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Federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley announced the approval of the controversial quarry expansion on Tuesday. Inset: A koala on a property near the Brandy Hill quarry. Picture: Marina Neil (above), Save Port Stephens Koalas stage a protest in opposition to the quarry expansion (below).

DISMAYED residents and environmental campaigners say "rocks have won over koalas", with federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley approving the controversial expansion of the Brandy Hill quarry.

The decision paves the way for the clearing of 52 hectares of critical koala habitat, the project's opponents say.

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In announcing the decision, Ms Ley said strict new conditions had been attached to the project, including the establishment of a 74-hectare koala habitat corridor for the local populations. Construction materials company [Hanson wants to clear the land](#) as part of a proposal to expand its rock quarry.

**Sussan Ley responds:** [Brandy Hill decision was based on science, not emotion](#)

The NSW government had already approved the project in July, but [the final decision rested with the federal minister](#), under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, because of its potential impact on koalas.

"The clear finding from the NSW government's 2018 study, which found that the quarry expansion, to be staged over the next 25

"The 74-hectare koala corridor can, however, be established by providing better quality habitat than is there

The decision is a blow to Seaham and Brandy Hill residents, who had their hopes on the minister rejecting the expansion

In recent weeks, the opposition to the quarry expansion had been growing, with celebrities such as [Olivia Newton-John and Jimmy Barnes](#) lending their voices to the campaign.

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A koala on a property near the Brandy Hill quarry. Picture: Marina Neil

"I'm disgusted," said resident and member of Save Port Stephens Koalas, Chantal Parslow Redman.

"With all the information, the evidence, the groundswell of community support - as well as internationally and celebrities - and scientific studies showing the presence of breeding koalas, and in the end we still lost.

"I don't understand. Rocks have won over koalas in this case."

Ms Ley had [delayed](#) her decision [twice](#), to have more time to consider reports about the site and the impact the project could have on the marsupial's population and habitats.

The environment department also commissioned a report from koala expert Dr Stephen Phillips.

Ms Ley said the report used assessments taken on site to map the extent of the koala population and land use. She said the study determined that as few as one or two koalas were present in the proposed construction area. The report also indicated that any impact due to the removal of native vegetation on the movement of koalas from east to west could be managed, including habitat rehabilitation measures.

"It is critical that we closely examine all assessments in the light of bushfires and habitat loss, but also important that we make informed decisions," Ms Ley said in a statement.

"This is not a region where bushfires have impacted local populations or habitat, it is not a site that is supporting breeding populations and, having reviewed the department's recommendations, I have approved the proposal."

Ms Ley said the 74-hectare corridor would help establish high-quality koala habitat across the wider site, including bushfire buffer zones and protection from cars and dogs. She said that was in addition to the state requirements for Hanson to fund habitat off sets.

The minister said Hanson would spend about \$100 million to take place over five stages during 25 years,

Chantal Parslow Redman disputed that argument "now", particularly after the devastating impact of the fire.

Save Port Stephens Koalas had earlier commissioned conservation biologist John Clulow, and that was the basis of the



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ect. She said the quarry expansion would

tree to grow; we need to protect what's there

life conservation scientist Ryan Witt and his partner, a pioneer to koala movement.



Community representative Chantal Parslow Redman speaking in June. Picture: Marina Neil

Chantal Parslow Redman said the importance of this area to koalas was further highlighted by the numbers of photos sent in by residents. This year alone, about 120 koala images had been taken within a 10-kilometre radius of the quarry.

"This is our icon," she said. "If the koala can't win something with the environment, then what will?"

Just a month ago, at the official opening of the Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary, NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean looked to his federal counterpart to determine the quarry expansion's fate, after his own government had approved the project.

"I think we should be doing everything we can to protect koala populations and their habitat, and that means securing that habitat into the future," Mr Kean said at the opening.

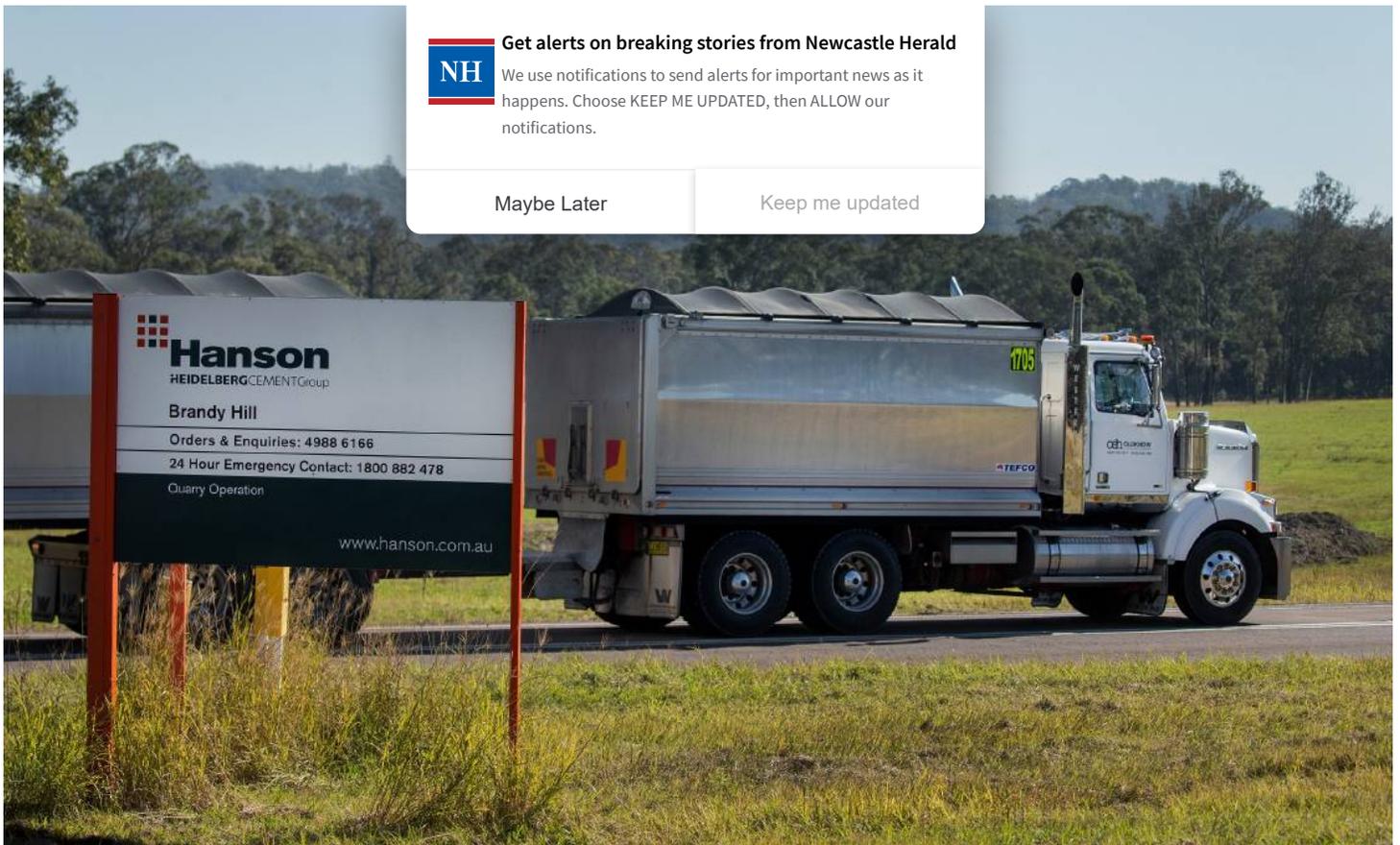
"So my message to the federal Environment Minister is, 'You should be looking very closely at this Brandy Hill decision, because a lot is turning on the decision you will make'."

Ms Ley told the *Newcastle Herald* that "Minister Kean's remarks didn't weigh on my mind at all".

"He should be happy with an additional 74 hectares of good quality koala habitat that will come about as a result of this decision, and obviously his own government didn't come up with that additional 74 hectares," Ms Ley said.

Ms Ley [inspected the site last month](#) and also met with residents and members of the Save Port Stephens Koalas campaign.

The minister said to the *Herald* she was impressed by the campaigners' passion for the koala. She acknowledged that their campaign helped achieve a "good outcome".



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Hanson's Brandy Hill quarry. Picture: Marina Neil

"The amenity of the region will be enhanced by significant additional high quality koala habitat, which is also natural to the area, and I think will provide over a time a really good quality," Ms Ley said.

"I think the residents were concerned about other aspects, but they talked to me about koalas ... I think they'll be reassured by this additional belt of really good quality trees. This is a good outcome for koalas."

The state MP for Port Stephens, Kate Washington, said "this is not a good outcome".

"I'm pretty angry," Ms Washington said. "Time and again, the state and federal governments and their weak laws fail the environment and our koalas."

Chantal Parslow Redman said this would not be the end of the campaign to preserve that land.

"There'll be a lot of angry community members out there," she said.

"We'll just regroup, and see where to go next."

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- [Resident bid to save koalas from Brandy Hill Quarry expansion](#) (August 21, 2020)
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- [Federal government under pressure to reject Brandy Hill quarry expansion](#) (September 6, 2020)

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