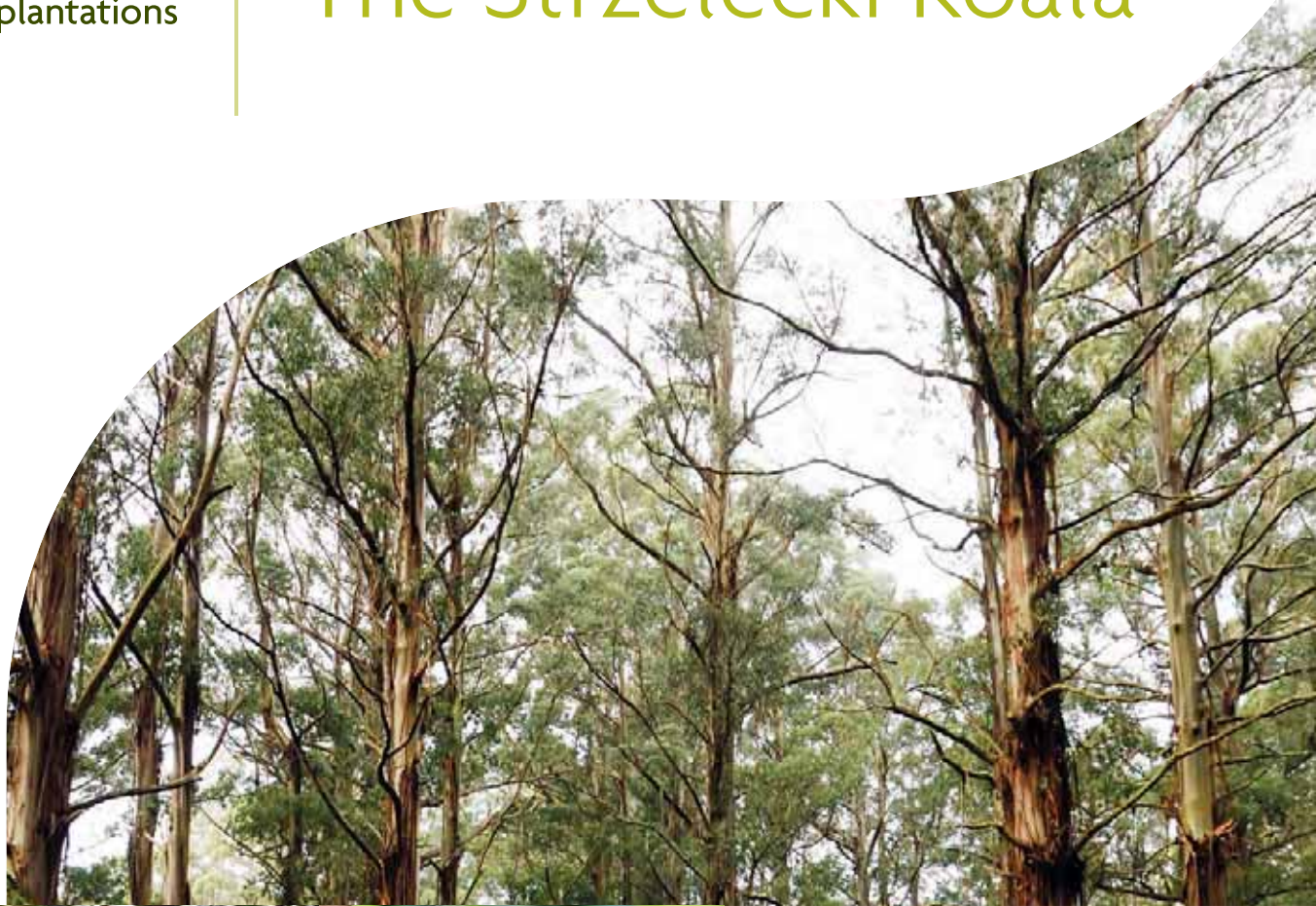




The Strzelecki Koala



“Some people are surprised when they discover that for over 60 years, HVP has shared a unique relationship in the hills of the Strzelecki Ranges with the Strzelecki koala.”



*protection
harmony*

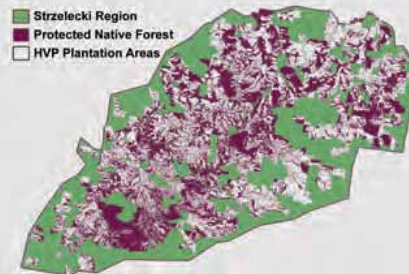
THE CO-EXISTENCE OF THE KOALA WITH THE PLANTATIONS

Like all Australians, those who work for HVP have a close affinity with the koala and we have the unique privilege of sharing our work environment with this iconic Australian species.

The harvest and re-establishment cycle of our plantation activities are sustainable and result in a mosaic of vegetation used by koalas for habitat and food. With only 3-4% of the plantation area harvested in any one year, there is a cycle of growth across our estate which allows koalas to move safely away from harvest areas.



“Understanding the history of land use in the Strzelecki Ranges is pivotal...”



“The plantation industry in the Strzelecki Ranges not only operates in harmony with the koala, it has enhanced the status of the koala as evidenced by over 60 years of forestry activity in the region.”

THE EXTENT OF PROTECTED NATIVE FOREST CUSTODIAL LAND (RED) ON HVP LAND IN THE STRZELECKI RANGES

We acknowledge our unique responsibility to help protect this population, particularly following the devastating fires that occurred on Black Saturday, in February 2009.

The koala is currently not listed as a threatened species. Koalas are more secure in Victoria than in other states and occur widely in lowland and foothill Victoria.⁽¹⁾ The Strzelecki Koala however has been recognised to be of particular significance.

Historic photos document the success story between the forest industry and the Strzelecki Koala. Plantation development in the previously degraded landscape of the Strzelecki Ranges has enhanced the habitat and health of the Strzelecki koala population

The koala has co-existed with the plantation industry in Gippsland in harmony for over half a century. Our estate in the Strzelecki Ranges is a patchwork of large areas of protected native forest and multi-aged plantation with intricate wildlife corridors intertwined between them.

Native forests on HVP land are not harvested. They have been protected by HVP since the company's inception and now, as part of the Cores and Links Agreement signed with the Victorian State Government in 2008, over 20,000 hectares of HVP land is permanently protected by law. This means that no matter who owns the forest in the future, it will be protected. As a result of the Cores and Links Agreement, the amount of forested area under permanent protection in the Strzelecki Ranges has increased from 2% to 10%. Much of this protected area is koala habitat.

With the natural attributes of our plantations coupled with our monitoring and research activities, our set of operating standards and our commitment to enhancing the status of the Strzelecki koala, HVP is confident of the future of the koala.

⁽¹⁾ Peter Menkhorst, 2004, *Victoria's koala management strategy*, Department of Sustainability and Environment, p.5.





HISTORY OF THE STRZELECKI RANGES

From the 1870s, the Strzelecki Ranges were subjected to extensive land clearing for settlement. By 1900, most parts of the Strzelecki Ranges were settled. Concern at the rate of land clearing was raised in the early 1900s which led to the preservation of an area now part of the Tarra Bulga National Park.

The Eastern Strzelecki Ranges in particular proved very difficult for settlers to manage. Maintaining property was back breaking work. The terrain was steep and rugged. Roads were of a poor standard which led to isolation. Pasture was difficult to maintain against the resilient native vegetation and pest animals and weeds.

From the early 1900s, settlers began abandoning properties. Some settlers went off to war and never came back. Most of the cleared land in the Eastern Strzelecki Ranges was left derelict and overgrown by weeds and scrub.

The area became known as the 'Heartbreak Hills'. By the late 1930s, it became clear that the settlement of the Eastern Strzelecki Ranges should be abandoned and a process of reforestation should commence.

During the last 60 years, a significant restoration process has been underway underwritten by significant long term capital investment in tree plantations from public and private sources. The plantation industry has been responsible for reforestation of large areas of the Strzelecki Ranges that were previously degraded. Plantation development has been in both pine and eucalypt species. These plantations have protected patches of remnant native forest and have enabled native vegetation to recover in the many gullies of the Strzelecki Ranges. Plantations have acted as a sanctuary for the koala significantly increasing habitat and the availability of primary food sources.



EARLY LAND CLEARING IN THE STRZELECKI RANGES



“Our association with the koala extends back 60 years...”



IMAGE A



IMAGE B



IMAGE C

These 3 photos show the same area at English's Corner

- (A) early land clearing in 1937*
- (B) plantation harvested in 2004, showing the intricate network of corridors left intact*
- (C) the same area in 2010 after replanting showing the mosaic pattern of forest growth and koala habitat*



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STRZELECKI POPULATION

Historically, Koalas were widespread throughout eastern and southern Australia. Since European settlement, numbers and distribution have changed dramatically due to land clearing, hunting for the commercial fur trade, disease and bush fires.



EX-PLANTATION AREA WITHIN THE CORES AND LINKS CONVERTED TO PRIMARY KOALA HABITAT

HVP CUSTODIAL LAND AND PRIMARY KOALA HABITAT

In the 1930s, fewer than 1000 Koalas reportedly remained in south eastern Australia. Only two natural populations remained: South Gippsland and Mornington peninsula. From the 1890s, Koalas were introduced to French Island and Phillip Island from these natural populations.

Sites around Victoria were later repopulated with animals from French Island and Phillip Island and as a result are likely to have high levels of inbreeding and low genetic diversity.

The Strzelecki Ranges in Eastern Victoria remain the exception.

Koalas may be found anywhere on HVP land throughout Victoria. However, the population of the koala in the Strzelecki Ranges has been recognized to be of particular conservation value because it represents a remnant of the original Victorian population, significant in size and largely unaffected by the genetic consequences of Victoria's intensive Koala re-population program.

In the Strzelecki Ranges, four endemic eucalypt species have been found to be primary food sources for the Koala. These species are *E.cypellocarpa*, *E.globulus*, *E.muelleriana* and *E.viminalis*.

In 2000, HVP began a process of assessing the value of the koala habitat on its estate in Gippsland.

This work culminated in the presentation of a Koala Habitat Atlas in 2009, compiled by the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF).

More than 5,200ha of native forest on HVP land has been identified as primary koala habitat.

These forests, all of which are protected, are believed to represent about 40% of the primary koala habitat in the Strzelecki Ranges Bioregion. A further 3,700ha of native forest on HVP land, also protected, has been identified as secondary koala habitat, meaning that less preferred koala food sources are prevalent.

In addition, a further 1500ha of plantation will be returned to native forest following harvest as part of the historic agreement (Cores and Links) made in 2008 between HVP and the State Government. This will add to the area of primary koala habitat in the region.



*restoration
re-forestation*

HVP AND THE KOALA: OUR UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITY

The Koala is not currently listed as a threatened species under Commonwealth or state legislation. However, it is an iconic Australian species and HVP recognises its unique responsibility in protecting its habitat.

HVP has a Koala Management Plan which sets out a number of initiatives or policies that HVP has in place to help maintain the koala population within Victoria.

The management plan is known as MORRE koalas, namely:

- M**onitoring
- O**perating Standards
- R**esearch
- R**ecovery
- E**nhancement

M	O	R	R	E
MONITORING	OPERATING STANDARD	RESEARCH	RECOVERY	ENHANCEMENT
<p><i>HVP over a number of years has established long term biodiversity plots that track population numbers and the health of the koala. A koala habitat atlas has been produced for the region in association with the Australian Koala Foundation.</i></p>	<p><i>HVP has established an operating standard for the management and protection of koalas, which is summarised on the following page.</i></p>	<p><i>HVP is involved in a number of research partnerships. For example, Monash University are proposing to extract DNA from faeces to determine the genetic integrity, diversity and extent of the Strzelecki population. Future proposed research will focus on the impact of the fires on the koala population, the impact of Chlamydia disease and the use of Shining Gum plantations by koalas.</i></p>	<p><i>Following the devastation of the 2009 wildfires in the Strzelecki Ranges, HVP has chosen to support the activities of the Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter at Rawson. This shelter specialises in the care of injured Koalas and HVP is impressed with their ability to respond after fires. HVP assists through the provision of funds, the supply of food and in assisting with relocation of koalas back into the wild.</i></p>	<p><i>HVP utilises the AKF koala habitat atlas to identify priority areas, which supports projects that create or improve wildlife corridors either within our estate or leading out of our estate.</i></p>
				

WORKING TO PROTECT THE KOALA

In consultation with koala expert, Peter Menkhorst, HVP has prepared a suite of strategies designed to minimise the operational impacts of plantations on koalas and to provide a level of protection and enhancement of the koala habitat. The initiatives being undertaken by HVP include:

- The identification of the koala habitat within the HVP estate and the creation or improvement of the links between priority habitat areas.
- Restoration of priority native forest sites, including the removal of impenetrable weeds such as blackberry.
- Temporarily leaving some plantation trees standing after harvest in priority areas to act as minimal refuge and food sources.
- Retention of all *E.viminalis* plantations for koala habitat.
- Over time, the replacement of pine plantations within close proximity to sensitive streams with indigenous species.
- Preservation of eucalypt plantation trees within close proximity to permanent and temporary streams. These riparian 'corridors' of plantation trees create refuges for koalas and provide a link to native forest habitats.
- Replacement of non-viable pockets of plantation with indigenous species including primary koala food sources where appropriate.
- Replacement of pine trees within selected road reserves with indigenous species including primary koala food sources where appropriate.



WILDLIFE CORRIDOR REPLACING PINE PLANTATION



EUCALYPT PLANTATION TREES RETAINED IN A WILDLIFE CORRIDOR



NATIVE VEGETATION REPLACING PINE TREES WITHIN A ROAD RESERVE

- Participation in cooperative pest animal control programs with other land managers that are aimed at protecting the koala.
- The training of field staff to look for signs of koalas during planning and operational activities.
- Arrangements with a wildlife shelter that specialises in koala welfare should our field staff find an injured animal.

ABOUT HVP

HVP manages about 65,000 hectares of land within the Strzelecki Ranges.

This represents about 20% of the total land area of the Strzelecki Ranges.

About 40,000 hectares of land is managed as eucalypt and pine plantation.

About 25,000 hectares (40%) is managed as custodial land, mostly native forest.

HVP does not harvest this native forest. Custodial land is managed for conservation values.

You can find out more about HVP at www.hvp.com.au or enquire at our Melbourne office tel. **03 9289 1400**.

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