



# ***Coastwatchers***

***Eurobodalla's environment group***

Newsletter 21 March 2017

## **Coastwatchers Endorses Calls for Full Environmental Inquiry Before the Snowy Mountain Upgrade Part 2 Proceeds**

The President of the Coastwatchers Association, John Perkins, has joined calls from a number of environmental organizations, calling on the Commonwealth Government to undertake a full environmental assessment before proceeding with the upgrade of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electricity Scheme.

electricity prices. This differential must be sufficient to meet the cost of recycling water back above the turbines. If that differential reduces because of say the introduction of big battery storage, then Snowy 2 will be unviable.

John Perkins said before any work proceeds, it is critical that a thorough and independent environmental assessment be made. The allocation of \$500K for the technical feasibility study, ironically by ARENA the organization Abbott tried to close, will be entirely inadequate to review environmental issues as well. That presumably will be considered in the planning assessment process.



The President said that the technical appraisal, which is currently being carried out, must demonstrate the project is technically viable.

He also said that the proposal had to be financially viable. It was essential to review alternate strategies such as major battery storage as proposed for South Australia and Victoria.

The assumption underlying pumped hydro is based on their being a price differential between off peak and peak

## **Explore the South Coast Islands Around Durras**

Islands adjacent to Murramarang National Park coastline are continental islands, created when sea levels stabilized about 6,500 years ago.

People can explore them from the water, but landing is prohibited. The NPWS personal are permitted to undertake invasive weed control, and survey work on nesting sea birds.



The islands are connected geologically to the mainland. All are within a few kilometers of the coast and most are of an area of less than 10ha. Their ecology is similar to nearby headlands.



Due to their shape, the central plateau is surrounded by rock platforms. Many of these islands are termed "old hat" islands.

These coastal islands are of high conservation significance to burrowing and nesting sea birds such as the Little Penguin. These sea birds use very few places on the mainland, because of the existence of predators such as foxes, cats and dogs.

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## Coastwatchers Makes Two Submissions on Koalas to the NSW Government

Coastwatchers recently made two submissions to the NSW Government regarding the preparation of a "NSW Koala Strategy" and what is known as SEPP 44, a State Environmental Policy covering Koala Habitat.

Only the 'NSW Koala Strategy' is considered in this report.

The Government has estimated that Koala numbers in NSW have declined by 26% over the past 15-21 years. It is clear that if that rate of decline continues without significant intervention, by 2050, Koalas will be near extinct in the State.

The Government commissioned a review of the decline in Koala numbers in NSW by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer. That process occurred between March-December 2016. There

were 7 public information sessions, five in the north of the State, one in Sydney and one in the south at Bega.

The Chief Scientist's principal recommendation was that a **NSW Koala Strategy** be developed to stabilise, then increase koala numbers.

### Eurobodalla Koalas

The detailed history of Koalas in the Shire of Eurobodalla is extremely deficient. There was clearly a resident Koala population in the Shire when Europeans settled the South Coast of NSW in the 1800's. It has been reported that there was a growth in the koala population in the Shire until around the mid-1850s, attributed to the European impact on aboriginal activities and dingo numbers.

With European settlement increasing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Koala numbers declined rapidly Shire-wide, leaving remnant populations in various locations. The decline in numbers, was mainly attributed to the clearing of agricultural land by European settlers.



Unfortunately, much of that land was prime Koala habitat, which was characterised by high nutrition vegetation

(and low toxin levels), mostly along the fertile river valleys. There were also other issues such as disease and hunting for food especially in the depressions. A Koala skin tanning factory existed in Ulladulla and other parts of SE NSW.

Drought, increasing rural and urban development, road transport and more mechanised forestry techniques, have all contributed to the loss of Koala habitat in this area and the consequent depopulation, during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

By 2000 the Koala population in the Eurobodalla Shire was by any measure, was extinct. There are records of the odd Koala in search of a breeding group. However, the ongoing loss of habitat, especially in the State Forests, has been considered the greatest contributor to the decline in Koala numbers.

The last confirmed sighting of a Koala was at Nerrigundah in 2013. There is no data of the current number of Koalas in the Eurobodalla Shire, whether on private land, NSW Forestry Land or the National Parks.

In the adjacent Bega Valley Shire, a known Koala population exists in the Bermagui–Murrumbidgee, Mumbulla and Tanja regions. The population has been well documented, with the number of known koalas being less than 60.

Three State Forests, the Murrumbidgee, Mumbulla and Tanja, together with the southern half of Bermagui State Forest, were reclassified by the NSW Government in early 2016, as the **Murrumbidgee Flora Reserve**.

There is also believed to be a small population in the Koorabean National Park near Dignams Creek, (15 km from Narooma), which is also within the Bega Valley Shire, and adjacent to the boundary of the Eurobodalla Shire.

## **Coastwatchers Commissioned Reports**

The Coastwatchers Association has been involved with developing Koala Recovery Strategies in the Eurobodalla Shire for a number of years. The Association commissioned and funded research through its independently administered **'Coastwatchers Environment Fund'**. The project was led by Dr Keith Joliffe, a retired Canberra scientific researcher.

During his studies he produced three reports, available online at the Coastwatchers Association website (in the Archive section at [coastwatchers.org.au](http://coastwatchers.org.au)), and these reports were provided directly to all stakeholder agencies in this region and the State Government.

The first was the **"Eurobodalla Koala Discussion Paper"** prepared in March 2011. This report concluded that koala presence and koala habitat issues in the Eurobodalla were objectively unknown, and a full independent study was warranted.

This Discussion Paper was followed by:

**"Habitat Assessment and Koala Revival Prospects in the Eurobodalla, NSW – A Pilot Study"** January 2013.

The final report, in 2013 was the:

**"Eurobodalla Koala Recovery Strategy – 2014 to 2026"**

In developing the **NSW Koala Strategy**, the Coastwatchers considers that these reports need to be considered to assist in the development of that Strategy. The Association considers the findings and approach of the reports prepared by Dr Joliffe et al for the Eurobodalla Region, would be of great assistance to the NSW Government, as it embarks on the preparation its own Strategy.

When preparing the **NSW Koala Strategy** it is crucial the NSW Government understands why the

previous NSW Government prepared **Koala Recovery Strategy** of 2008 failed.

That **“Recovery Plan for the Koalas”** was prepared by the OEH in November 2008, but was never adequately implemented, and fell from the Government’s radar as a priority.

There were turf wars between the various NSW Government agencies, plus the lack of will by some of those agencies to take cooperative action, to implement the Strategy. That is why the present predicament exists, with the NSW Koala populations continuing to decline. A huge failure.

Clearly the NSW Government has demonstrated that if it cannot sustain existing populations. It has no capacity to recover previous populations of Koalas such as those that were in the Eurobodalla Shire.

If the 2008 agency rivalry continues into this 2017 NSW Koala Strategy, then that decline in Koala numbers will continue, and no doubt trend to near extinction across the State.

The Association:

- supported the establishment of a **“NSW Koala Strategy”**;
- supported the Findings of the NSW Chief Scientist, especially that the objective of the strategy should be to **stabilise and then start to increase koala numbers** throughout the State of NSW
- considered that the Strategy be extended to recovering lost Koala populations as in Eurobodalla;
- noted that long-term koala survival requires an inter Local Government area landscape-scale connected mosaic of suitable home ranges and breeding corridors. There must be a collaborative effort between all land managers, public and private

agencies to protect and rehabilitate these areas.

- noted that irrespective of the status of Eurobodalla’s sparse koala population, the Eurobodalla region is an important component in the linkages between the Bega Shire, Cooma and Shoalhaven populations.

Finally the Association requested the NSW Government to review the **“business model”** of NSW Forestry, and face up to the reality that hardwood logging is highly unprofitable.

Instead of operating at a financial loss in most years, NSW needs to profit from the forests by **NOT LOGGING**. Simply accept carbon credit payments under the Emissions Reduction Fund scheme, and turn a financial drain into a major financial benefit for all people in NSW, the environment and in particular the Koala.

Place on public exhibition the completed **“NSW Koala Strategy”** prior to its implementation.

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## **NSW Nature Conservation Council Critical of the NSW Government’s Biodiversity Offset Policy**

The NCC has just released a report titled **‘PARADISE LOST’**. The report shows that, far from ensuring no loss in biodiversity, offsetting rules are pushing the endangered plants and animals they’re supposed to protect, closer to extinction.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Biodiversity is fundamental to our wellbeing and prosperity because it provides the basic requirements of life and underpins our economy. Our bushland and native animals are

integral to our national identity, an essential part of what makes Australia and Australians unique.

Biodiversity in NSW, however, is in steady decline. Almost 80 species of plants and animals have become extinct in the state since Europeans arrived, and there are currently a further 999 threatened with extinction, including 59% of all mammals, 34% of amphibians and 30% of birds. Clearing of native vegetation and habitat modification are the greatest threats to the survival of the great majority of species on the threatened list. After 200 years of settlement, NSW has lost almost half of its bushland through land clearing and only 9% of that which is left is in good condition.

The continuing loss of biodiversity in NSW poses a significant challenge for governments who have a responsibility to protect species and ecosystems and a desire to promote economic growth and create jobs by allowing land clearing for urban development, infrastructure, agriculture, mining and other major projects. State and federal governments in Australia, following the lead of governments around the world, have embraced biodiversity offsetting in a belief that it can resolve this conundrum and deliver growth that is ecologically sustainable. In theory, offsetting achieves this by allowing the loss of biodiversity values at a development site on the condition that biodiversity values at offset sites are protected and enhanced, ensuring there is no net loss of values across all sites.

The NSW Government has used biodiversity offsetting for more than a decade as an adjunct to land clearing, planning and threatened species conservation laws. The government is poised to significantly expand its use through the introduction of a Biodiversity Offsets Methodology (BAM) that is a central pillar of its new biodiversity conservation and land-

clearing laws, including a new *Biodiversity Conservation Act* and *Local Land Services Amendment Act*. This report provides a timely review of the performance of biodiversity offsets policies in NSW and a critical appraisal of the Draft Biodiversity Assessment Methodology that the government proposes to introduce to supersede them.

## KEY FINDINGS OF REPORT

### **1. Biodiversity offsetting schemes in NSW have failed to deliver the promised outcomes.**

The performance of five existing offsets schemes was examined through the lens of eight Case Studies in the state's northwest, southwest, Hunter Valley, and in Sydney. These Case Studies demonstrated that biodiversity offsetting in NSW is failing to deliver the environmental outcomes governments and policy makers have promised. In one Case Study (Boggabri/Maules Creek), biodiversity outcomes were deemed to be "Disastrous". In five others, outcomes were "Poor" (Warkworth, Mount Owen, Huntlee, Albury, Kellyville). Only two Case Studies were found to have resulted in "Adequate" biodiversity outcomes (Namoi, Wagga Wagga), while none resulted in outcomes deemed "Good".

### **2. Biodiversity offsetting schemes in NSW have failed to deliver the promised outcomes**

A review of the key features of the five biodiversity offset schemes in operation in NSW since 2005 found the later models contained fewer best-practice principles and standards than the earlier ones. Schemes were judged on their inclusion of eight features essential for positive environmental outcomes. Only the first offsets scheme (the Environmental Outcomes Assessment Methodology under the Native

Vegetation Act) contained all eight features. The Biodiversity Offsets Policy for Major Projects introduced by the Baird government in 2014 contained only one.

**3. The Draft Biodiversity Assessment Methodology contains fewer best-practice principles and standards than any previous scheme and will likely deliver worse environmental outcomes.**

Many of the weaknesses and few of the strengths of earlier offsets schemes have been carried forward into the new *Biodiversity Conservation Act* and Draft Biodiversity Assessment Methodology, which the government intends to implement in 2017. The government is proceeding with this model despite warnings from leading scientists, conservationists and lawyers who have identified many concerns. For example:

- Clear objectives for protecting biodiversity are lacking
- There is no consideration of impacts on water quality, salinity and soil quality
- It does not provide absolute protection (red flags or 'no-go zones) for areas of high conservation value
- The like-for-like principle is undermined
- Supplementary measures are allowed in lieu of genuine offsets
- Mine site rehabilitation can be used as an offset credit
- Developers can pay money into a fund rather than find an appropriate offset site
- Offset obligations can be 'discounted' under the discretion of the Minister
- Offset areas are not guaranteed protection in perpetuity
- The new scheme is unlikely to meet Federal standards.

## CONCLUSION

Biodiversity offsets schemes in NSW are failing to deliver the environmental outcomes governments and policy makers have promised and the design and performance of these schemes is declining.

The proposed Draft Biodiversity Offsets Methodology (BAM) sets lower standards and drifts further from best practice than the underperforming schemes it is intended to replace and will consequently be less effective as a conservation measure. Implementing the BAM will in fact add extinction pressures to the very species and ecological communities offsetting is supposed to protect by facilitating the more rapid and widespread destruction of threatened species habitat across NSW.

The report makes a series of recommendations.

The full 'PARADISE LOST'. report can be found at:

[http://www.nature.org.au/media/265228/bio-offsetting-report\\_v14.pdf](http://www.nature.org.au/media/265228/bio-offsetting-report_v14.pdf)

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## Editorial

### Thought Bubbles Dominate the Energy Debate

Many Australians are totally disheartened with the political impasse and policy inertia in Australia. In turn this leads to significant disrespect for the elected politicians at both Federal and State level. Talk to them in private and their aspirations are commendable, combine them together, and they are no more than a meek shadow of those aspirations.



The fact they call themselves “a political class” is a euphemism, and helps explain why they are so out of touch. Many believe their IQ jumps 20 points when they enter Parliament. Most have evolved as staffers or trade union officials, and few have had ‘real’ jobs especially in policy and social areas. They raise their hands and voices as “a class”, because the rigidity of non-conformity, is political extinction.

A recent analysis of Australian and Norwegian politics, sought to answer the question as to why they had been so much greater unity both within and between parties in the post war period up until the mid 1970s. The answer was simple - many members of all parties had fought or been prisoners together in WWII, and their survival depended on cooperation, and unity. Post their retirement there appears to be no common bond to unite the “class”, not even the future of this nation.

Add to this the emasculation of the Public Services, and the country has what Laura Tingle calls “Policy Amnesia”. The result is a lack of review, an entrenchment of policy bias, and the complete lack of development of ideas and directions that will enhance the well being of the generations that will follow, rather than the member’s survival at the next election.

The GFC was a wake up call for the world, but not in Australia as we cruised through the crisis, more from luck than sound planning. We are certainly a lucky country, but at some time that can and will change.

Then the politicians will have to perform, and if their performances to date are any indication, it will be a disaster for this country, as the wardrobe of policy options and expertise will be empty.

In recent years, energy policy in this country, has been described by

commentators and experts as ‘shambolic’. There is little serious energy policy direction from governments. Meanwhile pollution continues at an unprecedented pace with little to no consideration of the future legacy that is being left.

The recent failures in the electricity grids to South Australia and NSW, the shortages of gas, when Australia will shortly be the largest gas exporter to the world, and the cheap political point scoring by politicians at any opportunity, is a complete disgrace.

The Finkel Review will certainly try and lay a policy road map into the future of energy in this country. But whether our politicians are capable of stepping up is concerningly doubtful.

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## **Finkle says Europe, US well advanced on Energy Policy, Technologies**

**By Sophie Vorrath, Renew Economy,  
17 March 2017**

As state and federal politicians duke it out over energy policy and investment, the Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market, led by Australia’s chief scientist Dr Alan Finkel, remains on track to release its final report mid-year, having gathered more than 360 submissions from industry stakeholders and observers.

After a dramatic week of surprise investment announcements and live-to-air spats, the Review, which was established in October off the back of South Australia’s state-wide blackout in September, remains the nation’s best hope at establishing a bi-partisan blueprint for national power security, as well as achieving a considered re-examination of the rules governing

Australia's energy markets.

And while the submissions to the Review, the majority of which were made public on Friday, reflect the many different views and agendas of a broad range of industry players and stakeholders, there are two strikingly common themes: a) Consistent, bipartisan policy on both energy and climate policy is crucial to progress; and b) We need to move on from the fossil fuels vs renewables debate.



"Currently there is a disconnect between political party aspirations and state aspirations for the energy markets which is creating confusion resulting in a hiatus in actions to address the problems being faced," said the submission of the Major Energy Users, whose member companies include some of the biggest manufacturers on the NEM.

"If emissions reduction policies impact the energy markets, it becomes essential that the emissions reductions policies are integrated into energy policy; further, emissions policy needs to reflect the ability of the energy markets to accommodate the emissions policy. Inevitably, this means that energy market policy and emissions policy must be aligned," it says.

"Stable, long term and predictable policy is critical to attract the investment to address the current issues and undertake the transition," says the submission from the Australian Aluminium Council.

The Australia Institute uses its submission to express the hope that the Finkel Review can "steer Australia back towards a policy path that looks after the interests of energy consumers and the environment.

"With political stability and support the RET can rapidly increase investment in renewables and aid a transition to a low-emissions energy system," TAI says. "We hope the Finkel review can provide firm direction towards a renewable future for Australia's energy systems."

And the Australian Energy Regulator makes a similar plea: "There is an urgent need for energy and emissions reduction policy to be better integrated," the AER submission says. "This needs to happen at the overarching policy level. Ultimately, policy makers will need to balance objectives of emissions reduction and energy security and affordability, but this can only happen effectively if the interrelationships between emissions reduction policy and energy policy are well understood."

Finkel, himself, has said the nearly 400 submissions, alongside the insights gained from consultations in Australia and internationally, will help inform the development of a "comprehensive blueprint" for government.

"The breadth and depth of these submissions is a mark of the community's determination to help shape the future of our electricity sector," he said in comments on Friday. "It is also reflective of the message the Review Panel has received from the outset: a nation like Australia can and must rise to the challenges we face.

Notably, though, he points out that the energy market experts that he and two other panel members met with in Europe and the US were coming from a place that was "well advanced" in managing the policy and technology



driven changes transforming their electricity systems.

Some such experts, including Californian EV and battery maker, Tesla, and New York based blockchain microgrid start-up LO3 Energy, were among those who contributed submissions to the Review.

“LO3 Energy’s view is that we are currently only at the very beginning of market and grid architecture changes that will begin to take place in an exponential fashion over the next 3 to 5 years,” the company said in its submission.

“We believe the grid will need to align with transactive energy principles, where consumption, production and the transportation of energy will self-organise according to economic efficiencies.

“The regulatory structure would also need to change, to be aligned with these principles. Market participants would need to be rewarded for of maximising the efficiency of energy production, storage, etc, and therefore should earn returns based on increasing the efficiency, resiliency or adaptive nature of the grid.

“As such, the power markets and utility industry will be faced with having to embrace and eventually adopt new ways of thinking, operating and competing,” LO3 Energy said.

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## Clean Up Australia

A number of Coastwatchers members participated in the annual Australia Clean Up Day in the Eurobodalla Shire

This day attracts approximately half a million volunteers Australia wide every year, and is the nations largest community wide based environmental event.

Australians are the second highest producers of waste per person in the world, with an estimated 7 billion cigarette butts and 50 million plastic bags littered every year.



At a local level it is certainly positive to remove unsightly litter. The conservation catch cry rings true here **"think globally act locally."**

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## Coastwatchers Social Media

### New Look Website

Coastwatchers has a new look website that includes the Coastwatchers brochure and membership forms. View this at

<http://www.coastwatchers.org.au>

### New Facebook Page

Coastwatchers also has a new Facebook page. Please Like, Follow and Share. Thanks to John Hicks for the great aerial pic of Mossy Point and Tomakin. The link below is open and can be viewed even if you don't have a facebook account by clicking on or copying the link into your browser.

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Coastwatchers-Association-1392626574130962>