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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary inquiry into koala populations and habitat

Vegan Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Council Planning and Environment Committee inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales. We hope this submission assists the committee in recommending actions to ensure the welfare of koalas.

Vegan Australia is a national organisation that informs the public about animal rights and veganism and also presents a strong voice for veganism to government, institutions, corporations and the media. Vegan Australia envisions a world where all animals live free from human use and ownership. The foundation of Vegan Australia is justice and compassion, for animals as well as for people and the planet. The first step each of us should take to put this compassion into action is to become vegan and to encourage others to do the same. Veganism is a rejection of the exploitation involved in commodifying and using sentient beings.

STOP EATING KOALAS!



**Koalas are dying and the key threat is land clearing.
Most land clearing is for animal farming.
If you want to save the koalas, go vegan!
www.veganaustralia.org.au/govegan**

vegan
AUSTRALIA
Love life, live vegan.

Introduction

This public consultation is an opportunity for the community to reflect on how the production of animal products is damaging to many aspects of the environment, including by threatening native species such as the koala. Every year over half a billion farmed animals are bred, raised and killed for food in Australia. The U.N. has identified animal agriculture as 'one of the most significant contributors to today's most serious environmental problems', including global warming, species extinction, loss of fresh water, forest destruction, air and water pollution, acid rain, salinity, soil erosion and loss of habitat.

This consultation is an opportunity to consider alternative ways we can obtain food which do not involve both the suffering of farmed animals and the environmental havoc animal agriculture causes.

Impact of land clearing

We note that the goals of this inquiry is to identify key threats to healthy koala populations and to identify how to ensure their welfare and survival.

The key threat to koala survival is land clearing, both past and continuing. This threatens not just koalas but many other species.

A shocking report by WWF-Australia found that millions of native animals are killed each year due to the bulldozing of their forest and woodland habitats. While this report concentrates on Queensland, we believe many of its findings are relevant to NSW.

The WWF-Australia study estimates that tree clearing in Queensland alone kills about 34 million native mammals, birds and reptiles every year, comprising 900,000 mammals, 2.6 million birds and 30.6 million reptiles.

Bulldozing of habitat, past and ongoing, is a major factor in the 80% decline of koalas in Queensland's Koala Coast.

In a departure from many conservation and environmental organisations, the WWF-Australia report focuses on the experiences of individual animals rather than on conservation of habitat and species. It states "the fate of all native vertebrate animals is considered important, regardless if the species is threatened or common". The report looks at the suffering and death individual animals experience due to habitat destruction.

The report also states that "cruelty and animal suffering, whether intentional or not, is abhorrent to most Australians" and that there will be strong public support for action.

Habitat loss inevitably leads to suffering and death of the individuals inhabiting an area to be cleared. Species affected include koalas, quolls, bats, bandicoots, native rodents, possums and gliders. Close to a million mammals are estimated to die each year from clearing.

The impact on animals resident in an area to be cleared is immense. Many die during

clearing; crushed by machinery or falling trees. Many others die slowly over days or weeks, from injuries, starvation or exposure. Animals left behind in the cleared landscape are highly exposed and vulnerable to predators. Some die when log piles they are sheltering in are burnt or chipped into mulch by machines.

Animals who flee from the clearing suffer on the way - in collisions with vehicles, fences or powerlines, taken by predators, or due to injuries, exposure, starvation, dehydration or disease. If the clearing is extensive or other habitat patches are distant, many animals, particularly the small and young, will die before being able to reach new habitat.

Other deprivations suffered by animals due to clearing include suffocation, starvation, dehydration, heat exposure, heat stroke, infection and disease.

The report claims that "habitat destruction through tree-clearing probably counts as Queensland's and possibly also Australia's single largest crisis of animal welfare."

Land clearing is mainly for animal agriculture

Animal agriculture is the key driver for tree-clearing in Australia.

Native vegetation is still being cleared for agriculture in Australia, with about 90% of that used to open up new areas for grazing pasture for animal farming. Queensland is the nation's leader in current land clearing. While NSW is continuing to clear land to some extent, much of the state has already been cleared. Agricultural land occupies 81% of the state, with most of this used for animal agriculture. By comparison about 2% of NSW is used for forestry.

As the Beyond Zero Emissions Land Use Report says "Since colonisation Australia has seen more biodiversity loss than any other continent and this rate is still one of the highest globally. Deforestation and grazing pressure are the major threats to biodiversity, and cause stress to a range of ecological communities across the continent."

As can be seen from Figure 2.6 of the BZE Land Use Report, nearly all of NSW has been impacted by grazing.

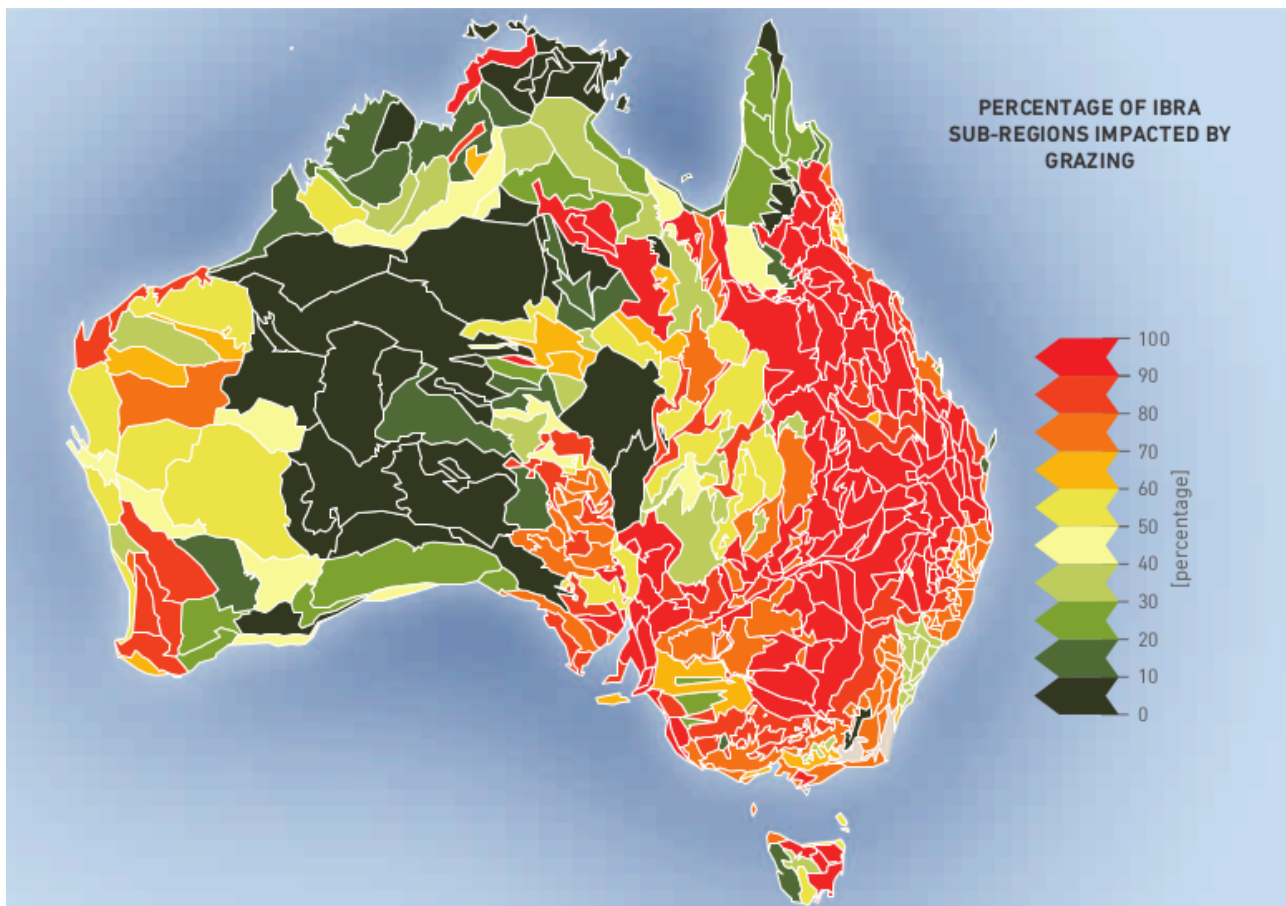


Figure 2.6 Percentage of IBRA sub-regions impacted by grazing. (From BZE Land Use Report)

The solution is to phase out animal agriculture

Protection of koalas should not be taken in isolation. Not only are there grave concerns for koalas in NSW, there are concerns for many species as well as the continuation of the human population due to environmental destruction, especially from climate change. All this is in addition to the over half a billion farmed animals bred, raised and killed for food in Australia every year. NSW accounts for about one third of these.

For these reasons we need to end land clearing for animal agriculture, start to revegetate previously cleared land and then work towards phasing out the animal agriculture industry in NSW and throughout Australia.

Evidence that animal products are not necessary for health

Vegan Australia's recommendation to phase out animal agriculture implies a change to a plant-based diet for the people of NSW. Nutritional science shows that humans have no need for farmed animal food products. In fact, there is a solid body of peer-reviewed scientific evidence to confirm that it actually benefits human health to consume a primarily plant-based diet. Changing to a plant-based diet can help people live a longer, healthier life, and significantly reduce risk of falling victim to many of the serious health threats facing Australians today.

Australia's peak health body, the National Health and Medical Research Council, recognises that a vegan diet is a viable option for all Australians. Australia's top health experts agree with those in other parts of the world that well-planned vegan diets are safe and healthy for all age groups. The Australian Dietary Guidelines state that alternatives to animal foods, such as nuts, seeds, legumes, beans and tofu, can "increase dietary variety and provide a valuable and affordable source of protein and other nutrients found in meats."

According to the US Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, "Appropriately planned ... vegan diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood and for athletes."

Not only are animal products unnecessary for optimal health, an increasing number of nutritionists and health professionals are acknowledging animal products are harmful to our health. This is supported by decades of good research. A healthy vegan diet helps reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, obesity, and diabetes, some of Australia's top killers.

A recent issue of the Medical Journal of Australia, dedicated to the question "Is a Vegetarian [including vegan] Diet Adequate?", included the following statements. "A varied and balanced plant-based diet can provide all of the nutrients needed for good health." "Most vegans meet the recommended daily intake for protein." "Vegan diets generally contain just as much or more iron than mixed diets containing meat." "BMI and obesity was lowest for vegans."

The China Study by T Colin Campbell is one of the most comprehensive studies on nutrition ever done. Campbell provides compelling evidence linking animal products to disease, including cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, etc.

Every current vegan, by simply being vegan, proves that causing harm to sentient farmed animals is not necessary.

Climate change, animal agriculture and koalas

The committee has been asked to inquire into the likely impacts of climate change on koalas. We expect that climate change could have a disastrous effect on koalas, as it may have on many other species, including humans. Some have called the current climate emergence the "Sixth Mass Extinction". So to protect koalas we need to urgently tackle the climate crisis.

Animal agriculture is the leading cause of climate change. In Australia, animal agriculture emits about 50% of all greenhouse gases, when accounted over 20 years. Animal agriculture produces greenhouse gases through land clearing for grazing, methane produced by cows and sheep and emissions from manure.

In their greenhouse gas calculations, the IPCC and other international environmental organisations use warming potentials of greenhouse gases using a 100-year time frame. The decision to use a 100-year time frame is arbitrary. The IPCC states that "There is no scientific argument for selecting 100 years compared with other choices. The choice of

time horizon is a value judgement." The convention to use a 100-year time frame was decided several decades ago, before the urgent need to avoid climate-system tipping points was understood. Given the urgency of the emissions reductions required to avoid catastrophic temperature increases, 20-year global warming potentials are much more relevant. Over 20 years, the global warming potential of methane is about 5 times higher than over 100 years. Animal agriculture is the largest source of methane and so if we measure the impact of sectors using a 20-year time frame, the climate impact of agriculture is significantly higher.

The IPCC and other groups also do not take into account the impact of short-term gases on global warming. In the short time we have available to overcome climate change, the global warming potential of these short-lived gases becomes much more significant. Most of these gases are emitted by animal agriculture.

When 20-year global warming potentials are used and short-term gases are included, we find that animal agriculture is responsible for about 50% of all greenhouse gases, both in Australia and worldwide.

Methane stays in the atmosphere on average about 12 years. This means that reductions in methane emissions will cause more immediate cuts to global warming than reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Carbon dioxide can stay in the atmosphere for over 100 years, so even if carbon dioxide emissions (from, for example, burning fossil fuels) were reduced now, it would take many decades for this to have an effect on global warming.

Once we understand that animal agriculture is a major cause of global warming, a simple, effective and relatively quick solution becomes clear. By abolishing the use of animals for food, we not only act ethically for the animals, we also help slow and eventually reverse global warming.

The economic impact of removing animals from the agricultural system will not be as significant as most people believe. The animal agriculture industry is a relatively small part of the modern Australian economy. It currently contributes about 1.2% to the Australian GDP and employs less than 1.5% of the Australian workforce.

Any negative economic impacts could be carefully managed to avoid dislocation, by reskilling workers and reusing land for other purposes. Currently, over half of the Australian continent is used for animal agricultural. Much of this could be used for sequestering carbon which would remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and hence start to reverse global warming.

At an individual level, the single best thing you can do for the environment is to live vegan. At a national and worldwide level, the best thing we can do is to abolish the use of animals in the agriculture industry.

To achieve climate and social justice and avoid catastrophe, we need to work on multiple fronts. Yes, we need to transition to 100% renewable energy. Yes, we need to change cities so we depend on cars less. Yes, we need to make buildings more energy efficient. But we also need to move quickly to a vegan way of life.

Seriously tackling climate is the only hope of protecting koalas, other species and humans.

Other benefits of ending animal agriculture

A report by the CSIRO states that "Land clearing, primarily for agriculture, is perhaps the single most important cause of environmental degradation, loss of species, and depletion of ecological communities."

By removing animals from agriculture, a large proportion of land cleared for animal agriculture in NSW will be freed up. This will allow regrowth and reforestation which will not only help koalas survive, it will have other environmental benefits, particularly by strengthening ecosystems, increasing biodiversity and allowing endangered species to recover and possibly preventing extinctions in the future.

In addition, the end of the use of animals in agriculture will avoid an enormous amount of suffering to the over half a billion farmed animals who are bred, raised and killed for food every year in Australia. Each animal values their life and doesn't want to die.

Moving towards a vegan Australia

This committee has been charged with recommending actions, policies and funding by government to ensure healthy, sustainable koala populations and habitat in New South Wales.

We urge the committee to recognise that animal agriculture is a key threat to koalas in NSW and to make recommendations for actions based on this. These actions should include policy, legislation and regulations to:

- educate the public about the damage caused by animal agriculture to farmed animals and wild animals and to the environment
- improve the knowledge of the public about plant based nutrition
- encourage the public to adopt plant based diets
- assist farmers to move to other uses of the land, including reforestation.

The members of the committee should ask themselves if it is important to save the koalas, and then if it is, why the same logic should not be used to save farmed animals? Please see the references to carnism and speciesism below.

Greg McFarlane
Vegan Australia

References

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