

LETTER TO: MIN TONY BURKE, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT RE KOALAS ON THE FAR SOUTH COAST OF NSW. HARRIETT SWIFT 21.08.2012

Dear Minister

I refer to the ABC-TV Four Corners program of 20 August 2012 on the plight of the koala on Australia's east coast and commend you for the obvious sincerity of your expressed intention to ensure that the koala recovers from its current dire situation.

I am asking you to consider two factors central to the survival of the koala in south eastern New South Wales:

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999. You must remove the legal impediment that prevents you, as federal Minister for the Environment, from taking action to protect the koala in State Forests that are the subject of Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). Currently it is legally impossible for you to take any action to protect the koala as a federally listed Threatened Species due to the exemption of RFA areas from the EPBC Act 1999. Until you remove this exemption, logging of koala habitat will continue and koalas will be at grave risk in State Forests. Most of the known koalas on the far south coast are in State Forests.

Corridors and Core Habitat for the Koalas of the NSW Far South Coast, a project granted \$1.9M by you under the Biodiversity Fund. This project should be urgently reviewed as it could actually be a threat to the recently discovered population of koalas in Tanja State Forest near Bega. The project provides for a 6 year moratorium on some (but not all) known koala habitat in Bermagui, Murrumbidgee and Mumbulla State Forests. This may or may not work to protect those koalas (although it is fragmented, will not allow for expansion of populations and, of course, it is temporary) but any result will be at the expense of koalas in other forests in the Eden Region.

To compensate for logs forgone from the moratorium areas during the 6 years of its duration, the intensity of logging elsewhere will be increased.

Replacement logs will be obtained by logging more intensively elsewhere in the Eden Region.

One of the first areas affected is Tanja State Forest where koalas were discovered about a month ago. The intensified logging will take place there shortly. Between the draft Harvest Plan (before the Biodiversity Fund grant announcement) and the final approved Harvest Plan (after the Biodiversity Fund announcement), the estimated yield of pulp logs has increased by more than 20 percent. This could be catastrophic for this tiny remnant of the once abundant Bega Valley koalas.

If you are truly committed to ensuring that the koala survives as a species on the far south coast of NSW I ask you to take these two actions.

Yours sincerely

Harriett Swift

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