



Voices for Woogaroo

Expert Open Letter to Protect

WOOGAROO FOREST

Presented to the Hon. Murray Watt, Federal Minister for the Environment and Water
on 23rd June, 2026. Brisbane, Australia

Woogaroo Forest is a significant and irreplaceable native habitat in South-East Queensland supporting endangered species and nationally important ecological values.

We are a broad coalition of scientists, legal experts, conservation practitioners, wildlife carers, First Nations representatives and community leaders from Australia and around the world. We respectfully call upon the Federal Environment Minister of Australia to protect, in entirety, this irreplaceable landscape for future generations.

At a time of accelerating biodiversity decline, decisions made today will shape the environmental legacy left to future Australians.



Expert Open Letter to protect WOOGAROO FOREST

An Open Letter by scientists, legal scholars, conservation professionals, Traditional Owners and community leaders calling for the protection of Woogaroo Forest, Ipswich / Springfield, Queensland and refusal of all development proposals that would clear or fragment this irreplaceable habitat

June 2026

As scientists, legal scholars, conservation professionals, Traditional Owners and community leaders working to protect Queensland's biodiversity, we write to express our grave concern about proposals that would clear or fragment Woogaroo Forest (Ipswich/Springfield). This forest is irreplaceable habitat within a rapidly diminishing landscape; once lost, its ecological function, connectivity and wildlife populations cannot be meaningfully restored.

Government decision-makers are now at a critical point. Choices made by the Hon. Murray Watt, Federal Environment Minister under the EPBC Act, will determine whether Woogaroo Forest is protected as a coherent, functioning ecosystem, or incrementally diminished by piecemeal approvals that collectively cause permanent decline. This is a rare and urgent opportunity to apply a precautionary, science-based approach that prioritises avoidance of clearing and fragmentation.

Clearing and fragmentation have far-reaching and often underestimated impacts. They remove mature habitat that takes centuries to form, sever movement corridors between remnant patches, increase edge effects (heat, wind and weeds), elevate fire and road-strike risk, and concentrate predators and competitors. For hollow-dependent species, once large trees are removed there is no short-term substitute, as hollows take hundreds of years to form. For species with limited dispersal, fragmentation can lead to local extinctions even when only "some vegetation" remains.

Available ecological evidence and established conservation principles indicate that further loss of this forest risks significant impacts to Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) and to threatened species recovery in Southeast Queensland. In this context, the avoid, mitigate, offset hierarchy must be applied as intended: genuine avoidance of impacts first, followed by scientifically based mitigation measures. Offsets and translocation are not a cure for the loss of complex, interconnected habitat, and cannot lawfully or ethically be used to justify preventable clearing where serious or irreversible harm is reasonably foreseeable - particularly when cumulative impacts across the region are considered and their effects on endangered species.

Protecting Woogaroo Forest would be a landmark step toward safeguarding biodiversity, maintaining climate-resilient habitat networks, and preserving a living landscape for future generations. It would also align planning and environmental decisions with the scientific reality that intact bushland near growing urban centres provides disproportionate ecological and social value. Beyond ecology, Woogaroo Forest supports key social values: it is a place for recreation, connection to Country, quiet refuge, and community wellbeing; a natural classroom for local schools and universities; and part of the cultural identity of Ipswich/Springfield. Protecting it also reflects fairness and intergenerational responsibility, ensuring that the benefits of nature (shade, clean air, reduced heat, and accessible green space) are not reserved for a few, but retained for current and future communities. Our specific requests to governments are set out below.

Why Woogaroo Forest Matters

Woogaroo Forest forms part of a wider habitat network in the Ipswich/Springfield growth corridor. It supports native wildlife, provides feeding and shelter resources, and functions as a movement pathway between remaining bushland areas. Its size, condition and connectivity make it especially important in a biodiverse region experiencing sustained development pressure and ongoing vegetation loss.

At 450 hectares, Woogaroo Forest is among the largest remaining remnant bushland patches in the Ipswich/Springfield corridor, comparable in scale to nationally significant urban-edge reserves elsewhere in SEQ. Global data has revealed that relatively small patches are more biodiverse per hectare than large patches. Previous surrounding developments over the past 10 years have squeezed wildlife into this remaining forest where they cling on to survival.

Woogaroo Forest contains critically endangered Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia, itself a Matter of National Environmental Significance. Woogaroo Forest provides habitat for documented populations of Powerful Owl, the Grey-headed Flying-fox (vulnerable), and Koalas (endangered). It also provides potential habitat for several species found in the local region: the Greater Glider (endangered), the Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater (both critically endangered). Citizen science records on iNaturalist now exceed 1,000 distinct species. The forest is not a generic green space; it is a specific, named, scientifically documented refuge for species the Federal Government is legally obligated to protect.

What Good Decision-making Requires

We urge decisionmakers to assess impacts at the landscape scale, not project-by-project in isolation. This includes transparent consideration of cumulative vegetation destruction, fragmentation thresholds, climate change, and the feasibility of proposed mitigation measures. Where information is uncertain, but the risk of serious or irreversible harm is credible, the precautionary principle should be applied. Approvals should not rely on speculative outcomes (such as unproven translocation success or future habitat creation) to justify present-day clearing of mature forest.

These approvals are being assessed at exactly the moment the Government's own independent review found the EPBC Act ineffective, and Parliament has legislated to replace it. Approving them under the failing regime, when the new standards are only months away, would lock in irreversible clearing that the reformed Act is specifically designed to prevent.

Confidence in this decision also depends on procedural integrity and we note that the public submission process was administered by an entity associated with the proponents, a structural conflict of interest that warrants the Minister's independent consideration of the underlying evidence.

Our Call to Governments

We urgently call on the Federal Environment Minister, to:

- Refuse all development proposals (EPBC Case Referrals 2019/8575, 2020/8629, and 2020/8651), and assess them as a single cumulative project rather than as separate referrals - their combined impact, not their individual footprints, is what determines this forest's future
- Commission a cumulative, landscape-scale population viability assessment for all MNES dependent on this habitat network.
- Enforce the avoid, mitigate, offset hierarchy, requiring genuine avoidance; these developments cannot be approved.
- Initiate formal processes to gazette Woogaroo Forest as a protected conservation reserve.
- Acknowledge that continued incremental approvals in SEQ are incompatible with threatened species recovery obligations.

Woogaroo Forest cannot be rebuilt once it is gone. The species that depend on it cannot be translocated as a salve to our conscience; they likely will perish, and these developments will push them closer to extinction.

Decisions made now will determine whether this forest, and its wildlife, survive into the next generation.

We, the undersigned professionals, academics, conservationists, environmental lawyers, scientists, community leaders, wildlife experts, and First Nations representatives, stand united in our call to protect Woogaroo Forest.

Yours sincerely,

Keith McCosh

President

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If you are a professional who wishes to support the campaign to protect Woogaroo Forest, consistent with your expertise and skills, please email: admin@savewoogarooforest.com.au.

Visit www.savewoogarooforest.com.au for more information.

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