



Senator Doug Cameron
Senator for New South Wales

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- 7 JUL 2011

Mr Nick Roberts
Chief Executive Officer, Forests NSW
PO Box 100
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Dear Mr Roberts

As you are aware, the Senate Environment and Communications Committee is undertaking an Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population. I am Deputy Chair of the Committee and I have read your letter dated 18 April 2011 to the Committee.

As a consequence of the Inquiry's activities I have been contacted by residents of the Bermagui area who were notified by Forests NSW of proposed timber harvesting in Compartment 2001 & 2002 of the Bermagui State Forest. In its correspondence Forests NSW acknowledges that Koalas have been detected in the area and seeks any information the residents may have. The letter goes on to say that following harvesting a top disposal burn may be carried out within the compartments to reduce fuel loads and promote regeneration.

The Committee has received evidence from acknowledged experts on koalas who have drawn our attention to the unique status of the koalas on the far south coast (see transcript of hearing on 19 May 2011).

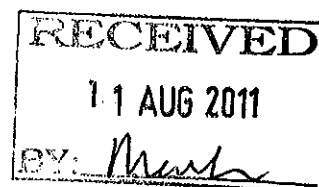
The Committee has received evidence from acknowledged experts on Koalas who have drawn our attention to the special status of Koalas in the Bermagui area.

I am at a loss to understand why Forests NSW would be logging a known koala habitat, then burn it, at a time when there is widespread community acceptance of the need to provide koalas with a safe haven for them to reproduce and flourish.

I ask that Forests NSW not proceed with planned logging and take the necessary steps to protect the local koala population and their habitat within State Forests.

Yours sincerely

Senator Doug Cameron
Senator for New South Wales
Deputy Chair
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee



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10 AUG 2011

Senator Doug Cameron
Senator for NSW
Deputy Chair
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee
PO Box 322
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Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter of 7 July 2011 concerning koala populations on the south coast of NSW.

I appreciate your concern for the protection of the koala population on the south coast. I can assure you that Forests NSW shares these concerns, which is why we work closely with the Office of Environment and Heritage to minimise the effect of our operations on the koala.

In relation to the current Senate Environment and Communications Committee inquiry into the koala, Forests NSW was invited to attend a hearing on 1 August 2011. I trust that Mr Andy Stirling and Mr Peter Kambouris provided useful information to you regarding Forests NSW activities and the range of regulation required to undertake harvesting and roading activities on state forests.

By way of background, harvesting in state forests on the NSW south coast is conducted under the provisions of the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals (IFOA) and in accordance with the Forest Agreements (FA). The IFOAs and FAs are the means by which NSW implements its obligations under the Commonwealth-State Regional Forest Agreements (RFA).

The RFAs followed the most intensive studies ever made of the social, economic and environmental values of the forests in RFA regions. The outcomes included the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system to meet defined, internationally recognised standards, while providing greater certainty for industry and a management regime to ensure sustainable management of remaining production forests. Under the Eden Regional Forest Agreement, signed by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments in 1999, the whole of the Eden area State forests were not required to meet the regional reservation targets and accordingly the remaining area of State forest is available for harvesting.

Koala conservation on the far south coast of NSW has been the subject of considerable public debate since the early 1990s. Negotiations leading to the 1999 Eden RFA identified the koala as requiring protection in some forest areas, including the Bega coastal forests. Consequently, significant areas of State forest were dedicated as national park with the objective, amongst others, to protect the koala. The Eden Threatened Species Licence (TSL), within the subsequent IFOA, imposed strict procedures to be followed by Forests NSW wherever historical evidence of koalas was known or koalas were detected in proposed logging areas.

A copy of the Eden TSL koala prescriptions is attached at Appendix 1. Forests NSW has been following these prescriptions, including the pre-logging surveys required, in the recent planning of logging in compartments 2001 and 2002 of Bermagui State Forest. To date, no evidence of koalas has been found in pre-logging surveys so site-specific protection has not been necessary. Additional to pre-logging surveys, Forests NSW' policy is that, if evidence of koalas is detected during logging, operations must immediately stop and the Office of Environment and Heritage must be consulted. To date, this measure has not been necessary for these compartments. It is worth mentioning that the forest type in compartments 2001 and 2002 is predominately spotted gum, which is not preferred koala habitat.

If indeed the recently surveyed Bermagui/Mumbulla/Murrah koalas are the healthiest population remaining, it is worth noting that the Mumbulla and Murrah State Forests are approximately 50 per cent regrowth forest, mostly created by harvesting in the 1970s. There is increasing evidence from both the Bermagui area and other areas of NSW that logging is not the threat to the koala that is commonly perceived as I understand that the koala prefers a mixed-age forest with both re-growth and older forest areas.

I note your request that harvesting be stopped in state forests but, with respect, this is simply not an option for Forests NSW or for our customers with which we have wood supply agreements. Forests NSW has a number of wood supply commitments which, if they are not met, could result in considerable action against Forests NSW, the NSW Government and potentially the Commonwealth Government under the RFAs.

Should you wish to obtain further information in regard to native forest operations on the south coast of NSW, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Daniel Tuan, Southern Region Manager

Yours sincerely


Nick Roberts
Chief Executive Officer

Encl.

Extract from the Eden Threatened Species Licence Describing Koala Prescriptions

Koala *Phascolarctos cinereus*

For all specified forestry activities:

- a) When koalas or evidence of koalas are detected in a compartment, habitat will be retained according to this Condition. Habitat retained under this condition must be mapped in the Harvesting Plan.
- b) Where one or two trees with evidence of the presence of a Koala are found during an asterisk survey, integrated harvesting (regeneration) must be excluded from within a 50 metre radius exclusion zone around of each of these trees.
- c) Where three or more trees with evidence of the presence of a Koala are found during an asterisk survey, the area which falls in between these trees and a 50 metre wide exclusion zone outside this area shall be implemented from which integrated harvesting (regeneration) operations must be excluded.
- d) Areas retained under b) and c) must be connected to other retained areas within the compartment (e.g. Rare Old Growth Forest Communities, areas retained for other species, Ridge and Headwater habitat, other non-harvest areas) by a corridor which meets the following specifications:
 - i. links Koala use areas with the nearest second or higher order stream exclusion zone;
 - ii. crosses the topographic sequence linking adjacent catchments incorporating representative samples of mid-slope and ridge-top habitats;
 - iii. incorporates one or more of the identified Koala browse tree species; and
 - iv. is a minimum width of 40 metres. Trees retained in Koala exclusion zones or corridors shall not be counted towards the habitat tree retention requirements for the remainder of the compartment.
- e) As far as practicable post-logging burning is to be kept out of the areas retained under b), c) and d) above.
- f) 150 hectares of suitable habitat for Koalas must be retained within 1.5 kilometres of the trees identified with evidence of the presence of a Koala in the asterix survey. No integrated harvesting (regeneration) is to be undertaken within this retained area. Suitable habitat is defined as forest types floristically and structurally similar to the retained areas in the compartment and preferably containing a substantial quantity of one or more of the following Koala browse tree species in sizes greater than 30 centimetres dbhob; *Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*, *E. maidenii*, *E. longifolia*, *E. bosistoana*, *E. globoidea*, *E. muelleriana* and *E. consideniiana*. If these tree species or forest types floristically and structurally similar to those in the retained area are not present, the NPWS must be consulted regarding the retention of alternative stands.
- g) Browse Tree Retention
 - i. In all compartments where Koala evidence has been found, 10 browse trees shall be retained per hectare within the net logging area of the compartment. Koala browse trees must be greater than 30 centimetres dbhob and be of the following species: *Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*, *E. maidenii*, *E. longifolia*, *E. bosistoana*, *E. globoidea*, *E. muelleriana* and *E. consideniiana*. If these tree species are not present, the NPWS must be consulted regarding the retention of alternative trees.
 - ii. Trees retained to meet other prescriptions (hollow bearing trees, recruitment trees or feed trees) may be counted as Koala browse trees if they have leafy, broad crowns in a range of size classes with a minimum of 30 centimetres dbhob and are one of the identified Koala browse species.
 - iii. Specified forestry activities and post-logging burning must be carried out in a way that minimises damage to retained Koala browse trees. The potential for damage should be

minimised by techniques of directional felling. Felled heads must be flattened or removed from five metres of stems retained to meet this prescription.

- h) SFNSW must assist the NPWS in a review of Condition 6.11 of this licence. This review must commence within three months of the commencement date of which this licence forms part.
(Note: SFNSW and the NPWS have agreed to complete the above review by 31 December 2000. The review will involve consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the NSW Koala Recovery Team.)

Koala survey

Where a Koala has been detected within two kilometres of a compartment boundary in the period since 1980, or local knowledge indicates that koalas are likely to be present, the following survey regimes and habitat protection measures must be implemented.

- a) Consultation with the local community should be undertaken during the harvest planning stage. As a minimum this should include contact and exchange of information with neighbours, local animal welfare and conservation groups.
- b) **Transect Survey with Quadrats**
- i. An intensive survey within the proposed logging area will occur prior to harvesting to determine whether koalas use the compartment.
 - ii. The survey will involve traverses in areas to be logged. Areas where logging will not take place (such as wildlife corridors) need not be surveyed.
 - iii. The traverses must uniformly cover the harvesting area with transects between 50 to 100 metres apart (subject to local conditions).
 - iv. At approximately 25 to 50 metre intervals (depending on the distance between transects) quadrat searches are to be conducted. At each search site, four quadrats (quadrat size = 50 centimetres x 50 centimetres) are to be randomly placed within 10 metres of the transect, beneath tree crowns. The quadrats are to be searched for Koala scats
 - v. Trees at the quadrats and between quadrats are to be examined for koala scratches, koala scats, koalas or predator scats.
 - vi. While surveying the transect line, all trees between quadrat sites are to be similarly searched (without using quadrats) for scratches, scats, koalas and predator scats. Possible scratch marks are to be confirmed by quadrat searches for scats.
- c) **Asterisk Survey**
- i. This method is to be applied when a koala or evidence of a koala is detected in the transect survey. The method allows an assessment to be made of the level of use of a particular area and in some cases will enable the delineation of an area of regular use.
 - ii. The tree where a koala or evidence of a koala was detected is designated as Centre Tree 1. Transects are run on the four cardinal compass points from the centre tree. The transects are 100 metres long. All trees within 15 metres of the transect line are inspected for signs of koala use, i.e. scratches, scats, koalas.
 - iii. Trees having scratches but, on first inspection, no scats, are searched using 0.25 m² quadrats placed on the ground under the crown. A minimum of four to eight quadrats are searched depending on the size of the crown. Any tree under which scats are found is designated as a centre tree and numbered sequentially if it is more than 20 metres from the previous centre tree. Further transects are then established around the new centre tree on those cardinal points which do not coincide with a transect from a previous centre tree. The process continues until no further centre trees are identified.
 - iv. Additional transects are then established from each of the peripheral centre trees on any of the four intermediate compass points (NE, SE, SW, NW) which do not overlap previous transects.
 - v. Once all transects are completed and no further evidence of Koalas is found a koala use area is delineated by connecting the outermost points from which Koala evidence has been recorded.
 - vi. Additional information is to be recorded from each centre tree according to the following method:

- Plots are established around each centre tree consisting of the centre tree and its nine nearest neighbours in each of two size categories (above and below 30 centimetres dbhob). There is a search limit of 25 metre radius for each size category and if no trees occur within this limit, only one tree in the category is recorded.
- In the plots tree species, dbhob or diameter class and Keady Crown Class are recorded for each tree greater than or equal to 10 centimetres dbhob. Where diameters are estimated, they are allocated to the following classes: 10-29 centimetres; 30-59 centimetres; 60-89 centimetres; 90-109 centimetres; 110 centimetres or greater.
- The height of the centre tree and the tallest tree in each of the two categories is also recorded. Where the tallest tree on the site is judged not to represent the site potential, site height is estimated
- The distance to the furthest tree in each of the two categories is recorded as is the distance to the next tree further out in each category.
- Aspect slope and topographic position are recorded and the floristic, structural and historical attributes of the site are described.
- Scats of koala or other species are noted and koala scats are examined for freshness and uniformity of appearance.

d) Survey Results

- i. The results of Transect and Asterix surveys will be recorded on the standard data forms.
- ii. The approximate location of the transects and all asterix survey centre trees are to be recorded on a map.

e) Reporting

- i. Koala surveys are to be reported as part of the threatened species pre-logging and pre-roading survey report and provided to the NPWS at least 10 days prior to the commencement of specified forestry activities in the compartment.
- ii. All survey results must be archived by SFNSW on the compartment history.
- iii. All Koala sightings will be incorporated into SFNSW database with subsequent transfer to the NPWS.

f) SFNSW must assist the NPWS in a review of Condition 8.8.12 of this licence. This review must commence within three months of the commencement date of which this licence forms part.

(Note: SFNSW and the NPWS have agreed to complete the above review by 31 December 2000. The review will involve consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the NSW Koala Recovery Team.)