

## Ministerial Briefing Notes

### Critical Corridor Linkages between Biamanga and Gulaga National Parks need Protection

#### **Background**

Bermagui State Forest forms the only link of remaining forested land between Biamanga and Gulaga National Parks<sup>1</sup>. These two national parks have been handed back to their traditional Aboriginal owners and are managed by Boards of Management. The last two remaining koala colonies on the Far South Coast of NSW (of what was once an extensive population) have been located to the west of Gulaga NP (Kooraban NP) and on the border of Biamanga NP (Mumbulla SF). Bermagui SF forms part of the Eden RFA, and is programmed to supply both sawlogs and woodchips.

#### **The Issue**

The retention of full connectivity between the larger areas of protected forest lands in Biamanga and Gulaga NPs is critical for two reasons:

1. Mumbulla Mountain (Biamanga NP) and Gulaga form part of the same cultural landscape which is sacred to the Yuin people, and this connected landscape is acknowledged in the Draft Plan of Management for the two Parks;
2. Koalas are still breeding in the Mumbulla and Kooraban forests, but numbers are critically low. These remnant koala populations therefore critically need ecological connectivity of high quality forest to improve their long-term viability<sup>2</sup> for (a) genetic interaction, (b) resilience against threatening agencies (eg fire, climate change), and (c) opportunity for expansion of recovering populations. These areas are 8 kilometres apart. With the exception of Compartment 2069 (see attached map), the forest cover between them is largely fragmented and provides extremely unsuitable habitat.

On the other hand, this connectivity depends largely upon forested lands dedicated as production state forest, and to a lesser extent, upon an area of forested private land. Forests NSW is currently proposing to log Compartment 2069 in Bermagui State Forest in the immediate future<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Representations made**

1. The Boards of Management of Biamanga and Gulaga National Parks have previously written to the Premier of NSW<sup>4</sup> expressing their desire for the public forest lands between the two mountains, and linking to the coast with Mimosa Rocks National Park, to be managed by the Traditional Owners as national park.
2. The then Shadow Minister for Environment, Catherine Cusack, inspected Mumbulla State Forest and Biamanga NP at the end of 2010, with the Chairman of the Biamanga NP Board of Management, Mr. John Mumbler.
3. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW has made ongoing representations to the current Government, both when in opposition and since now in government, to seek an outcome for the management of Mumbulla, Murrah, Tanja West and Bermagui State Forests that would

<sup>1</sup> Google Maps is a good way of demonstrating the importance of these links

<sup>2</sup> ....(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. Dr Alistair Mezler, Uni of Central Queensland, evidence to Senate Inquiry, May 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Forests NSW June 2011 – IFOA Monthly Report – Eden Region. Commencement Date June 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Letter can be supplied on request

ensure not only long-term survival of the existing koala colony, but also actively contribute to its expansion to a more viable population size.

### ***Resolution***

Compartment 2069 has a high diversity of koala feed-tree species in largely mature forest; as such it is good quality koala habitat, possibly the best remaining in this coastal forest corridor. Any reasonable approach to koala conservation would protect the surviving habitat between these areas to improve the chances of younger dispersing koalas connecting with identified resident populations and maximising viability of both populations. Consequently, severely degrading the habitat of this compartment by intensive logging is totally indefensible.

While Forestry's outdated survey techniques<sup>5</sup> failed to find current occupation by koalas in Compartment 2069, this does not diminish in any way the case for protecting the high quality koala habitat in the compartment. Koalas will only be able to interchange between their two remnant core areas if Compartment 2069 retains its full suite of ecological values.

If the koala populations are to be given the maximum chance of long-term survival, **Compartment 2069 must be immediately withdrawn from the Eden RFA supply quota, and its ecological values permanently protected, preferably as an addition to Gulaga National Park.**

Currently there is an urgent need to resolve the current impasse between OEH and Forests NSW over the future management of the remaining state forests between Bermagui and Tathra. Given promises made by Forests NSW to the local community at previous public meetings, it is essential that final resolution of the koala management issue, also addressing the aspirations of the Traditional Owners of this 'country', be undertaken in a transparent and consultative manner with ample opportunity for community participation. An appropriate starting point for public consultation should be the public release of all relevant agency documents and reports relating to the status of koalas in the region<sup>6</sup>, and the proposed management strategies for these state forests. **While such consultation takes place, a moratorium should be declared on any forestry activities in Bermagui, Mumbulla, Murrah and Tanja West State Forests – including roading – until this due process has been completed.**

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<sup>5</sup> The IFOA stipulates a specific koala survey methodology which has now been superceded by the RGBSAT survey technique. The IFOA has not yet been modified to take account of the new science.

<sup>6</sup> Including release of the long overdue Koala Management Framework