

Letter to the editor, Bega District News

Koalas and woodchipping don't mix Harriett Swift 22.03.10

I refer to the article "Managing koalas, a timber industry perspective" (BDN 19/3/10) by Vince Phillips.

Firstly, Vince Phillips did not provide a "timber" industry perspective, he provided a "woodchipping" perspective. There is an important difference.

Mr Phillips made a number of points (and I will paraphrase for brevity) which require a response.:

Bushfires have wiped out more koalas than logging has. What this assertion fails to acknowledge is that bushfires are more frequent and more intense as a result of decades of intensive logging by Mr Phillips' employer, South East Fibre Exports. A logged forest is more dry, and with thinner, denser stems, generally more fire prone. Further, under climate change, accelerated by native forest logging, fire will become an even bigger problem in the future.

Greenies are crying "wolf" when they say that the Bermagui/ Murrah/ Mumbulla/ Tanja koalas are the last. The "Interim report: koala surveys in the Bermagui-Mumbulla coastal forests (2007-2009)" shows that remaining koalas in those forests are overwhelmingly clustered in Mumbulla forest. We have never said that the only koalas left are in Mumbulla, but of those few remaining, most are in Mumbulla. We remain optimistic that koalas may again be found in Yurammie when surveys are undertaken there.

The woodchipping industry doesn't use large trees greater than 60cms diameter. Anyone who has seen log trucks traveling down the highway will know that it is common practice to split logs in the forest before they are taken to the chipmill. Every day trucks travel through Bega carrying large split logs. We've all seen them.

The chipmill doesn't take most preferred koala trees anyway. This is partly true for the time being, anyway. The chipmill does not take trees which are too red or too hard to chip. Some of these: woollybutt, iron barks and grey box are good koala trees. Until now, most of those trees have been safe from the woodchippers, but not for long. Come the SEFE Wood Fired Power station, those trees will no longer be safe. They may not be suitable for woodchipping, but they will be very suitable for the furnace.

Finally, this is not the first time that the woodchipping industry has tried to conscript the koala into its cause. A few years ago, the chipmill was so keen to be associated with this animal that it used koala images on its corporate stationary (see attached).

It was not only woodchipping that brought the koala to its present dire situation. A combination of hunting, disease, fire, land clearing for agriculture and logging are all to blame. But logging now has the potential to finish these animals off in our region. Can we risk that for a logging operation that will yield 95% woodchips?

Yours sincerely

Harriett Swift



Harris-Daishowa
(AUSTRALIA) PTY. LIMITED
ACN 000 604 795
JEWS HEAD, EDEN 2551