

**MEDIA RELEASE: BURKE'S STRZELECKI KOALA FAILURE IS PLANTATION INDUSTRY'S WIN. ANTHONY AMIS, FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MELBOURNE, SUZIE ZENT, FRIENDS OF GIPPSLAND BUSH. 30.04.2012**

Environmental organisations, Friends of the Earth and Friends of Gippsland Bush, have slammed Minister Burke's failure to list the Strzelecki Koala as endangered or vulnerable.

“All the evidence is pointing to a very bleak future for the Strzelecki Koala, which has lost 50% of its habitat in the past decade due to logging and fire. If this habitat loss is not endangering the Strzelecki Koala, then the Minister's view must be very blinkered” said Friends of the Earth spokesperson Anthony Amis.

Almost all of Victoria's koala populations are the result of translocations, sourced from a handful of koalas sent to French Island from South Gippsland in the 1880's. Effectively these koalas have low genetic diversity compared to the only non-translocated koala population, which is based in the Strzelecki Ranges.

The genetically superior Strzelecki Koala holds the key to the preservation of the species in Victoria, because translocated koalas suffer from a range of problems, many of which are the result of inbreeding. The Strzelecki Koala does not suffer from the problems of inbreeding meaning that it is more robust than its translocated cousins. Its population is clearly unique in the context of Victorian and South Australian koalas. This simple fact appears to have eluded the Minister” said Mr. Amis.

Almost the entire habitat for the Strzelecki Koala is in private hands. Hancock Victorian Plantations have converted close to 10,000ha of koala habitat into non-koala habitat over the past 14 years and the tragic 2009 Churchill and Boolara bushfires burnt out approximately 20,000ha of koala habitat. Hundreds if not thousands of Strzelecki koalas were killed during the fires. After 14 years of logging key koala habitat, Hancock Victorian Plantations still do not have a Koala Management Plan. 75% of logs from the Strzelecki Ranges end up at Maryvale Pulp Mill owned by Nippon Paper.

It is clearly inaccurate to water down the significance of the Strzelecki population by including it with other Victorian koala populations that have been translocated. The Strzelecki Koala deserves to be treated as a separate management unit and accorded endangered status. It is also outrageous that Federal, State and Local Government's along with Hancock Victorian Plantations have no idea about the existing population base of Strzeleckis Koalas. They say they have no idea of koala numbers therefore they can't make a scientific decision on its status, but at the same time do nothing to curb the ravages of the plantation industry that is destroying koala habitat. They also have provided no resources for koala population counts. How convenient for the loggers and the paper industry” added

Ms Zent.

“The State Government wiped its hands clean of the Strzelecki Koala by privatising almost its entire habitat to Hancock Victorian Plantations. Plans to plant thousands of trees as future Koala habitat will in no way ameliorate what has been lost over the past decade due to logging and fire. Only two weeks ago Friends of the Earth and Friends of the Gippsland Bush witnessed hundreds of newly replanted trees in the Strzelecki Rainforest Reserve being incinerated in log dump burns by Hancock Victorian [WINDOWS-1252?]Plantations” concluded Mr. Amis.

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