

Letter to Bega District News: Logging South East NSW to save koalas 02.10 B J Somerset

Conservationists who live on the far south coast of NSW want the NSW Government to put an immediate stop to logging of the State Forests of South East NSW to save the koalas.

Prior to recent re-logging, a survey by Bega High School students proved that koalas inhabit the Bermagui State Forest and have been sighted in other forests. The local Community, Department of Environment & Climate Change and Forests NSW have conducted a new survey. Their report has been withheld and the local conservationists fear that they will have no time to react to the findings before logging recommences in the Mumbulla and other local State Forests.

This withholding of information is undemocratic for a civilian and could be a death knell for the remaining koalas. It most likely means that the logging of koala habitat forest, in Bermagui, Mumbulla and Murrah State Forests, where koalas have been sighted and photographed recently, will possibly begin in two weeks. The State agency responsible for logging, Forests NSW, has not made public an actual date for the start of logging in the Mumbulla State Forest possibly in fear of a direct action from conservationists who forced loggers out of a nearby area three years ago.

The koala continues to be under threat in south east NSW if logging continues. The loss of this important and much loved animal on the far south coast would be devastating for their species, for the people of Australia and for overseas visitors whose affection for the animal is well known.

Dr. Stephen S. Phillips, arguably the most experienced and expert Koala scientist in NSW, said on ABC radio recently; "We have got the management prescriptions (for koalas) wrong, especially in the SE. The small area of koala habitat remaining is such a precious resource. They have just got to be protected so they can continue to expand ... there is no longer any argument about what is important habitat".

Our immediate concern is for the koala. New findings show that koalas cannot exist in fired forests, travel up to 50 km a day and eat a far wider range of leaves than previously thought.

Our overall concern is that Forests NSW continue to rip into the forests as they rely heavily on the outdated Regional Forest Agreements which expanded State National Parks but retained State Forests for logging. The logging industry is outdated and only propped up by political will and union backing. The 2,500 – 3,000 logs **a day** which enter the Eden chip mill are chipped and added to the 8 story high stockpile for potential sale overseas. But the Japanese buyers have recently recognized that buying Australian timber jeopardizes koala habitats. The Japanese love koalas so the Eden chip mill may lose its buyers and therefore, trees already logged and chipped will have been in vain. We do not need to keep harvesting native forest timber as Australia has sufficient plantation wood to sustain our domestic needs.

Submitting this report:

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