



Supporting facts - Queensland deforestation campaign, 2020

Deforestation rates

Claim: “Queensland is on the list of top 10 deforestation hotspots”

Primary source:

- [A major study in 2015 by WWF-International into global deforestation](#) established the world’s top 11 deforestation fronts for the period 2010-2030.¹ “Deforestation fronts” are defined in the Report as “the places where the largest concentrations of forest loss or severe degradation are projected between 2010 and 2030.”² This factors in both recent deforestation and projected deforestation in a business as usual scenario.
- By scale of projected loss, “Eastern Australia” came in as number 10 in this study with 3-6 million hectares of projected loss in 2010-2030. The Top 11 with associated projections are extracted below:³

 Deforestation front	 Projected loss (million ha) 2010 to 2030
Amazon	23-48
Atlantic Forest/Gran Chaco	10
Borneo	22
Cerrado	15
Chocó-Darién	3
Congo Basin	12
East Africa	12
Eastern Australia	3-6
Greater Mekong	15-30
New Guinea	7
Sumatra	5
Total from 11 deforestation fronts	127-170

Sources for the figures are given in the sections on the individual deforestation fronts.

- “Eastern Australia” includes both Queensland and New South Wales. However,

¹ WWF-International (2015). Living Forests Report (Chapter 5: Saving Forests at Risk).
<http://bit.ly/2yOYbsM>

² WWF-International (2015). Living Forests Report (Chapter 5: Saving Forests at Risk). p. 2.

³ WWF-International (2015). Living Forests Report (Chapter 5: Saving Forests at Risk). p. 5.



Queensland makes up the vast majority of the 3-6 million hectare figure. Queensland alone is projected to be responsible for up to 4.7 million hectares of clearing in the report.⁴ Queensland alone therefore comes in with greater projected deforestation 2010-2030 than Choco-Darien (on the border of Colombia and Panama). This figure was based on an assumption of at least 234,000 hectares a year of clearing carrying forward every year.⁵

- The Australian Federal Government's Greenhouse Gas Inventory reporting supports the fact that Queensland makes up the vast majority of clearing within "Eastern Australia". The Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Activity Table: 1990-2018 shows that in 2018, Queensland's clearing made up 78% of the total clearing for Queensland and New South Wales combined.⁶ While these data are based on different methodology than that used in the WWF-International report, they do provide a general relative indication of Queensland's contribution to clearing rates.

Claim: "Between 2013 and 2018, over 1.6 million hectares were bulldozed in Queensland"

Primary source:

- According to the Queensland Government's Statewide Land and Tree Study reports, over 1.6 million hectares of forest and bushland have been cleared in Queensland between 2013-2018⁷.
- Queensland deforestation and land clearing rates from 2010-2018:⁸
 - 2010-2011: 92,000 hectares
 - 2011-2012: 155,000 hectares
 - 2012-2013: 261,000 hectares
 - 2013-2014: 295,000 hectares
 - 2014-2015: 298,000 hectares
 - 2015-2016: 390,000 hectares
 - 2016-17: 356,000 hectares
 - 2017-18: 392,000 hectares

⁴ WWF-International (2015). Living Forests Report (Chapter 5: Saving Forests at Risk). p. 34.

⁵ The upper end estimate for Queensland alone was derived from the graph on p. 34 of WWF-International's 2015 Living Forests Report. The estimate of 234,000 per year was derived from dividing Queensland's upper end estimate of 4.7 million ha by the timeframe (20 years).

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia (2020). Australian Greenhouse Emissions Information System: Activity Table 1990-2018 - LULUCF. Table 1a. Last updated May 2020.

<https://ageis.climatechange.gov.au/QueryAppendixTable.aspx>. Here, "clearing" consists of "primary conversion" plus "reclearing" combined.

⁷ Queensland Department of Environment and Science (2011-2018). Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) reports, 2011-12 (2014); 2012-13 (2014); 2013-14 (2015); 2014-15 (2016); 2015-16 (2017), 2016-17 (2018); 2017-18 (2018). DES, Queensland Government, Brisbane, Queensland.

⁸ Queensland Department of Environment and Science (2011-2018). Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) reports, 2010-11 (2014); 2011-12 (2014); 2012-13 (2014); 2013-14 (2015); 2014-15 (2016); 2015-16 (2017), 2016-17 (2018); 2017-18 (2018). DES, Queensland Government, Brisbane, Queensland.



Claim: “An area of forest and bushland the size of the Gabba stadium is bulldozed every 3 minutes in Queensland”

Primary source:

Queensland deforestation reached a staggering 392,000 hectares in the year of 2017-2018, according to the most recent state Government data⁹.

- The rate of deforestation/land clearing in Queensland, according to the most recent statistics released by the Queensland Government, is 392,000 hectares for 2017-18.
- $392,000 \text{ hectares} \div 365 \text{ days} = 1,073 \text{ hectares cleared per day}$
- $1,073 \text{ hectares} \div 24 \text{ hours} = 44 \text{ hectares per hour}$
- $44 \text{ hectares} \div 60 \text{ minutes} = 0.7 \text{ hectares per minute}$
- $0.7 \text{ hectares} \times 3 \text{ minutes} = 2.1 \text{ hectares per minute}$
- Gabba grounds = 1.8 hectares¹⁰
- Thus, a little over one Gabba ground is cleared every 3 minutes.
- Also, $1,073 \text{ hectares per day} \div 1.8 \text{ hectares} = 596 \text{ Gabba grounds are cleared per day}$

Claim: “Last time the laws got rolled back, we saw a four-fold increase in deforestation in Queensland”

Primary source:

- From 2012, the former Newman-led LNP state government systematically weakened land clearing laws. They began in 2012 by introducing area management plans that allowed clearing without permits, suspension of penalties, and slashing of compliance staff and effort.
- Then in 2013¹¹, they took the axe to the Vegetation Management Act¹² by (among other things):
 - Reversing the 2006 ban on broadscale clearing of mature forests by introducing a new loophole for “high value agriculture”;
 - Removing protections for other high conservation value regrowth bushland that had been in place since 2009;
 - Ending the need for permits for most rural tree clearing via “self-assessable codes”; and
 - Making it harder to take action against illegal clearing.

⁹ Queensland Department of Environment and Science (2018). Land cover change in Queensland. Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) Report 2016–17 and 2017–18. Accessed online at: https://www.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/91876/landcover-change-in-queensland-2016-17-and-2017-18.pdf

¹⁰ Gabba ground size calculated using this data and method: <http://bit.ly/2f2p6zP>

¹¹ Queensland Government (2013). Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Act 2013. Accessed online at: <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/asmade/act-2013-024>.

¹² ABC article reporting on the speech by then Natural Resources Minister Andrew Cripps titled “Taking the Axe to Queensland’s Tree Clearing Laws”. Melinda Howells and Kim Lyell (2018). Call to scrap Qld tree clearing law changes. Accessed online at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-17/call-to-scrap-qld-tree-clearing-law-changes/4634060>



- As a result, land clearing rates went from 92,000 hectares in 2010-11, to 155,000 hectares in 2011-12, 261,000 hectares in 2012-13, 295,000 hectares in 2013-14, 298,000 hectares in 2014-15, 395,000 hectares in 2015-16, 356,000 hectares in 2016-17 and 392,000 hectares in 2017-18.
- This is a more than a four-fold increase in deforestation and land clearing from 2011 (when the former laws were in place) to 2018 (the latest available data which was released just after the laws were tightened again, but does not reflect those tightened changes).

Impacts of clearing on wildlife

Claim: “Australia is the worst offending country in the world for mammal extinctions”

Primary source:

- As discussed in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, “highly distinctive and mostly endemic Australian land mammal fauna has suffered an extraordinary rate of extinction (>10% of the 273 endemic terrestrial species) over the last ~200 y. In comparison, only one native land mammal from continental North America became extinct since European settlement”¹³.
- As at 4/9/20, the IUCN Red List database contained 84 extinct mammals across the world. Of these, 25 were from Australia plus another 3 were from Christmas Island. This is the highest number of extinct mammals recorded in any country globally¹⁴.

Claim: “45 million native animals were killed every year”

Primary source:

- In Queensland, scientists estimated that approximately 34 million vertebrate animals lost their habitat and were presumed killed by deforestation and land clearing each year during the period 2013-15¹⁵. This estimate includes 0.9 million mammals, 2.6 million birds and 30.6 million reptiles.
- That study was later replicated based on the 2015-16 clearing rates, finding that the number of vertebrate animals presumed killed had risen to 44.7 million per annum. This equates to over one native animal being killed every single second because of deforestation¹⁶.

¹³ Woinarski J, et al (2015). Ongoing unraveling of a continental fauna: decline and extinction of Australian mammals since European settlement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(5): 4531-4540.

¹⁴ Based on a filtered search of the IUCN Red List at <https://www.iucnredlist.org/search?searchType=species&scopes=1&taxonLevel=Species&legends=105,1900,1800,305,1901,1801&redListCategory=cr,en,vu&taxonomies=100041&landRegions=AU>. The search was based on Species and filters were added to only select Class Mammalia, Red List Category of Extinct and then explored numbers within each Land Region.

¹⁵ WWF Australia (2017). Australian animals lost to bulldozers in Queensland 2013-15.

¹⁶ WWF Australia (2017). Australian animals lost to bulldozers in Queensland: 2015-16 update.



Claim: “Deforestation is the greatest threat to many native animals in Queensland”

Primary source:

- Scientists found that habitat loss was the greatest danger facing Australia’s threatened species with 81% of species at threat by this process.¹⁷ In many of Queensland’s coastal and subcoastal bioregions, over 80% of the threatened species were impacted by deforestation and land clearing.
- The Queensland Government’s Species Technical Committee Report into the impact of land clearing on threatened species demonstrated that over 130 endangered and vulnerable wildlife species in Queensland had lost more than half their original habitat extent.¹⁸
- Expert advice to the Federal Government that summarised the state of the environment stated that tree clearing, inappropriate burning and inappropriate grazing were the biggest threats to Queensland’s threatened wildlife.¹⁹ The report stated “Land clearing for pasture is the greatest pressure on threatened flora and fauna”. The report also highlighted that “pressures interact in complex ways, often compounding the threat to biodiversity”. For example, deforestation removes habitat which may be replaced by agriculture. In turn, grazing cattle or polluted run-off from cropping chemicals may then further damage any remaining habitat.

Impacts of clearing on koalas

Claim: “Koalas numbers have declined by over 50% across Queensland”

Primary source:

- In 2012, expert knowledge was used to estimate koala population trends across Eastern Australia for the past three generations (around 15-21 years) and the next three generations. The researchers found that Queensland koala populations had suffered an estimated 53% decline during that time.²⁰
- These estimates are supported by research commissioned by WWF-Australia into koala population trends across Queensland. This work found that koala populations across Queensland had fallen by 49% from 2001 to 2018.²¹

¹⁷ Evans MC, et al (2011). The spatial distribution of threats to species in Australia. *BioScience*. 61, 281-289.

¹⁸ Species Technical Committee and Laidlaw MJ (2017). Scientific review of the impacts of land clearing on threatened species in Queensland. Queensland Government, Brisbane.

¹⁹ Cresswell ID and Murphy HT (2016). Australia state of the environment 2016: Biodiversity (Independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Energy). Canberra.

²⁰ Adams-Hosking C, et al (2016). Use of expert knowledge to elicit population trends for the koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*). *Diversity and Distributions*, 22(3), 249-262.

²¹ Wallis K, Lane A and Philips S (2020). A review of the conservation status of Queensland populations of the koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) arising from events leading up to and including the 2019 fire events. Report commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Australia, in collaboration with Humane Society International (HSI) and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). Biolink Ecological Consultants, Uki, NSW. Available at <https://www.wwf.org.au/ArticleDocuments/353/A%20Review%20of%20the%20Conservation%20St>



Claim: “Deforestation is the greatest threat to koalas in Queensland”

Primary source:

- The koala is currently listed at the Commonwealth level as vulnerable in Queensland, NSW and the ACT under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)*. At the state level, it is listed as vulnerable in Queensland under the *Nature Conservation Act (1992)*²².
- According to the Queensland Government's own Species Technical Committee Report into the impact of land clearing on threatened species, “Habitat loss is the most serious threat to koalas in Queensland and New South Wales (Martin and Handasyde 1999).”²³ The report states that clearing leads to many direct deaths whilst also exposing koalas to additional threatening processes through habitat fragmentation.
- The final Queensland Koala Expert Panel report (September 2017) highlights the need to stop deforestation and land clearing, the main stressors for koalas²⁴. The report warned of dramatic declines in koala populations in South East Queensland, including 80% in the Koala Coast area (Gold Coast to Sunshine Coast and west to Ipswich), and singled out land clearing as a major cause. The report said “that loss of koala habitat is considered to be the threat having the greatest impact on koalas.”
- About 84,000 hectares of critical koala habitat was destroyed between 2013 and 2015 in Queensland and New South Wales, with an estimated 180 koalas killed in South-East Queensland alone during this time²⁵.

[atus%20of%20QLD%20Koalas.pdf.aspx?OverrideExpiry=Y.](#)

²² WWF-Australia (2017). Current status of the koala in Queensland and New South Wales (Online). <http://bit.ly/2ePc08C>. Accessed July 2017.

²³ Species Technical Committee and Laidlaw MJ (2017). Scientific review of the impacts of land clearing on threatened species in Queensland. Queensland Government, Brisbane.

²⁴ Rhodes J, et al (2017). Queensland Koala Expert Panel: A new direction for the conservation of koalas in Queensland. A report to the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection. Queensland Government, Brisbane, Australia.

²⁵ WWF-Australia (2017). Current status of the koala in Queensland and New South Wales. <http://bit.ly/2ePc08C>. Accessed July 2017.