

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FOR FORESTS NSW FROM SENATOR DOUG CAMERON

1. Given the absence of adequate monitoring and long run data sets identified by the Threatened Species Committee representatives, specifically for the koala and for biodiversity more generally:

a. How can Forests NSW justify the very cursory inspections it makes of threatened species, the koala and other species identified in the IFOA prescriptions?

Answer - The objectives of the Threatened Species Licences imbedded within the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals are to set out measures to protect threatened species and the habitats of threatened species from activities associated with timber harvesting. Forests NSW complies with the terms of those licences.

b. How can it justify logging all available forest compartments in the southeast NSW on a twenty-year cycle when it is known that many species rely on much older forests for survival?

Answer - The area available for harvesting on State forest is only a small proportion of the total area of forest in the south-east of NSW. The majority of the forest is older forests protected in national parks and in informal reserves on State forests.

2. How many hectares of State Forests in the Eden region have been surveyed for koalas using the IFOA survey prescriptions, what has been the cost of these surveys and what have been the results?

Answer - Targeted survey for koalas has been carried out in 164 compartments, having a total harvestable area of 7784 ha, in State forest in the Eden Region since the commencement of the Eden IFOA. This is estimated to have cost \$140,000 and has yielded 5 koala detections.

3. Do these results call into question the FNSW estimate of 1500 koalas in The Eden Region?

Answer - No.

4. How many of the radio-tracked koalas in the Eden study apparently showed a preference for logged areas and is this an adequate sample to draw this conclusion?

Answer - There were two cases where koalas' home ranges included a mosaic of logged and unlogged forest and there were sufficient data to determine a statistically significant preference. In both cases, there was a significant preference for logged coupes.

5. Have follow up surveys revealed whether or not koalas are persisting now in these logged areas?

Answer - Surveys carried out under the terms of the Threatened Species Licence and surveys carried out according to alternative methods have continued to detect the presence of koalas in logged forests. Surveys of logged compartments in Murrah State Forest showed

that koalas were present in all logged compartments where they had been previously detected and some where they had not been previously detected between 1 and 14 years after logging. The attached map indicates koala activity detected during recent surveys in the coastal forests north of Bega relative to the disturbance history of the area.

6. What happened to the koalas that FNSW were radio-tracking?

Answer - The fate of the two koalas that preferred logged coupes at Eden is unknown because the transmitters or batteries failed before they could be retrieved.

Forests NSW state that they are aware of healthy and viable populations of koalas in the forests of the ...South Coast.

7. What evidence do you have that koala populations are viable on the South Coast?

Answer - Despite the clearing of its core habitat from the regions floodplains and adjacent foothills for agriculture, koalas have continued to occupy the remaining forested areas of SE NSW at similar low densities for at least the last 50 years (Reed et al 1990; Jurskis & Potter 1997; Lunney et al 1997; Lunney et al 2009 – references previously provided). Recent landscape-scale surveys suggest that higher activity levels are strongly associated with historic disturbance events from logging and silvicultural-treated wildfire regrowth (map attached). This, together with evidence of recruitment and higher levels of occupancy in less marginal contiguous habitat on the Southern and Monaro Tablelands, north of Bermagui and south near Mallacoota, suggests that there is no evidence to indicate the existing population of koala in SE NSW is unviable or declining.

8. Why do you log forests where you know there are koalas and in forests which contain remnant populations which are not viable, such as Gulaga and Mumbulla?

Answer - Published research indicates that logging on State forests does not have a negative impact on koala populations.

FNSW states: “it is not feasible to count koalas at a landscape scale because they are difficult to see”.

9. How do you know then which populations are healthy and which populations are viable?

Answer - We know the populations in the south-east are healthy and viable because we continue to detect their presence across the landscape at similar rates and because there are no signs of disease even though they are infected by Chlamydia.

FNSW states: “Precise estimates can be obtained for dense populations in prime habitats, and imprecise and costly estimates can be obtained for low density populations in habitats with low carrying capacity.”

FNSW states that koala populations are “difficult to see on a landscape scale” and the second says that can only “imprecise estimates” can be obtained for low-density population habitats.

10. Given this across the board difficulty how can FNSW state that they know where koalas are before they log?

Answer - Forests NSW is required to carry out various general surveys and targeted surveys designed to detect the presence of koalas prior to conducting any forestry activities and, if their presence is detected, conditions designed to protect koala habitat must be implemented.

11. What safeguards are in place in regards to any proposed logging of state forests to protect the fewer than 50 koalas surviving in the Eden Forestry Region, with their stronghold in the coastal forests of which Bermagui is part?

Answer - Forests NSW undertakes surveys and implements conditions designed to protect koalas and their habitat from activities associated with timber harvesting. Forests NSW does not know the origin of this population estimate or its scientific credibility.

FNSW believes that the currently regulatory framework that applies to the protection of koalas and their habitat on state forests in New South Wales is appropriate and will be appropriate for the future.

12. By what measure do you determine “what will be appropriate for the future”?

Answer - Forests NSW believes that the current regulatory framework – the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals and Threatened Species Licences – will continue to be an appropriate framework because it provides for the protection of koalas and their habitats.

FNSW states that koalas prefer clear---felled forests to thinned or natural forests.

13. What tangible evidence can you provide such as photos or scats of koalas in clear---felled forests?

Answer - Forests NSW made no such statement.

14. Can you please provide a reference (author, publication and date) for the ‘literature’ which you cited in the Public Hearing as saying that koalas prefer clear felled forests?

Answer - Forests NSW did not cite literature that made such a claim. Forests NSW’ written statement cited literature that indicated that, on the north coast of NSW, koalas are significantly associated with heavily logged areas (22% detection rate) rather than unlogged or selectively logged areas (5% detection), and that studies at Eden showed that koalas preferentially used logged coupes in logged/unlogged mosaics and that koalas were found in the same coupes before and after logging. Recent surveys from SE NSW suggest that this remains unchanged. Forests NSW has provided the Committee with copies of that literature.

15. If this is a peer reviewed study, why do you favour it over other scientific studies, observations and evidences to the Inquiry which agree that logging native forests causes destruction of koala habitat?

Answer - Forests NSW cited it because it is peer-reviewed, published scientific literature. Forests NSW is not aware of the “other scientific studies, observations and evidence” to which the question refers and therefore knows nothing about its scientific credibility.

Regulations under the IFOA require that a logging contractor working in known koala habitat undertake a visual inspection of trees to be felled before cutting them down to ascertain whether there is a koala in the tree.

16. How does a logger operating a mechanical harvester see koalas before they log, when there is a solid steel roof on the machine?

Answer - There are no such requirements in the IFOA or Threatened Species Licence. In the Eden Region, Forests NSW and the Office of Environment and Heritage have agreed that, if anyone observes a koala in the area of operations, operations shall cease and the agencies shall consult about the appropriate protective measures to be implemented.

17. Has FNSW any records of koalas being killed by mechanical harvesters?

Answer - No.

18. Has FNSW ever conducted a thorough survey of any one compartment to be logged which is known to contain koalas? If so, what action was taken?

Answer - Forests NSW has undertaken surveys according to the Threatened Species Licence and according to another survey method in compartments known to have historically contained koalas. Forests NSW notified the Office of Environment and Heritage and implemented the relevant conditions of the Threatened Species Licence, as is required under the relevant IFOA.

FNSW stated that: “various conditions within the threatened species licence may be able to be improved in the future, using current knowledge of tree and forest--type preferences, home range sizes, population densities and distribution, and threats.”

19. Will FNSW contribute to improving various conditions (clauses) within the threatened species licence? What will they do?

Answer - Forests NSW is already contributing to a review of the conditions in the Eden Region Threatened Species Licence, in conjunction with the Office of Environment and Heritage. Forests NSW is providing information and comment about proposed changes to the survey methods and the habitat protection conditions.

20. Bearing in mind that ‘improved in the future’ obviously means not in the past – when will FNSW endeavour to improve conditions especially in respect of the Stryzlecki genotype of koalas which are obviously, though not officially, threatened?

Answer - Forests NSW is already endeavouring to improve conditions by contributing to a review of the conditions in the Eden Region Threatened Species Licence, in conjunction with the Office of Environment and Heritage.

21. How did they exist for millions of years without clear-felled forests and over-browsing?

Answer - Forests NSW believes that koalas existed for millions of years because their core habitat was not permanently cleared for agriculture and urban development, and Aboriginal people managed fire across the landscape.

22. If a letter was sent to a stakeholder or resident saying that an agency was going to destroy a koala's home, would you consider this to be consultation?

Answer - If a letter was sent to a stakeholder or resident saying that an agency was going to be conducting logging operations in the vicinity and inviting them to contact the agency if they had any concerns, Forests NSW would consider that to be consultation.

23. Does FNSW consult with the NSW Minister for Tourism, or the department responsible for Tourism in NSW prior to logging forests which provide beauty and a recreational venue for the local community?

Answer - No.

24. What training and education programs for staff or contractors of FNSW to recognise dangers to Koalas?

Answer - Forests NSW staff and contractors undertake various training courses about wildlife identification techniques and environmental care.

Recent Koala Activity
Relative to
Disturbance History

