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Carnage - environment groups declare war on government over habitat clearing



By [Matthew Kelly](#)

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Main image and bottom left: Land clearing undertaken as part of the Minmi Estate. Top right image: a kangaroo found on Newcastle Road, near the Inner City Bypass construction site. Pictures by Peter Lorimer and

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The Lower Hunter is losing biodiversity and conservation land at a rate not seen for a century.

It comes as the state's environment lobby declares war on the Minns government for backflipping on promises to enhance biodiversity protections.

"The Minns Labor Government came to power promising to "stop runaway land clearing" and "fix the biodiversity offset scheme ", The Alliance for Nature NSW, which represents 220 member groups, said in a statement.

"The government also committed to doubling koala populations in this state. These critical reforms have been delayed and ignored, with concerning indications that some members of the Minns Cabinet are seeking to water down or simply not enact these election commitments."

A controversial [858-lot Minmi Estate residential subdivision](#) on Newcastle's western fringe was approved despite significant community and council concerns about urban sprawl and environmental destruction.

Last month, City of Newcastle was threatened with the loss of its planning powers if it did not place a planning [proposal for 505 Minmi Road on public exhibition](#).



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Proponents for both projects argue they will provide a much needed boost to the state's housing supply.

The NSW Nature Conservation Council has also raised concerns about the loss of biodiversity and habitat associated with the construction of the [Newcastle Inner City Bypass](#) and a [21-kilometre gas pipeline from Killingworth to Hunter Power Project at Kurri](#).

Hunter Community Environment Centre coordinator Johanna Lynch said the region's region's environment and communities were already paying a high price for the housing and renewable energy infrastructure boom.



📷 Early construction of the Newcastle Inner City Bypass in mid-2023. Picture by Simone DePeak.

Any even more biodiversity could be lost if environment protection laws are not urgently updated.

"Community members are fed up with contesting developments because NSW environment laws fail to prevent the destruction of essential bushland corridors and threatened species habitat," she said.

Premier Minns must get out of the way and let the Environment Minister and NSW Cabinet get on with the crucial task of updating our biodiversity protection laws."



■ Confused koalas walk in circles and try to climb stumps of logged trees in Pine Creek State Forest. The Australian Institute released the video in a campaign to stop the government's continued support for native forest logging. Video via AAP.

The Alliance for Nature said that, on a statewide level, [vegetation had degraded](#) to the point where it can only support 30 per cent of the biodiversity it could before British colonisation. [More than half](#) (29 million hectares) of all native forest and woodland vegetation in NSW has been lost.

"Habitat clearing is, alongside climate change, the most significant threat to species in NSW, the [worst ranked state](#) in the country for protecting and restoring trees," the alliance said.

"Since coming to Government in 2023, around 95 000 ha of land and 100 million trees will have been lost, stripping wildlife of their homes and releasing over 7 million tonnes of carbon each year - more than every household in Sydney. Clearing of native vegetation is fundamentally in conflict with action to achieve a safer climate than the current trajectory predicts."

Environment Minister Penny Sharpe said the government's commitment to the environment has not wavered.

"In 12 months we have strengthened environmental protection laws and have introduced the Climate Change Act," she said.

The government is finalising its response to the Ken Henry review into the Biodiversity Conservation Act and the native vegetation provisions of the Local Land Services Act, tabled in Parliament last year.

"The response will address our election commitments, including fixing our biodiversity offsets and stopping runaway land clearing.

In addition, the government has committed a record \$59 million into the NSW Landcare enabling program, which will support more on ground activities in sustainable agriculture and improving native vegetation management on private lands.

The Alliance for Nature has called on the government to immediately commit to measures to prevent biodiversity loss. These include:

- Re-affirming commitments to stop runaway land clearing, remove the self-assessment clearing loopholes, make native vegetation management maps statutory and ensure NSW is on a path to have halted and reversed deforestation by 2030.
- Immediately stopping code-based clearing in all areas of vulnerable and endangered ecological communities, as well as critically endangered ecological communities, by expanding Category 2 - sensitive regulated land to include a broader range of sensitive and high conservation value areas.
- Committing to giving environmental considerations primacy in decision making under all processes and at all scales - whether it is in relation to ending runaway land clearing across the state or to impacts on wildlife because of individual developments.
- Preventing species going extinct, including regional extinctions, supported by a veto on developments that would worsen the state of a species and ecological community.
- Embedding enforceable targets that protect, connect, restore and improve biodiversity, informed by comprehensive and accessible data.

- Banning cash-for-habitat removal practices and other offset approaches that lead to a net loss of remnant habitat.

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Matthew Kelly has worked as a journalist for more than 25 years. He has been working as a general reporter at the Newcastle Herald since 2018. In recent years he has reported on subjects including environment, energy, water security, manufacturing and higher education. He has previously covered issues including the health and environmental impacts of uncovered coal wagons in the Hunter Valley, the pollution of legacy of former industrial sites and freedom of information issues.