



centralwest
environment
council



The Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2001
By email: penny.sharpe@parliament.nsw.gov.au

25 January 2019

National Park commitments for the 2019 election

Dear Shadow Minister Sharpe,

We write requesting the ALP make public commitments prior to the NSW election on March 23, 2019, in relation to three priority areas for the conservation movement, as outlined below.

The Great Koala National Park

Since former Labor Leader Luke Foley announced prior to the 2015 election that an ALP government would establish the Great Koala National Park (GKNP), the need for urgent action has become more apparent as evidence of threats to koala populations has mounted.

New information also shows the proposed GKNP is optimised for koala conservation. Government data obtained by National Parks Association about so-called 'koala hubs' shows the GKNP to be the single most important area of public land for koalas in NSWⁱ and highlights the importance of other koala reserve proposals on the north coast.

Despite possessing this knowledge, the government has implemented a new 'intensive harvesting zone' that could wipe out the species on the North Coast. A recent critique of the NSW Government's Koala Strategy found it would fail to protect the species in the medium and long term because it ignores koala habitat loss from land clearing, logging and urban development as a key threat and did not include creation of the GKNPⁱⁱ as part of the solution.

Community groups have built public support for the GKNP to such an extent that a recent poll in the *Coffs Coast Advocate* ranked creation of the park as the single most important issue for local votersⁱⁱⁱ.

Given the importance of the GKNP, the unprecedented threat to koalas and the popularity of the project, we urge you to publicly recommit that NSW Labor will urgently establish the GKNP when elected.

Gardens of Stone Stage 2 Reserve Proposal

A 39,000-hectare Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area (SCA) would make a world-class conservation reserve that would be a 'win-win-win' for Lithgow's workers, community and environment. It would establish effective management for its internationally significant pagoda landscapes of sandstone pinnacles and public forests.

Newnes State Forest has the richest plant diversity of any state forest in NSW. A state conservation area reserve would protect 84 threatened plant and animal species and 16 threatened communities.

Lithgow is now accessible by road from Sydney for day-trippers but has an under-developed tourism economy. Lithgow can become the next Katoomba if family-friendly, nature-based experiences are developed in those parts of reserve proposal that adjoin the town. Based on visitation to existing NPWS reserves^{iv}, visitation of 200,000 per year to this reserve is a realistic aim. If reserve design made Lithgow the gateway to the Gardens of Stone reserve, it would greatly boost Lithgow's tourism economy.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

We are deeply concerned about the future of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and we seek a clear commitment from Labor to restore funding and expertise to the agency.

When the NPWS was a stand-alone agency, it was a world leader in reserve design and management. The NPWS pioneering concept of systematic reserve selection remains best practice today. However, the loss of ecological and fire management expertise has substantially impacted on the agency's ability to maintain our national parks as needed. This is unacceptable at a time when threats to the protected area network are unprecedented and it is short sighted given that national parks underpin a nature-based tourism industry worth almost \$20 billion per year to NSW^v.

Given the environmental, social and economic responsibilities that NPWS shoulders, it should be a stand-alone agency, so its interests are better represented to Cabinet. We ask that NSW Labor commit to a funding boost to NPWS of at least \$150 million by 2022 to ensure we are resourcing our parks as they deserve.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Smolski
Chief Executive Officer
Nature Conservation Council

On behalf of:

Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Central West Environment Group
Colong Foundation for Wilderness
National Parks Association of NSW
Nature Conservation Council of NSW
North Coast Environment Council INC
South East Region Conservation Alliance NSW

CC: Opposition Leader Michael Daley

ⁱhttps://npansw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/KoalaGIPAanalysis_Sep18.pdf

ⁱⁱ<https://www.wwf.org.au/news/news/2018/nsw-koala-strategy-ineffective-inadequate-and-expensive#gs.7xWUTtae>

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.coffscostadvocate.com.au/news/so-readers-what-does-coffs-want/3596624/>

^{iv} Roy Morgan Research, *Annual Visits to NSW NPWS Managed Parks & Reserves 2016 State Report*

^v<https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/nature-based-tourism-to-nsw-snapshot-ye-sept-2017.pdf>