

REPORT ON ASPECTS OF A PUBLIC HEARING

Senate’s Inquiry into the Status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population

1 August 2011, Melbourne



1. Inappropriate koala surveys.....	1
2. Logging threatens koala populations.....	2
3. Koalas prefer logged forests	2
4. Consultation mechanism	3
5. One resident’s experience	3
6. Activism.....	3
7. Conclusion.....	4
APPENDIX 1: FNSW presentation at the Senate’s Public Hearing into the status, health and sustainability of Australia’s koala population	5
APPENDIX 2: Evidence of Inadequate Koala Surveys.....	5
APPENDIX 3: Letter From Forests NSW to Bermagui Residents 27.05.2011	6
APPENDIX 4: Letter from Forests NSW to Tanja Residents 13.07.2011.....	6
APPENDIX 5: Letter from Wires to Forests NSW 18.07.2011.....	6



Bronte Somerset, Ed.D

bj Somerset@gmail.com

Web editor, South East Region Conservation Alliance Inc

www.serca.org.au



A National Parks’ Ranger photographed this koala in 2009 Bermagui State Forest
Subsequently logged.

12 August 2011

The Hon Dr Mike Kelly MP
Member for Eden Monaro
Mike.Kelly.MP@aph.gov.au

cc less Appendix 1 to:

The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
The Hon Greg Combet AM MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
Mr Barry O'Farrell, Premier of NSW
Hon Chris Hartcher MP, Minister for Resources and Energy,
Hon Robyn Parker MP, Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Heritage,
Mr Andrew Constance, Member for Bega,



Dear Dr Kelly,

I was invited to speak at a public hearing of Senate's Inquiry into the Status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population on 1 August 2011, in Melbourne. This opportunity arose as I made a Submission to it in a 'private capacity'.¹

As a signatory to the Regional Forestry Agreements and their detailed prescriptions for species protection, the Commonwealth is jointly responsible with the NSW Government for forest management practices to halt what will become, the regional extinction of the koala. Hence I thought you might be interested in some of the proceedings as they relate to the State Forests of SE NSW and Forests NSW who had not Submitted to the Inquiry.

I have included the uncorrected proof transcription of FNSW's presentation for your information². (As this was a public hearing - I think this is appropriate).

Many of FNSW's claims belie reality.

1. Inappropriate koala surveys

FNSW stated that:

The threatened species licences are designed to protect threatened species and the habitat of threatened species from forestry activities. In relation to koalas, the licences prescribe the way in which Forests NSW must conduct surveys for the detection of koalas, signs of their presence and signs of their preferred habitat. The licences also prescribe the measures that must be put in place to protect them.

Note that it is stated that they 'must' conduct surveys and that measures 'must' be put in place to protect them. History shows that FNSW have not completed adequate surveys. Letters to Department of Environment Heritage & the Arts and Dept. Environment, Climate Change and Water from South East Forest Rescue outlining incidences of

¹ No. 96 at: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ec_ctte/koalas/submissions.htm

² Appendix 1

inappropriate surveys, support this claim³. These are complimented by an extract from a report by Robert Bertram and a summary of a *Review of Methodology and Results of a Koala Survey of Compartment 2135, Mumbulla State Forest, NSW* by South Coast Landmark Ecological Services.

2. Logging threatens koala populations

"Forests NSW does not believe that logging of public native forests in New South Wales threatens koala populations."

Every other Submission from the SE NSW to the inquiry which discussed this issue, claimed that logging was the main or one of the main, cause/s of decline of koala population.

For example,

"The continuation of intensive logging activities ... on state forest lands in this area poses the single greatest threat to the survival of this particular population of koalas" (Submission 61, p.7).

This is of particular concern as the unique Strezlecki genus koala in SE NSW is very rare and on the brink of extinction. The Threatened Species Committee would not approve this koala to be listed as Endangered as, the koala is considered one species from their perspective.

Ray Hammond⁴ believed that even though there were similar species in other parts of the country, "the term 'endangered species' means that you're not going to see them again in your neck of the woods". Koalas are thus an endangered species in southeast NSW forests (Submission 61, p.7) and any claim that logging has had no affect on their status is unbelievable.

Dr Alistair Meztler⁵ confirmed: "...these koalas are probably the most critical population in Australia in the sense that they may represent one of only two reservoirs, very small ones, of what is the native genotype of all of the Victorian and South Australian animals left..."

3. Koalas prefer logged forests

FNSW claimed that:

"Studies at Eden showed that koalas preferentially use logged coupes in logged/unlogged mosaics and that koalas were found in the same coupes before and after logging", and that "... from time to time koalas prefer logged areas to unlogged areas".

They did not cite the literature to which this comment referred and local people confirmed that they have been using this ploy for years. The Chair suggested that: *"So where you log forests the population increases. Is that the outcome?"* Their response was: *"I do not know that anybody knows that"* and that *"... I do not have the specifics of that piece of work here"*. They were asked to produce the study on Notice.

There was further discussion on this topic, and their claims were unsubstantiated. Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of koalas occurring in Bermagui State Forest, which has now been logged.

³ Appendix 2

⁴ Ray Hammond and a Burgeoning Woodchip Industry in SE NSW: www.serca.org.au/SERCA/hammond.html

⁵ Koala Research Council, University of Queensland referring to the koalas in the coastal forests of SENSW in evidence to Senate Koala Inquiry

FNSW's handle on the situation and ability to provide crucial evidence at a Senate Hearing, based on adequate surveys, was at best unconvincing and at least, worthless. Their ability to protect the koala population in the forests of SE NSW is, therefore, untrustworthy and they should not be allowed to log anywhere within these forests.

4. Consultation mechanism

FNSW claimed to have conducted appropriate surveys in Bermagui prior to logging. Residents of Bermagui and Tanja recently received letters notifying them of timber harvesting and acknowledging that the forests to be logged contain koalas.⁶

I did not believe that an animal welfare group would approve of logging in areas in which were known to contain koalas. In my Submission to the Inquiry, I noted that FNSW appeared not to have undertaken legally required consultation⁷ with certain groups prior to logging. I provided the following hard evidence to substantiate this.

- Janine Green, President of the animal welfare group, *WIRES*, confirmed that they had not been consulted.⁸
- *Friends of Five Forests* based in Bermagui, confirmed that there was no consultation regarding the Bermagui State Forest logging in either its 2009 or its June 2011 campaign.⁹
- Two members of the *Gulaga and Biamanga Board of Management* told me that neither the traditional owners nor other Board members had been consulted.
- Rather than depend on hearsay as to whether residents had been consulted, on 16th July I conducted a door-to-door survey of all the people whose residences abut the Bermagui State Forest. I found that only one person was consulted and almost 100% stated that they opposed the logging. Some had not received a letter of advice.

These few incidents indicate to me that FNSW is untrustworthy and is conducting logging illegally at least within your electorate.

5. One resident's experience

On her regular walks through the forest beside her home next to Compartment 2001, Julie has seen bird life: lyre birds, sea eagles, swift parrots, owls, wedge-tailed eagles, and animals including a kangaroo with a joey, echidnas, yellow bellied gliders, turtles, a monitor lizard and she also found a little microbat which she took to NANA. She practices the principles of sound environmental stewardship as she picks up rubbish in the forest and stays on the tracks so as not to damage creatures lurking beneath leaf litter. Now heavy machinery has destroyed this forest. The creatures cannot go to the forest over the road because they could get run over and it has been logged. There are no hiding places. FNSW has blatantly ignored the principles of sound environmental stewardship and applied their own rapacious practices to a fragile and welcoming and established forest ecosystem by destroying it and all it contained.

6. Activism

Twenty-four of the 25 conservationists charged with offences relating to protecting Mumbulla State Forest from logging known koala habitat have had their cases dismissed. It creates an anomaly: that Australians are penalised for trying to protect our natural wilderness, and, after considering the issues, a judge dismisses their cases.

⁶ Appendices 3 and 4

⁷ The constitutional definition of 'consultation' goes beyond just sending an advice letter

⁸ Appendix 5

⁹ As spokesperson for the Conservation and Environment group Friends of Five Forests based in Bermagui I can state that there was no consultation from Forests NSW with our group regarding the logging in the Bermagui forests either in 2009 or in this recent logging campaign June 2011. Suzanne Foulkes.

Friction is created as the edges of nature and politics, science and the law, the timber industry and activism, collide and grind against each other like tectonic plates. This is a 'war' – an environmental disaster both here in SE NSW and in Victoria which faces similar problems relating to the destruction of koala habitats.

7. Conclusion

On a personal note, I consider their treatment of the Bermagui State Forest within a couple of kilometres of the village and on the tourist drive which is the main route into Bermagui from the north, is nothing short of disgraceful. Many local residents have told me they were 'heartbroken' about what has happened¹⁰. People move here because of the beauty of the area. The impact on tourism may be felt. My suspicion that this type of insensitive hard-core logging is intended to weaken the tourist industry and by doing so, strengthen the woodchipping industry as an employer, now appears justified.

These are serious allegations. I am not an expert on all of FNSW's activities, however, the small amount of research I conducted in preparation for the Public Hearing raised issues which, in my opinion, casts grave doubts on the capacity of FNSW to conduct their business professionally. At risk, therefore, as a result, is the health and sustainability of all State forests and their wildlife.

The irrefutable evidence, which demonstrates that the woodchipping industry must cease, cannot be ignored. There have been too many native forests degraded to the point where one logger stated of the Bermagui Forest: it won't regrow, it's been logged too many times.

Hammond's conservative and conscientious vision of the State's woodchip industry which he founded, is a far cry from what it is today. The woodchip industry was established on false economic principles and the NSW Auditor General found that Forests NSW made a loss of \$14.4 million last financial year on its native forest logging operations. To Hammond, the woodchip export industry undermines his original ideal to keep the forests of NSW for the people of NSW.

As a Commonwealth Officer, and as a signatory to the Regional Forestry Agreements, you have a responsibility to exercise stewardship over the forests and their detailed prescriptions for species protection.

Our forests of the SE NSW are amongst the richest carbon sinks in the world. It makes us wonder if the Commonwealth and State caretakers of this nation's forests are cognisant of this and if they truly understand the ramifications of neglect at governmental level. And it makes us wonder about the awful impact of logging on the fragile ecosystems of this 'rich and rare' beautiful part of the world. Further degradation of these forests must cease.

Could you please, on behalf of the people of your electorate, lead the way into a new rational environmental imperative in NSW by instigating a complete cessation of logging our natural native forests for woodchips?

Yours sincerely,

Bronte Somerset.

¹⁰ I visited an 80 year old local lady, suffering from pneumonia, in hospital today and she also told me that what has happened in Bermagui is heartbreaking.

APPENDIX 1: FNSW presentation at the Senate's Public Hearing into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population

(deleted for web publication)

APPENDIX 2: Evidence of Inadequate Koala Surveys

Please email <bjsomersset@gmail.com> for copies.

1. 29.03.2010: **Letter** to Premier Keneally, Minister Sartor, Minister Garrett advising them requesting that DECCW disallow logging until the inadequate koala survey issue has been rectified.
 2. 27.05.2010: **Letter** to Mr Andrew Mattes, Acting Manager, Crown Forestry Policy and Regulation, Dept. Environment, Climate Change and Water, from SEFR claiming a breach of forestry regulations in Murrah State Forest Cpt 2052, 2051 and Mumbulla State Forest, Cpt 2133 as pertaining to adequacy of pre-logging Koala surveys.
 3. 08.09.2010: **Letter** to Mr Steve Hartley, Manager, Crown Forestry Policy and Regulation, Dept. Environment, Climate Change and Water, indicating that SEFR's audit of the Koala transect surveys for Yurammie SF Cpt's 963, 964, 965 fail to comply with the prescriptions in the IFOA-TSL.
 4. 08.09.2010: **Letter** to Mr Steve Hartley, Manager, Crown Forestry Policy and Regulation, Dept. Environment, Climate Change and Water, indicating that SEFR's audit of the Koala transect surveys for Murrah State Forest Cpt 2032, found that the survey failed to comply with the prescriptions in the IFOA-TSL.
 5. 20.02.2011: **Letter** to DECCW indicating disapproval of SEFE's inadequate surveys and information from SEFE as pertaining to Cathcart State Forest native forest logging operations being inadequate to accommodate known Koala habitat. Indicates discrepancies between how Koalas should have been surveyed and how they were not. 2011 harvesting used 2005 Koala surveys.
 6. 26.05.2011: **Letter** to Department of Environment Heritage & the Arts from SEFR outlining Koala survey breaches in Bodalla State Forest wherein it maintains that Forests NSW forestry operations have been conducted in contravention of the Integrated Forestry Operations Approval South Coast sub-region Threatened Species Licence. It contains claims that logging proceeded illegally due to inadequate koala surveys.
-
1. 30.07.2010: **Report** from Robert Bertram re Complaint in relation to logging in Compartment 2002 and areas in Bermagui and Murrah State Forests including image of Felled habitat and koala feed tree, Coupe 9, Cpt 2002.
 - a. Contradiction between the koala preferred species of tree which South East Fibre Exports (SEFE) deems not to have logged and those which it has. Image provided.
 - b. Recommendation that Bermagui State Forest should have remained a Koala moratorium area because of failure by FNSW to comply with adequate koala surveys.
 2. 24.04.2010: **Review** of Methodology and Results of a Koala Survey of Compartment 2135, Mumbulla State Forest, NSW South Coast by Landmark Ecological Services. This reviewed the methodology and results of Forests NSW's (FsNSW) Koala Phascolarctos cinereus survey of Compartment 2135, Mumbulla State Forest (SF) on the NSW south coast. It found that:
 - a. The Koala survey conducted by FsNSW in Compartment 2135 on 30 March 2010 cannot be considered to satisfy the requirements for a Koala survey as described under the terms of the EMA TS Licence.
 - b. Although intensive in parts, coverage of the harvesting area was not uniform and did not conform to the survey design. It is estimated that approximately 38% of the harvesting area was not surveyed.

- c. The varying and limited amount of time taken to complete survey traverses suggests that survey effort was inconsistent between transects and for 10 of the 13 traverses appeared inadequate to effectively apply the methodology described under the terms of the EMA TS Licence.
- d. The recording of traverse results appeared confused, inconsistent and contradictory with an almost complete omission of documentation of the presence/absence of scratches, scats, Koalas or predator scats outside the quadrants. This indicated a lack of standardisation and rigor in application and documentation of the Koala survey methodology. The recording of Yellow-bellied Glider scratches on a rough-barked eucalypt also suggested inexperience in methods of wildlife field detection.
- e. Overall, the survey was inadequate to assess whether Koalas were using Compartment 2135. A more comprehensive, rigorous and fully documented survey is required before the presence/absence of Koalas in the compartment can be determined with any confidence.

APPENDIX 3: Letter From Forests NSW to Bermagui Residents 27.05.2011

(deleted for web publication)

APPENDIX 4: Letter from Forests NSW to Tanja Residents 13.07.2011

(deleted for web publication)

APPENDIX 5: Letter from Wires to Forests NSW 18.07.2011

(deleted for web publication)