes, as I had been asked to do by the Premier. But I was basically ignored. He said to me that he did that to protect me, but to this day I do not understand what that means. He told me that was a story he would one day share. It was clear that Adam Marshall had changed the bill from what was approved by Cabinet, and it should not have even been in the Parliament. The situation was a total reversal of the position Matt Kean and the Premier had taken six weeks earlier, when everyone was my friend for standing up for koalas. Now nobody wanted to tell me what on earth was going on.

I communicated to the party room that I could not vote for the bill, and nothing happened for a week. But then on the morning of the debate Gladys called me for a meeting and I told her it was too late. She then sent Matt Kean to see me. I was relieved because I thought we were in agreement on koalas—but no. The significant part of the conversation went like this. I said, "Matt, this bill is a stain on your reputation as environment Minister." He was angry and said, "That's rubbish. I am one of the greatest—probably the greatest—environment Ministers in Australian history." I was stunned. I thought, "Oh, he's joking", but he was not. He started talking about his energy bill and how he had broken through where nobody else could. When I asked, "What about koalas?", he said, "I don't know anything about that. It's all Rob Stokes." This was the Minister who, six weeks earlier, had been completely winding me up to go out into the media attacking the Deputy Premier.

I asked Matt Kean, "Why did Gladys send you up here?", to which he shrugged. When he asked me what I was offered in exchange for my vote, I said, "Nothing." He replied, "No wonder you won't vote for it. What do you want?" I said, "You can't do deals on koalas." He said, "Catherine, how else do decisions get made?", like I was some kind of stupid little two year old. An hour later, I was back in Gladys's office with Matt Kean and Rob Stokes, and she was offering me a job, to which I said, "Unbelievable." She misunderstood me and said, "I will put it in writing and issue a media release. Matt has all the details." The meeting went on with me refusing and them insisting. Finally, we agreed that Rob would brief me on the amendments, which happened later on in my office. But then those amendments never appeared in the House, and that outrageous and flawed bill was debated in the upper House, with me moving a motion to refer it to a committee.

The rest is known: I was sacked, the 2020 State environmental planning policy [SEPP] was repealed—which really shocked me—and they went off to work out how to get what they wanted without the need for Parliament. I can honestly say I had zero support from anyone. I was furious at the whole process and bewildered as to what had changed. I asked both Matt and Gladys the same question. I said, "This started when you asked me to speak out and ended with me having to cross the floor, get sacked and now a defective 1994 planning instrument is protecting koala habitat." I have no idea what happened in the middle of this story, though that has become blindingly obvious in the past week as Matt Kean has bragged about his energy deal with The Nationals.

I looked up the legislation and saw that the second reading speech for the energy bill was due to go before the upper House on the day the koala bill was supposed to pass—I was obviously completely distracted that day—and they were clearly connected. The Liberals were supporting something we hated a few weeks earlier, and The Nationals were supporting something they hated a few weeks earlier. I checked with a Nationals MP, who confirmed that a deal was done, as did a former staffer in Gladys' office. I checked with Rob Stokes, but he never replied. So here we are—and I fully realise how completely stupid I look, trusting these people and trying to help them. Gladys had sent me a lot of text messages talking about a deal—that mystified me. To be honest, I was distraught by the news that she was sending Rob Stokes to Government House to repeal the 2020 SEPP, which was not even a strong SEPP but at least updated the species list.

Councils like Clarence were begging us to update the species list because none of their koala trees were protected by the 1994 SEPP and their koala plan of management, which was lodged with the Government in 2015, still had not been approved—and that situation persists to this day. The 1994 SEPP is still in force for all rural zoned land. Only residential land has been protected, and hardly any koalas are assisted by that. Land zoned R1 like Ruins Way in Port Macquarie could be cleared and then rezoned. That situation was saved by taxpayers and wildlife donors, who paid millions to buy that block strategically. But this approach is totally unsustainable; it cannot save koalas. We cannot buy our way out of this problem. Regulatory protection is essential to ensure the survival of koalas.

The NSW Koala Strategy is based on the idea that we can buy our way out of the problems created by private native forestry, native forest and native vegetation clearing—which is accelerating destruction by a factor of three. The plan sees volunteers and wildlife funds planting and revegetating areas for the future, while across

the road established trees that are being used by koalas are being cut down—and it is subsidised by taxpayers. This is sheer madness. The spin about "doubling koala numbers" is such a joke. There are no numbers to tell us what that means. The announcement was made before the Black Summer fires, and now the joke among conservationists is that the New South Wales Government is seeing how low we can get koala numbers because then it will be much easier to double them.

The evaluation of the previous koala strategy features the word "success" 11 times. The fact that the number of animals plummeted by perhaps one-third does not count. The strategy was a success; it was the koalas who failed. I am voting for this bill tonight because our koalas are so far gone—and our volunteers are upset and exhausted in their fight to save them—that we must do some really big things to pull them back from the brink. With the private native forestry announcements during the Federal election campaign, the open slather extension of every single timber agreement for five years, the \$60 million that taxpayers now have to spend to upgrade logging roads and bridges, and the millions more in freight subsidies that are paid to timber mills, the absolute determination to destroy habitat—and spend as much money as possible doing it—is just grotesque.

It would be much cheaper and better to pay the farmers not to cut down koala habitat. Make it worth their while to keep the trees and use the NSW Koala Strategy funds to establish a great koala protected area, which is our best hope of having a substantial wild koala population that can roam and have the genetic diversity—which is another key issue that was missed in the strategy—they need as a species to survive. The current strategy is focused on the translocation of koalas, but we know that does not work—at least half the koalas die. And why would we need to translocate them if all the Government assurances about their homeland habitat were true? Of the 50 koala populations identified in New South Wales, 19 have been prioritised for funding. That means 31 populations are not funded at all. For example, the Iluka koala population has been abandoned. All of those Government decisions—like the impact of the M1 freeway, the increase in the speed limit from 80 kilometres per hour to 100 kilometres per hour and the bushfires that occurred in areas where bushfires should not occur at all—have put more pressure on koalas. It appears as though a decision has been made, as if to say, "Sadly, we will just let them go." The Koala Strategy is better renamed a "rescue what we can from logging and deforestation" strategy. It is actually a waste of money to be so ineffective, and frankly cruel, in order to avoid protecting their trees and paying the farmers to look after them.

The Great Koala Protected Area does not assist Northern Rivers koalas, especially those in Clarence who have the least protection of all because the Government says it will not allow any more koala plans for councils to protect koala homelands. There are so many problems in Clarence: They rarely get funding and a biodiversity offsets scheme does not work for smaller farms so there is very little they can do but watch as koala populations, like Iluka, collapse and go locally extinct. I do admire the volunteers—their passion, their knowledge and their determination—and it is really for them I am speaking so bluntly today: To express my solidarity with them in this cause and to insist that we focus on the truth and not glib rubbish like doubling koala numbers. For sure I will be voting for this bill today. I totally give up trying to save koalas through my membership of the Liberal Party. I see now that is impossible. I will continue, when I can hopefully leave the chains of party politics and Parliament, to do more to progress this cause in my new life—which I greatly look forward to.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON (20:30): The Animal Justice Party overwhelmingly supports the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021. The bill clearly comes from a position of utter frustration because these animals are in peril. We cannot wait around for more plans, more inquiries and more scientific panels. The evidence, the truth, is clearly before us. The message that resounds from that evidence and those facts is that we need to act urgently. That is why I commend this bill and I commend Ms Cate Faehrmann for having the courage, insight and vision to see that we really have to do something. There might be concerns that it is a bill that has not done all the consultation and gone through all the various phases and stages, but I can assure the House that if we were to look back over every question, inquiry and scientific panel analysis, we would know that we have all the information we need to act for these animals.

The Government was trying to tell us that there is nothing to worry about: "Everything's fine; we have it sorted and over the time of our governance we have helped koalas." Then why does the Government not see how the main measure of its success is preventing koalas from becoming an endangered species. But in this time the world experts have declared the koala an endangered species. What is now grotesquely obvious is that this Government is absolutely captured—in fact, paralysed—by industries, particularly the logging industry and the mining industry. What this bill is about is the realisation that we have to draw a line. We have to be absolutely clear that we have to stop taking these trees. We have to stop destroying the habitat of these animals. When we set that date and that time when we start this construction, then all the industries that have been relying on timber or other products are having to face the fact and move on. With government and community support, we will find alternative incomes and livelihoods.

After serving for seven years on the Legislative Council I have come to the same conclusion as my fellow crossbench colleague Ms Cate Faehrmann—that the only chance for survival of the koalas in New South Wales is to declare a Great Koala Protected Area, which will be the land identified by the National Parks Association of NSW in 2015, and to add 175,000 hectares of State forests to existing protected areas to form 315,000 hectares of reserve in the Coffs Harbour hinterland. We have to do something like that. We have to move; otherwise, we will keep swimming round and round with smoke and mirrors and lovely statements. But meanwhile koalas are falling and being crushed under trees while we say these words. Sadly, this bill will not protect the koalas in the Cumberland Plains, the Pilliga or Gunnedah but it will create a haven for North Coast koalas living in one of the last bastions of high quality koala habitat in New South Wales. It will serve as an exemplar of what can be done.

We might have to amend things but we can then move into the other areas and start working in the same way to declare the proper protection for these animals. We have managed to wantonly destroy our natural heritage. It is estimated that between 77 per cent and 88 per cent of the State was originally covered with forests, woodlands and tall shrubs. But between 1788 and 1921, 35.3 billion hectares of forest was ringbarked, which is 44 per cent of the land area of the entire State of New South Wales. It was not until the 1940s that any real attempt was made to reduce logging by establishing native and pine plantations. This Government, with successive Premiers—Baird, Berejiklian and now Perrottet—has shown its contempt for the environment and the protection of native animals, including the koala. By repealing the Native Vegetation Act and watering down environmental protections in their Biodiversity Conservation Act and codes of practice, New South Wales is a global villain when it comes to deforestation and habitat loss.

Logging intensity and widespread clear-felling have increased over the past 10 years, placing koalas at great risk due to this Government's demolition of environmental protections. The recent Legislative Council inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales found that high quality koala habitat is being logged out at frightening speed on both public and private lands. Felling of habitat and corridor trees makes them particularly vulnerable to predation and starvation due to their reliance on only a select number of food trees. Loss of habitat combined with the effects of the Black Summer bushfires and the impacts of climate change are placing koalas at extreme risk of extinction within 30 years.

The inquiry made a number of recommendations but of particular importance was the recommendation that the New South Wales Government consider the impacts of logging in all public native or non-plantation forests in the context of enabling koala habitat to be identified and protected by transferring land to national parks. The North East Forest Alliance obtained through the Government Information (Public Access) Act [GIPAA] documents that showed years of illegal clearing across 75,000 hectares of the North Coast's public forests that contained huge segments of prime koala habitat. New South Wales Forestry is transforming the north-east forests into plantations that will never recover their natural structure and function, given the pace and extent of logging. The only chance remaining for the North Coast koalas is the declaration of a great koala national park where logging is forever prohibited.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK (20:38): I join in debate on the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021 introduced by The Greens. If passed, the bill will add 175,000 hectares of native forest to existing protected areas and, in the words of Ms Faehrmann, "will put a stop to any further logging of critical koala habitat". The conservation reservation system has been proved to fail. It has failed koalas. It has failed biodiversity. It has failed our threatened species and it has failed our ecological communities. It would be foolish for us to think that it would somehow succeed here. I stand here today representing the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party to say from the outset that we do not support this bill. If passed, this bill will provide the legislative and regulatory framework to fast-track our koalas into extinction.

It is only The Greens and the army of academic activists and billion-dollar charity organisations who could think that adding 175,000 hectares to a failing conservation reserve system could actually protect koalas from extinction. The ideology behind the bill is outstanding in its hypocrisy. Reserve systems are based on a lock it up and leave it idea that Australia's so-called wilderness will prosper without human intervention. To stand in this place yesterday and acknowledge our First Nations people and pay respect to their culture and in the same week completely wipe out and ignore 40,000 years of Aboriginal land management and perpetuate the wilderness myth rooted in the racist ideals of terra nullius, is quite mind boggling. In fact, every time a member comes to this place and proposes a new national park they are disrespecting the rich history of traditional land owners. Here are a few facts based on science and proven through research: This country has been managed by humans for thousands of years through mild fire. Koalas are naturally rare and irruptive and, historically, according to award-winning historian Bill Gammage, koala habitats under Aboriginal management were, "distinct, lightly populated and few".

It was not until half a century after the British landed that the first koala irruption occurred. According to historical records, "They were common and numerous in thick stringybark forests on the fringes of the Blue Mountains." Those forests developed after Aboriginal burning was disrupted by Europeans. When koalas become

excessively abundant, they destroy their habitat. Native forestry has not been responsible for any species extinctions. Timber harvesting is not the same as land clearing. Research has shown that koalas occupy harvested forests at the same rate as unharvested forests. One of the biggest threats to biodiversity is the unhealthy state of our forests, partly due to the disruption of cultural burning. In fact, koala activity is closely associated with regrowth from integrated harvesting and bushfire, particularly in Coffs Harbour and the North Coast where research has shown that koalas were three times more frequent in heavily logged forests than unlogged forests.

But those facts do not sit well with The Greens and their corporate charity buddies, whose main source of income is timber harvesting propaganda. Let us call this bill out for what it is: another attempt by The Greens to completely shut down in the native forestry industry, despite the risks it poses to biodiversity and threatened species. This bill solely focuses on the remaining 10 per cent of land available to timber harvesting. Rather than approach the declining health of our forests, the increase in pest species, the decline in controlled burns and, more generally, the overall condition of our forests, The Greens would rather focus on one species. They believe one species is more valuable than a holistic approach to all of nature. The South East Timber Association made a submission to the inquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry, which I chaired. The opening paragraph of its conclusion stated:

The remaining native biota in Australia is trapped in a terra nullius environmental regulatory framework, that will underpin the next wave of flora and faunal extinctions, unless there is a fundamental rethink as to how truly ecologically sustainable management is delivered.

The Greens propose creating 315,000 hectares of tinder that will light up and obliterate everything—not just koalas—when the conditions are just right, like we saw in the Black Summer. Vic Jurskis, a well-known ecological historian said, "The Black Summer was a lesson we didn't need and haven't learnt. Only a paradigm shift can restore healthy, resilient and productive forests." The bill is not a paradigm shift. It perpetuates the wilderness myth, denies history and will condemn our forests to further decline, resulting in mega fires that will decimate communities, both ecological and human. Instead of helping our forests The Greens are shoring up political donations by selling Blinky Bill to the masses—and I mean that. How many times did Ms Cate Faehrmann talk about how important koalas are to the world? Why Koalas? What about the sharp-snouted day frog or the little pygmy perch, the short-nosed sea snake, the western swamp tortoise, the Christmas Island shrew—

The Hon. Mark Pearson: They're not pretty enough.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Exactly. What about the southern bent-wing bat or the boggomoss snail—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (The Hon. Adam Searle): Order! I remind members that interjections are disorderly at all times. The member should not respond to interjections.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: —also known as the Dawson River snail? What about all those critically endangered species? No Greens party member is dressing up as a boggomoss snail and rattling a tin for donations, are they? There are no draft bills suggesting a great snail national park. There is no State environmental planning policy dedicated to them because snails do not sell like koalas, with their big furry ears and deep, dark eyes. They are not the charismatic animal you can leech off for votes and Facebook likes. Yet the smallest and most unattractive elements of our biodiversity are going extinct at the greatest rates. First impressions have a lot to do with how much money people are willing to donate, and the koala is one charismatic little guy. There is big money in koalas, just ask the World Wildlife Fund. It is hypocrisy and it is environmentally negligent. Ms Cate Faehrmann said in her second reading speech that logging is one of the biggest threats to koala populations, which is categorically untrue. Multiple studies have proven that and research has demonstrated it. Timber harvesting is ironically one of the few activities that consistently creates a food source for our koalas.

In Coffs Harbour koalas irrupted in the 1960s along with urban sprawl and the consequent reduction of grazing and burning, then disappeared in some suburbs as urban development progressed—not timber harvesting, urban sprawl. By 1991 koalas were increasing again and—get this—they were increasing in dense regrowth created by intensive logging. In fact, they were three times more frequent in heavily logged forests than unlogged forests. Then in 2011 a mail-out survey sent to Coffs Harbour locals produced some interesting data that at the time the Office of Environment and Heritage [OEH] did not agree with, so it manipulated the data. The report from the mail-out stated:

While the raw data shows an increase in the number of koalas ... they do not account for the forgetfulness of people.

So they down sampled and adjusted the results to the "forgetfulness" of people and found "a small, yet statistically significant, decline" in the number of koalas. The honourable member quotes figures from the OEH, such as, "The north-east of New South Wales, the mid North Coast, is one of the last refuges for our koalas. It contains 76 per cent of OEH identified koala hubs in the State." We cannot guarantee that is fact. The mover of the bill said, "The glaring truth about koala protections is that nothing can replace habitat protection; nothing is more effective."

Habitat protection means the conservation reservation system such as national parks that did nothing to protect the 5,000 to 10,000 koalas that allegedly perished during the Black Summer. There is something more effective than adopting a lazy framework of protection that promotes avoidance, and that is active management. Actual human land management would be the biggest paradigm shift this State has seen.

The honourable member believes that by creating protection areas, jobs will flow. Again, that is categorically untrue. In a recent Portfolio Committee No. 4 inquiry into the timber industry, we were able to debunk the job myth. Professor Roberta Ryan, local government and executive director of the Institute for Regional Futures at the University of Newcastle, appeared in a hearing to talk about the 9,800 jobs that the great koala park would create. There would be 675 direct job losses if the koala park went ahead, but that data did not include the trickle-down impact those losses would have on the local mechanic or the local handyman. In fact, that data did not even include the job losses from the local mills, like machinery operators or the logistics industry. The jobs created included things like ecotourism and baristas, which are said to be full-time equivalent jobs but we all know tourism is seasonal. The professor could not provide the inquiry with a breakdown of where those jobs would be or how many would be temporary, permanent, casual or seasonal.

In another hearing for the same inquiry we heard from the Bellingen Nature Company, which would be a beneficiary of the great koala national park. It is one of The Greens "great ecotourism employers". As of the hearing date, 29 April, they had no employees. The owner of the company said, "I would hope within five years to have five to 10 employees. I have already kind of got them as friends and affiliates." The employees will not be retrained timber mill operators or ex-forestry workers, as the report makes out. No, they will be that bloke's mates. The great job bonanza is a poorly constructed lie that falls apart even under minor interrogation. The data and supposed research conducted and cited in the member's second reading speech is all half-baked. I finish with a quote from the book by renowned Australian zoologist, Professor Grahame Webb, *Wildlife Conservation: In the Belly of the Beast*. He writes:

Public opinion on conservation tends to be based on charisma, and through political processes, that public opinion ultimately sets the national and local conservation agendas. Thus, we end up in Australia with a recovery plan for sea turtles—

Or, in this case, koalas—

...and a budget to match when they may already be at carrying capacity.

I urge every member in this place to put their warm and fuzzy feelings aside and consider the real science. No-one wants to see koalas go extinct, but protecting unsustainably dense populations of koalas in unhealthy forests will exacerbate their decline and fast-track their demise.

The Hon. WES FANG (20:49): It has been an interesting evening, with a lot of contributions by members of this House. It is all too easy to stand up in this Chamber and use this opportunity to rant and rave and put our party political allegiances on the record. As a reformed bad boy—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (The Hon. Adam Searle): Honourable members will remain orderly and allow the speaker to be heard in silence.

The Hon. WES FANG: As a reformed bad boy, I will make a very considered contribution to this debate. What I have heard tonight is a lot of rhetoric, some of which has included reference to The Nationals. Some members have spoken about how the Nats have been the villain in this debate. Some have said that the Nats have been lauded for the success that they had by having a win in relation to the State environmental planning policy [SEPP] issue. The reality is that The Nationals just listen to our communities. We listen to our communities because that is where we live. Our communities told us that they believe we can do both things. We can have a sustainable and productive forestry industry, and we can protect and improve our koala numbers.

The whole principle of what has been progressed by some of the speakers tonight is that the members of The Nationals, including me, must hate koalas. Nothing could be further from the truth. I love koalas. My kids love koalas. In so many ways, the communities that we represent love koalas. They are iconic and part of the Australian identity. When a landowner finds a koala on their parcel of land, it is something they cherish as being uniquely Australian. They cherish that their little part of the world has played home to a koala. That idea that we come into this Chamber with no regard whatsoever for koalas is a fallacy that is progressed in order to champion a political intent. I do not know how many times members of The Nationals, in both this House and the other place, have said that they cherish that identity and look to improve and increase those koala numbers.

But we cannot ignore the science, which is clear. Those forestry jobs and, as the previous speaker indicated, the flow-on effects into our communities through other jobs and the economic benefit to the communities, can sustainably coexist with protecting koalas. On the koala SEPP issue, The Nationals ensured that the ridiculous, nonsensical, nonscientific restrictions put on landholders in our communities were not supported. It is what our communities wanted. We wanted our people to have their land rights recognised. But at no time did the

Government say that it was going to forgo koala numbers or the koala population. The fallacies that have been progressed tonight are only being progressed for a political cause. I note that a lot of the members who have spoken to the bill do not have a strong connection with a lot of the communities that would be directly affected by it. There are members from the Opposition and the crossbench who do. Ms Sue Higginson and Mr Justin Field are two regional members whom I recognise are from the regions and perhaps do not share the same view that I do. By and large, National Party members in this House and the Legislative Assembly live in those communities.

The Hon. Penny Sharpe spoke earlier of the river red gum issue and the land lock-up in the southern part of New South Wales. That had a devastating effect on towns like Deniliquin where the inability to source the fibre that the river red gums provided the town with saw large swathes of investment and jobs and prosperity leave the region, all with the stroke of a pen. I do not know what the environmental benefit was in locking up that area. When I was in Deniliquin speaking to the forestry people, the environmental groups and Indigenous land groups that operate in that area, they said that the red gums grow like wildfire when left unchecked and that part of the native manner of managing the forest was to thin it out. The thinning program would provide an opportunity for the forestry industry to source fibre. It provides more light and space for trees to grow, allowing the trees that are suitable for the region to grow to a proper height instead of having a very overgrown canopy where the floor sees no light. That is the way it used to be managed for years; now it is unmanaged.

We have seen devastating effects on employment in that area and I do not know of any environmental benefits, and for what? When we come at this issue with concern and a critical eye, it is based on the experiences we have had previously and it is based on our communities' desire to not only have the jobs that are provided but also to make sure that the restrictions we put in place are ones that are going to make a real difference to koalas. It is that sensible, practical and pragmatic approach that we take to the issue that makes what we are trying to do the right plan for the State. I do not begrudge the members for putting forward a plan. I understand that it is of concern. It is of concern to us, and that is why we have a plan to try to increase the koala numbers. We just differ on the method, but we also differ on the methodology that we are going to put towards it.

I note that the Government for the most part, noting some of the other contributions, will not be supporting the bill. But from my perspective, I believe we can do both things. We can sustainably and ethically continue to have the forestry industry in this State, to have that fibre, which is a sustainable, renewable resource, and to provide that fibre for us into the future, and we can also look to increase the koala numbers. Because, at the end of the day, there is nobody who values those koalas more than the people who live in that area. It is the rural and regional people, and that is who the National Party represents. With that, I conclude my remarks.

The Hon. EMMA HURST (21:00): I speak in support of the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021. The bill draws on the findings of the 2019 parliamentary inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales, which was deputy chaired by my colleague the Hon. Mark Pearson. I am pleased to see the bill before the House today, put forward by Ms Cate Faehrmann from The Greens. That 2019 parliamentary inquiry found that koalas in New South Wales will likely become extinct by 2050 without significant intervention and protection. It is easy to blame the 2019-20 bushfires, where we tragically lost over three billion animals and 70 per cent of the New South Wales koala population. But the decline of the koala population began long before the fires.

Decades of excessive land clearing for agriculture, logging of native forests and urban development has meant a catastrophic decline in eucalypt tree forests. The fragmentation of these forests means koalas are forced to travel from one area to another to seek food and shelter, making them more vulnerable to other threats such as being hit by cars as they cross major highways and falling victim to diseases such as chlamydia. Now here we are in early 2022, and rather than making any progress in recovering koala populations, these animals have actually been declared an endangered species, and that was before the shocking floods we have experienced, wiping out more koala habitat in northern New South Wales.

It is shocking to think that koalas are now even closer to extinction than ever before. That is the legacy of the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government. The bill will take a critical step towards protecting koala habitat. It identifies 315,000 hectares of national parks and State forests as a great koala protected area, which will be dedicated to the protection of koalas and their habitat. The Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment will be required to prepare and enact a plan of management for the protected area, which must provide for, amongst other things, the conservation of koala habitat, the prohibition of works and activities that may harm the koala population or damage koala habitat, and a written scheme of operations in relation to how the great koala protected area is to be managed consistent with the primary purpose.

Of course, the great koala protected area is not a complete solution to the threats facing koalas in this State. We know that over half of all koala habitat in New South Wales is on private land, and rather than seeking to protect this critical habitat, this Government has shown willingness to pass legislation that makes it easier for private landholders to harm koalas and their habitats. This is something we must change urgently if we are going to turn the tide on the decline of koala populations. We also know that threats to all animals and the environment

are only accelerating as the climate emergency worsens and brings even more extreme weather events to our shores. If we do not address the climate emergency, then all species of animals, including the endangered koala, are at risk. However, the great koala protected area would be a significant step forward.

I acknowledge and thank the Hon. Catherine Cusack for her brave and honest contribution and her ongoing tenacity and advocacy for koala protection. I also acknowledge Ms Cate Faehrmann from The Greens, who introduced the bill, chaired the inquiry and has fought for koala protection. The situation for koalas is urgent. There is no time to play politics on this issue and protection needs to happen immediately. I commend the bill to the House.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT (21:04): I oppose the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021. There are a couple of fundamental flaws in the bill that mean I cannot support it. It is worth mentioning the work of the Portfolio Committee No. 4 inquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry. The inquiry terms of reference compelled the committee to consider a number of things, including koala habitat protection. Over several months committee members conducted a number of site visits and hearings, including visits to the koala park that has been discussed. The inquiry report is still being developed and it will be thoroughly considered by the committee. I imagine that comments around the koala park will make up a big part of the report. As such, and out of respect for the committee process, we should wait to see what the committee comes up with in relation to this matter.

The bill relies heavily on the report that was delivered by the University of Newcastle, released in February 2021, which supports the establishment of the great koala national park. The report was commissioned by Bellingen Shire Council, Coffs Harbour City Council and Destination North Coast. Its analysis has a few flaws, including that it fails to account for the existing and potential benefits of State Forests from an economic, tourism and ecological perspective. The report claims that the koala park will deliver some wonderful things—so many jobs and so many dollars into local economies—but some of what it says just does not add up. For instance, the jobs that it claims will be created include indirect jobs all the way through to the barista in the cafe. But, for some reason, when referring to job losses, the report only talks of direct losses.

At the recent forestry inquiry the author of the report admitted to omitting consideration of any impacts on jobs in support service industries that relate to timber harvesting or the impact of local timber mills. However, the regional economy and associated industries were incorporated. It does not include the mechanics who are needed to service the machinery, the retail workers who sell the work clothes or the real estate workers who look after the rental houses. Those jobs are all at risk under this proposal, as are the local clubs and community organisations. We will lose volunteers from the RFS, members from the local footy team, kids from the swimming club and even students from the local school. We should never underestimate the importance of those things to our local communities because when they are lost, our community is lost.

The report did not even consider the impact on the mills, which, of course, would be enormous and have attached flow-on effects. To give members some idea of what those flow-on effects might be, the committee heard evidence that there are 2,600 jobs on the North Coast in forestry and first-stage processing—mills et cetera. That figure does not include indirect jobs, such as mechanics and tyre fitters, so the actual number would be significantly higher. The bill puts at risk all jobs, a number much higher than written about in the report. In a bit of sneaky maths to advance the cause of the bill, proposals and arguments include baristas who will all of a sudden be needed but the indirect jobs that will be lost are not counted. The report is not comparing apples with apples.

While the University of Newcastle report claims an array of potential economic and environmental opportunities from the proposed park, many of those purported benefits are purely speculative. While the report fails to explain why it is necessary to create a new national park to achieve them, they are all clearly possible on State forest land tenure. All the evidence I have heard points to the fact that more recreational activities can be conducted in a State forest than a national park. I am unclear how changing the status of a well-managed State forest will, all of a sudden, attract more visitors. Bushwalking, camping and horseriding can all be undertaken in State forests. Multi-day hikes, mountain bikes, cultural practices and beekeeping are all allowable in a State forest. To me this casts doubt over the reported economic benefits this park would bring and therefore the overall benefits in general.

It is possible to have a sustainable timber industry while providing rigid protections for threatened species. State forests are managed sustainably for a range of values, including biodiversity conservation, preservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage, tourism and recreation, and renewable timber production, all complementing and contributing to New South Wales' world-class conservation network. In New South Wales the majority of public forests are set aside for conservation and only a small proportion is available for renewable timber production. About 1 per cent of the State forest estate is harvested for timber and regrown each year, which is around 0.1 per cent of the broader New South Wales forested landscape.

The New South Wales Government must balance a range of considerations, including environmental, social and economic outcomes, to supply renewable timber from the small proportion of public forest designated for timber production. The New South Wales Forest Management Framework outlines how all forestry operations are regulated by a robust set of environmental safeguards. These have been developed following extensive research and protect wildlife habitat across the landscape and the ongoing biodiversity of the forests. Such research is ongoing. It is this science, together with appropriate policy settings, that the New South Wales Government through DPI Forestry and its other agencies will use to continue the Forest Management Framework of regulatory and statutory settings.

The New South Wales Government's science and forest monitoring will continue to play a key part in ensuring the protection of the koala and other threatened species, and we will continue our commitment to getting the balance right. Well-managed forests that include harvesting operations carried out under the agreed forest management and environmental prescriptions are not a threat to koala habitat. This is supported by the recent work of Dr Bradley Law. His peer reviewed "before and after" harvesting study found koala density was similar between paired national park and State forest sites. I bring attention to the recent work of the New South Wales Natural Resources Commission Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program. This program aims to improve the evidence base for decision-making for forest management across tenures. This will strengthen the New South Wales Government's ability to manage forests strategically and adaptively over time, including State forests, national parks, private native forests and Crown forested land.

In the case of koala protection, the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer reported in 2016 that landscape-scale threats, including habitat loss and climate change, are exacerbated by the impacts of local threats, such as vehicle strike, dog attack and disease—not timber harvesting. People have spoken about the declaration by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee determination that the koala be listed as endangered and the impacts of native forestry upon koalas. I point to the Natural Resources Commission again for a bit more guidance on this, from whom I learnt that in this determination, amongst the human activities identified as resulting in loss, fragmentation and degradation of koala habitats, forestry barely rates a mention. Other activities did, including urban expansion, mining and land clearing for grazing certainly. But none of these activities are permitted in State forests. Again, I am not convinced of the current need for the bill.

Forestry operations provide substantial economic benefit by supplying dozens of local mills and businesses that harvest and process forest products and employ local community members. State forests in New South Wales have been sustainably managed and regrown for more than 100 years. This careful management continues to ensure they will provide environmental, economic and social benefits for future generations. The New South Wales Government has put in place a range of programs, protections, regulations and policies that help to secure the future of koalas in the wild. The bill is not supported by strong science or evidence, which is why I do not support it. However, I acknowledge the intentions of Ms Faehrmann and compliment her passion and commitment to this cause, which I find admirable. I say the same about others who have spoken with genuine passion on the bill. No doubt there are more speeches to come. I look forward to further discussions on this topic in the context of the timber inquiry being conducted by the House and beyond that. Let us keep doing more to protect this wonderful animal.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD (21:14): I begin by particularly acknowledging the contribution of the Hon. Catherine Cusack to debate on the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2021. She has very succinctly articulated the challenges faced not only by koalas but by all those in the community who have spent much of their lives trying to protect these animals, supporting sick or injured koalas and working within their communities to build an understanding of what is needed to create a more sustainable future. It is not just for one species; protecting koala habitat has such profound benefits for broader biodiversity in New South Wales. I also acknowledge the honourable member's courage in pointing out—I can imagine it is a very challenging thing to do—the way in which the transactional approach of the Coalition Government to issues of biodiversity really struggles to come to terms with the challenge before us.

Like many people, after the 2019-20 fires I had an instinct that something would have to change. Business as usual was not possible. Yet there has been a total failure by the Government to recognise that there has been a change that calls for a significant reaction. It seems that the transactional nature that enables the Coalition to exist and the Coalition agreement to function, that holds together the competing views within the National Party and the Liberal Party, has been particularly detrimental to biodiversity protection in New South Wales. Putting aside the benefits that an energy policy change might have had, I think that the transactional approach of the Government to issues of biodiversity is really important for the community to understand. It is simply not enough to have the rhetoric of "let's double koala populations by 2050". There is substance that needs to flow from that. That is impossible when every single decision that will make a difference—particularly when it comes to koalas, but also for biodiversity more broadly—ultimately rubs up hard against policies that are deeply opposed by other elements of the Government.

It is really important for people to understand this debate and the challenges that we face in policymaking in New South Wales. A few weeks ago I was in the North Coast forests, visiting a site there pre-emptively. We were visiting for the timber inquiry, but I went early to look at some active logging coupes on the North Coast. It was not quite in the area of the great koala national park but an area that had been recently logged in the past six months. I was walking up the slope of a logged area at Wedding Cake Rock in the State forest and came across the stump of quite a substantial grey gum. It would have been nearly a metre across, a very old tree. In fact, it just fell under the very large tree prescriptions in the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approval [CIFOA] that would have protected it from being logged. There was about a metre of stump left in the ground and perhaps another couple of metres of stump on the floor that were a bit gnarly and so were not taken once the tree was felled. This tree stump was absolutely covered in koala claw markings. It was just so obvious.

I am not an ecologist. I have not studied the science of koala health and population. I did not need that background to see that this was a tree that was actively used by the local koala population. The reality is that the law in New South Wales allows for this substantial tree—which would have been several hundred years old, would no doubt have contained hollows, was one of the preferred feed trees and was obviously actively used by the koala population—to be logged and sold, in the absolute best case, for decking. Perhaps it was for a power pole, as the Hon. Catherine Cusack pointed out. But it is okay, because about five twiggy tallowwoods were kept for the koala feed tree requirements under the CIFOA. That is what we are talking about when we come to understand what is actually happening on the ground and the consequences for this animal.

Later on during that visit, I had the chance to go for a drive up to Killiecrankie Mountain, an absolutely beautiful lookout over the New England National Park. With the caldera there, it is an amazing scene. If you turn around and look back towards the coast, you see the headwaters of the Kalang and Nambucca rivers. Nearly all of that area, which looks no different from the New England National Park, has not been logged for 40 or 50 years. It looks like old growth forest has returned. Obviously a lot of it has been historically logged, but not at the scale and intensity of the current day logging under the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approval. There is a lot of rainforest in the old growth forest that is quite steep, but it is all State forest.

We know how Forestry Corporation operates. When we look at the plan portal, we see that this prime area of mature forest will be heavily targeted in the next few years by Forestry Corporation. It is targeting the next three years of timber supply. There is no doubt it is some of the best quality timber, but there is also no doubt that it is some of the best quality koala habitat in New South Wales. It is the cornerstone of the great koala national park proposal that is on the table tonight. I know it is some of the best koala habitat in New South Wales because I prepared some background information on the great koala national park when the proposal was put forward by the National Parks Association and the then Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. It was prepared for the Hon. Matt Kean, MP, when he was the Minister for Energy and Environment. He is now the Minister for Energy, and maybe that is part of the problem.

Work had been done by the department to understand where the quality koala habitat was in New South Wales. One thing it had to consider was the impact on logging, but also the validity of the proposal that it was able to improve koala protections. The department found that there was a substantial crossover of what it defined as areas of regional koala significance [ARKS] and koala hubs. But there were ways of identifying koala populations and then the critical areas of those populations. The DPIE identified 10 koala focus areas within the great koala national park. These areas are contained within three existing ARKS, which were Coffs Harbour to North Bellingen, Clouds Creek and north Macleay to Nambucca. They contained 61 identified koala hubs. The ARKS and hubs identify areas that are known to support koala populations and, when used in conjunction with the koala habitat information base, suitability layers provide the best available means of prioritising sites for koala conservation.

If we overlay the koala hubs, which are the most critically important areas, with the great koala national park and with the proposed Forestry Corporation logging plans over the next few years, they meet. This is a live issue now because Forestry Corporation recognises that it is in the dying days of its industry. There is a broad recognition, even by members in The Nationals who have spoken tonight, that native forest logging in New South Wales does not have a future. All North Coast logging contracts will conclude in 2028. Given the way things have gone in Western Australia and Victoria, as well as the national debate about biodiversity protection, it is entirely reasonable to assume that this industry will end. The worst possible thing we could do is allow Forestry Corporation to destroy some of the best quality koala habitat during its last few years of operation. We can do better.

This debate attracts such emotion and intensity of discussion because the Government has tried to make a virtue out of its koala protection plans. We all know that Matt Kean announced, with great fanfare, the intention to double koala populations by 2050. He has thrown a lot of money at it. At the same time, we are actively allowing logging of critical koala habitat in State forests in New South Wales. The Government has just amended the

private native forestry code, which has grandfathered pre-existing private native forestry approvals in known areas of core koala habitat. It will allow those areas to continue to be logged. It will prevent new koala plans of management being created that might have been able to identify and protect those areas of core koala habitat as well. Some 500,000 hectares of land clearing has been approved in New South Wales in the past three years under the Government's biodiversity reforms. Much of that is impacting on biodiversity. Some of it is also impacting on koala habitat.

I asked some questions in the recent forestry inquiry of Department of Primary Industry officials—scientists—who appeared before us. I considered the fact that those koala hubs were overlain with areas of forestry activity and that the scientific analysis that was being quoted by The Nationals suggested that, effectively, koalas' presence is not necessarily reduced in logged areas compared to unlogged areas. So I asked the question of the scientists: "If those areas of koala hubs that the department of environment has identified as critical for future protection were protected from harvesting, would koalas be better off than they currently are or would it be neutral?" The answer that I got was, "I will have to take that on notice." Those are the scientists who are supporting the New South Wales Government in being able to make a decision.

Our scientists have been tongue tied by the cognitive dissonance of members of the New South Wales Government and their idea that continuing to log, destroy and develop areas of koala habitat will not have an impact on koala populations. My six-year-old knows that koalas need trees. My six-year-old could understand the concept that, if we log koala habitat or if we allow it to be knocked down for urban development or cleared for agricultural development, that will not be good for koalas. But I could not get a straight answer from experts within the department about whether or not protecting those areas of identified critical habitat for koalas from logging would be beneficial for koalas. They said, "I will have to take it on notice." Why? Because—I suspect—they did not want to have to answer to Ministers who did not want to have to answer this question. That is what is going on. It is made worse by the fact that we have a way out of this.

I have done a bit of analysis based on what I have learnt through the koala inquiry and through my investigations over a number of years into this—what I and activists have found through the Government Information (Public Access) Act—and what I understand of the industry in particular. The net area of the great koala national park that is currently harvestable in State forests represents about 20 per cent of all the harvestable area on the North Coast. The volume of high-quality timber—which is the valuable stuff that most wood supply agreements are really about—represented by that 20 per cent of net harvestable area is about 50,000 cubic metres a year of high-quality sawlogs, large and small. As an example and comparison—just to get a sense of the value of that—in 2014 the Government bought back 50,000 cubic metres of quota off Boral because of historical over-logging. It was not able to meet its supply contracts at that time, so it bought out the quota. It paid \$8 million in 2014 for 50,000 cubic metres of blackbutt of the highest value high-quality sawlog.

That should give members a sense that the value of this timber is around \$8 million. I am just putting it out there. We will round it up to \$10 million just to make it easy. The Natural Resources Commission [NRC], which did a report for the Government on the impacts of post-fire logging on the industry, recommended that substantial additional conditions be put on logging in the North Coast and recognised the jobs impacts of that. Before the fires, there were 590 direct jobs in the North Coast native timber sector. We are talking about direct jobs in Forestry Corporation, logging contractors, haulage contractors and millers. Let us assume that the 20 per cent loss of wood supply results in a 20 per cent loss of jobs. I note that the NRC says that that will happen as a result of the fires anyway. It is a problem that exists for the Government irrespective of whether or not we develop the great koala national park. At 20 per cent, that is 118 jobs.

Down on the South Coast, when Blue Ridge Hardwood lost its contract, the Department of Regional NSW announced a \$150,000-per-person package as part of an industry transition support package in the region. If those 118 or 120 jobs were to be paid out in the same way, that would represent about \$18 million. Between \$25 million and \$30 million, the wood supply contracts could be bought out and every affected worker could get \$150,000. That is about \$30 million in total, which represents just 15 per cent of the total \$193 million that the Government has put towards its koala strategy. How easy is that? How easy is it to find the money to deal with this problem in a substantial way right now?

It makes it even easier to analyse the value for money. The modelling that the New South Wales Government's experts did on the great koala national park identified that about 27,000 hectares of modelled habitat exists within the koala focus areas of the park. It is the good stuff—27,000 hectares. By comparison, the NSW Koala Strategy aims to protect 22,000 hectares. By all accounts, from the questions I have asked, about \$107 million of the \$193 million will be dedicated to buying land to protect koala habitat. Is anyone from Treasury listening to me? We can pay \$107 million to buy and protect 22,000 hectares of koala habitat, or pay about \$30 million and protect more—27,000 hectares—by creating the great koala national park, alongside the flow-on

value that that creates for the North Coast region. It is not a difficult argument to make, I would think, even within the Liberal Party. The reality is we have to do it anyway.

It is disgraceful that in the past week the NSW Nationals renewed the North Coast wood supply agreements that were due to expire next year. That represents a volume of timber not much more than what the Government would need to buy out to create the great koala national park, in all honesty. It is disgraceful for two reasons. One is that the Government has failed to respond to the Natural Resources Commission's advice on how to manage the impacts of post-fire logging. The idea that a decision would be made about the future of that industry when that report identifies industry restructure is needed to address the wood supply constraints after the fires is totally ridiculous.

Worse still, it is nonsensical to renew those contracts at pre-fire levels when we know that the timber is simply not there. I note the comments by the Hon. Catherine Cusack that it puts us in a position where future governments may need to pay much more to buy out those wood supply agreements—those rights, essentially, to timber that may not even be there. It is astonishing that that has been allowed to happen. I am glad that it has been called out in this place tonight. It would have been a fantastic opportunity to address the need for additional koala protection and to start the industry on a journey.

The Government—or the National Party, which made the decision—has decided to kick the can down the road. But I think I have made an argument to say that the money, the science and the justification are there to fix both problems: the need to preserve koala habitat at a scale, and the need for the native forest timber industry to start the inevitable transition away from native forest logging towards more sustainable forms of logging or to transition away from the low-value products it currently produces towards higher value products.

I hope the Government, even though it will not support the bill, takes seriously the need for that transition to happen and the need to actually look at what is happening on the ground with koalas and uses the rest of this parliamentary term to address an issue that I think has captured the mind of the public. We expect better from governments. I acknowledge the comments by the Hon. Catherine Cusack, and I do not think the Government can hide any longer behind the fact that its rhetoric does not meet its actions. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN (21:34): In reply: I thank those who contributed to the second reading debate on the Great Koala Protected Area Bill 2022. I thank the House from the outset for graciously allowing so much time for debate on this very important bill, on an issue that people obviously feel so passionately about. I thank the speakers, the Hon. Peter Poulos, the Hon. Penny Sharpe, Ms Sue Higginson, the Hon. Mark Pearson, the Hon. Emma Hurst, the Hon. Mark Banasiak, the Hon. Wes Fang, the Hon. Scott Barrett, Mr Justin Field and the Hon. Catherine Cusack.

I note at the outset the courage and integrity that the Hon. Catherine Cusack has on this issue to once again signal her determination, as she did two years ago, to go against the party and the Government that she is a part of on an issue that is so fundamentally important to her. That is the survival of koalas in New South Wales, and she is really putting everything on the line for koalas. I chaired the inquiry that Catherine, the Hon. Penny Sharpe and others sat on. With the evidence that we received during that inquiry, we really could not do anything else but agree to dedicate as much of our lives as possible to doing everything that we can to save koala habitat—because that is what we are talking about here. That is why the inquiry made the very strong finding it did, which we deliberated over very carefully, that koalas will become extinct in New South Wales before 2050 unless urgent government action is taken to protect any further koala habitat from being destroyed.

That is why we have brought the bill to this place at this time. As the Hon. Catherine Cusack said, the proposal has been around for 12 years or so. It has been generated through science, mapping, consultation, research and years of work. I note Mr Justin Field's contribution that the environment department has researched the issue. It has looked at its own maps of the arcs where core koala habitat and areas of regional koala significance occur, and it has realised that the great koala national park falls over much of our very significant koala habitat. So much work has been done.

I also give a shout-out to the community, who are so passionate about the issue that they set up an information centre that for all intents and purposes looks like an official government tourism centre for something called the great koala national park in Urunga, advertising to tourists and visitors that the mid North Coast is indeed home to a great koala national park. It is absolutely extraordinary how much the community have thrown themselves behind this. Another example is that members of the mid North Coast community came down to Sydney today to attend a rally outside Parliament in support of the bill. People have begged us, and I know that the Hon. Penny Sharpe has received at least 1,500 emails urging Labor to support the bill.

I quickly address the Government's contribution. The Hon. Peter Poulos, who spoke for the Government on the bill, talked up the koala strategy as a resounding success but then said that protecting koalas takes time—it takes time to roll out the koala strategy.

In the words of the Government member, it is premature to bring forward this bill. Well, koalas do not have time. It is extraordinary that the Government contributed those words to this debate only a few weeks after the koala was declared endangered in New South Wales. I note the contribution to this debate of my colleague Ms Sue Higgs. She spoke of what it means when an animal or threatened species is declared endangered. You have to pull out all stops to prevent any further loss—or else that species will become extinct. That is what it means. It takes time? It is premature? No, this bill is not premature; this bill is urgent.

I will address Labor's contribution to this debate. From the outset, I acknowledge that I have no doubt the Hon. Penny Sharpe is incredibly passionate about saving koalas. I worked alongside Penny on the committee that inquired into koala populations and their habitat. Of course, in both the 2015 and 2019 State elections NSW Labor committed to establish a great koala national park, but Labor did not win those elections so we did not see that park established.

The basis of Labor's opposition to the bill in this Chamber today is that it is going to take the policy to the election—that it does not trust this Government to establish the great koala national park. That to me is quite extraordinary. I repeat that koalas have just been listed as endangered in New South Wales. For Labor to put at risk the halting of a significant amount of logging in koala habitat based on whether it wins the election is just extraordinary. Tonight members have once again seen, in the revelations from the Hon. Catherine Cusack, that politics always wins out. Politics is winning out over koalas. NSW Labor is more about politics than it is about koalas.

The Hon. Penny Sharpe: It's about funding communities and having money—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: No, it is not. I approached the Hon. Penny Sharpe and said, "Let's talk about this." I said, "I'm very happy to talk to you about what it looks like, in terms of amending the boundaries of the national park and what we can do to get this bill through, because we potentially could have the numbers." I also said this to the Government. The Government has the excuse that the bill is premature. The excuse from Labor is that it is a money bill and that we have to do all this consultation and work with communities. Of course we do. The Government could have come to The Greens and said, "Hey, 28 days is way too soon. Twenty-eight days just isn't enough. Really, Cay, we'll need to have three months. Can we work on this?" This is how you do this stuff.

But no, we have a commitment by Labor if it wins the next election. But what if Labor does not win the next election? We had the opportunity tonight. The Hon. Catherine Cusack is voting for the bill. That means it comes down to Labor tonight—and Labor is not voting for the bill. We could have had the bill pass the upper House with the Hon. Catherine Cusack's vote, which would have put pressure on the Government. Once again we would have had the whole issue of koalas in the media, and we could have seen what would happen in the lower House.

I said to the community today that this bill may not pass but we will do everything we can to ensure that it does. If it does not pass, and it clearly is not going to, this will continue to happen in those areas of the Mid North Coast. We often forget what we are talking about when we are in here. We are talking about areas being logged, protecting those areas and everything else. There are 32 forest areas within the great koala national park that are scheduled for logging over the next 12 months. We have already lost parts of the existing great koala national park that is before us today. Some areas have already been logged and are actively being logged. The 32 areas of forest that are scheduled for logging have been approved and are ready to go at any point. That makes up 2,596 hectares of land within the boundaries of the proposed great koala national park that is set to be logged within the next 12 months. That is about 2,600 football fields, which is massive. A lot of that is koala habitat.

I note that I walked through some of those forests recently, like Pine Creek State Forest, which is home to not just koalas but an extraordinary range of threatened species. It is subject to logging possibly within months. I also note the contribution from Mr Justin Field about doing the work on getting a rough indication of how much it would cost to buy out the contracts and compensate every worker for \$150,000. It is disappointing in some ways. I spoke with the environment Minister, James Griffin, about this yesterday. He knows that this has been on the cards for some time, and the Government possibly could have done better than Labor tonight. It is \$30 million, which is quite extraordinary for buying out the contracts. Once again, we have empty words from the Government.

After the koala inquiry handed down its report and its significant finding that koalas will become extinct by 2050 without urgent government intervention to protect their habitat, the then environment Minister, Matt Kean, said he was going to double koala numbers by 2050. At that point, I was not the only person who realised

they were empty words. In fact, he was just doing it for a headline and to try to look like he was doing the right thing on koalas.

But what an extraordinary contribution from the Hon. Catherine Cusack tonight. She revealed the dirty deals that were made between the Liberals and The Nationals to get the so-called "koala wars" out of the headlines and off the front pages of the newspapers. Tonight it was revealed that the former Liberal environment Minister and the Liberal Party, in fact, threw koalas under the bus for their own political self-interest and self-gain. That is what we heard tonight. That is the ongoing situation in this State for koalas. None of the political parties that have the ability to support these bills and pass legislation have the guts to do the right thing. I commend the bill to the House. I thank all members for their considered contributions to debate on the bill. It may not be until after the election, but if Labor wins and if the Hon. Penny Sharpe becomes environment Minister, I hope one of the first things she does is to bring a bill quick smart before this House to get something in place, because every day we are waiting, koala habitat is being cleared and opportunities for action are being lost.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the bill be now read a second time.

The House divided.

Ayes7
 Noes30
 Majority.....23

AYES

Boyd (teller)	Field	Hurst
Cusack	Higginson	Pearson
Faehrmann (teller)		

NOES

Amato	Graham	Moselmane
Banasiak	Houssos	Poulos
Barrett (teller)	Jackson	Primrose
Borsak	Latham	Rath
Buttigieg	Maclaren-Jones	Roberts
D'Adam	Mallard	Searle
Donnelly	Martin	Sharpe
Fang	Mitchell	Tudehope
Farlow (teller)	Mookhey	Veitch
Farraway	Moriarty	Ward

Motion negatived.

Documents

CASTLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL

Production of Documents: Order

The Hon. MARK LATHAM (22:00): I move:

That, under standing order 52, there be laid upon the table of the House within 21 days of the date of passing of this resolution the following documents, created since 1 January 2008, in the possession, custody or control of the Minister for Education and Early Learning, Department of Education, or the Department of Customer Service relating to Castle Hill High School:

- (a) all documents regarding asbestos identification, complaints, reports, rectifications and testing at Castle Hill High School;
- (b) all documents regarding building works at Castle Hill High School, including documents relating to the funding and asset management approvals of such works funded by either the Department of Education or from school funds; and
- (c) any legal or other advice regarding the scope or validity of this order of the House created as a result of this order of the House.

Given everyone supports the motion, I would appreciate if it could be carried now and then we can knock off.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Learning) (22:00): I appreciate that the Hon. Mark Latham is interested in this topic and, yes, it is an important issue relating to asbestos at Castle Hill High School. The Government will support the motion but I also am conscious that there are a lot of calls for