

Koalas in crisis: National nature laws are allowing rampant bulldozing of koala habitat

Executive summary

So far in 2025, the Albanese Government has used the national law intended to *protect* nature to approve more koala habitat destruction than in any other year. This is despite the koala being an endangered species and the Federal Government recognising habitat destruction and fragmentation as a “major” and “increasing” threat to the iconic marsupial.¹

But this only tells a fraction of the story. Since 2011, almost 2.3 million hectares of koala habitat has been knocked down without our national nature laws being applied at all. That’s more than sixty times the area that has been assessed and approved to be destroyed by the federal government which applies these laws.

The bulldozing of koala habitat is a national shame. But the Albanese Government can change this and has a once in a generation to do so as it re-writes the country’s national nature laws.

Australia needs national laws that protect koalas and keep the forests they need standing.

These laws must:

- close the current loopholes that allow deforestation,
- set clear and upfront rules that protect habitat for threatened species from bulldozers and
- be administered and enforced by an independent national environmental protection agency.

The destruction at a glance:

- **2025 so far is the worst year on record for federally-approved destruction of koala habitat:** Almost 4,000 hectares have been approved to be bulldozed to make way for 8 projects this year.
- **Since 2011, an area larger than two Royal National Parks has been approved for destruction:** Almost 38,000 hectares of koala habitat has been approved to be

¹ Australian Government (2022) Conservation Advice for *Phascolarctos cinereus* (Koala) combined populations of QLD, NSW and the ACT.

destroyed under Australia's failing nature 'protection' law, the EPBC Act. That's more than for any other threatened species in Australia.

- **Unassessed bulldozing is rampant and makes up the bulk of destruction:** Almost 2.3 million hectares of likely koala habitat in Queensland and NSW has been knocked down since 2011 without any assessment under our national nature law – that's *60 times more* than the amount of clearing that was federally assessed and approved to be destroyed, and more than twice the size of Greater Melbourne.
- **Agriculture is the biggest driver of koala habitat destruction:** Between 2011 and 2023, 72% of all unassessed bulldozing across Queensland and NSW was for agricultural activities, amounting to more than 1.6 million hectares of land that was likely koala habitat being destroyed.
- **Native forest logging is destroying koala habitat, particularly in NSW:** more than 390,000 hectares of koala habitat was cut down to make products such as pallets and woodchips between 2011 and 2023 – that's an area more than three times the size of King Island.

The Albanese Government has cleared the way for record levels of destruction in 2025

Despite its commitment to “zero new extinctions”, the Albanese Government has already approved the destruction of 3,958 hectares, or four Sydney Airports' worth of koala habitat, so far this year.

- This already dwarfs the total of 3,003 hectares of koala habitat that were approved to be destroyed in 2024, another year that was record setting for the amount of koala habitat federally consigned to the bulldozers.
- Of the 8 projects approved by the federal government so far this year, the Vulcan South Coal Mine in the Bowen Basin in Queensland has the largest destruction footprint. The project has approval to destroy 1,166 hectares, representing 30% of koala habitat approved to be flattened in 2025.
- Since 2011, the koala has had **more habitat approved to be destroyed** under Australia's national nature law than any other threatened species, totaling **37,738 hectares**.

Given that the koala has been recognised as threatened with extinction since 2012 and therefore should be protected from further harm by Australia's national nature law, this

underscores the total failure of the current laws to prevent the further decline of the species.

Most koala habitat is bulldozed without being assessed or approved by our national law

Unregulated destruction of the forest and woodlands where koalas live is happening on a massive scale far greater than federally-approved destruction. Australia's nature laws have failed to stop nearly 2.3 million hectares of likely koala habitat from being bulldozed and cut down.

- Between 2011 and 2023, **2,295,134 hectares** of bushland that was likely koala habitat has been destroyed across Queensland and NSW. This is more than twice the size of Greater Melbourne.
- Of this, **2,257,395** hectares were destroyed without assessment under our national nature laws. This means that more than **98%** of the destruction of likely koala habitat across Queensland and NSW over the last two decades has not been assessed and approved by the national laws that are meant to protect and manage Australia's threatened plants, animals and ecosystems.
- Most of this destruction occurred in Queensland, where the Statewide Landcover and Tree Study (SLATS) shows **1,927,845 hectares** of likely koala habitat is now gone.
- Overall, agriculture is the biggest driver of this destruction, responsible for **1,642,368 hectares, or 71%** of likely koala habitat that's been destroyed. That portion is higher in Queensland at **81%**.
- The native forest logging industry is also contributing to the demise of the bush, particularly in NSW. **391,170 hectares** of forest likely to be homes for koalas have been destroyed by logging operations.

State	Sum of estimated hectares of likely koala habitat destroyed
NSW	367,288.48
QLD	1,927,845.65
Total unapproved clearing (ha)	2,257,395.18
Grand total clearing (ha)	2,295,134.14

Table above: Total hectares of 'likely' koala habitat cleared in NSW (2011-2021) and Queensland (2011-2023)

Koalas and their forest homes need real protection by national laws that keep trees in the ground

The Albanese Government is currently re-writing Australia's broken national nature protection laws. To stop the rampant destruction of koala habitat they must:

1. Set out clear and upfront rules that protect habitat for threatened species like the koala from bulldozers and chainsaws.
2. Close current loopholes that enable rogue bulldozing and logging of Australia's forests and woodlands.
3. Establish an independent environmental protection agency that can enforce the law and make expert-based decisions that are free from political interference.