

## Local flora reserve saves koalas at a price

Five forests in our southern region have won a reprieve. The creation of the 11 800 ha Murrah Flora Reserve shows that the State Government does have the power to protect forests and, in one fell swoop, can deliver an environmental win. This win will protect a highly threatened remnant population of koalas. But, as local National Parks Association (NPA) President, Dave Gallan, says: "...there is something perverse about using Environmental Trust money to subsidise fuel for log trucks."

Downsides to this action are that: the Indigenous neighbours were sidelined; over 400 000 ha of State Forests in southeast NSW are still at risk of being logged for woodchips; and, to compensate the industry, the State Government granted it \$2.5 million from the Environmental Trust Fund to permit extra logging further up the coast.

At the heart of decades old campaigns has been the aspiration to safeguard Aboriginal culture, lands, and sacred places; to protect wildlife; and, to stop logging which destroys hollow bearing trees upon which threatened species depend.

Scientists find that logging causes soil loss, makes forests more fire prone from water loss, emits carbon, and prevents carbon sequestration. Economists calculate that logging is economically unsustainable. Taxpayers subsidise the sector, and plantations can supply nearly all our timber needs. We see how logging degrades and

silences our forests, and destroys natural beauty.

Climate change threats and efficient overseas eucalypt plantations were not significant factors when the Regional Forest Agreements for the southeast's forests were drafted. Those agreements are due for renewal.

The NPA's plan for the Great Southern Forest (GSF) is based on funding industries and jobs from about \$19.5 million pa from carbon credits from our carbon dense southeast forests via the Emissions Reduction Fund. This would safeguard jobs and wildlife. The Government should stop woodchipping, and create, or boost, jobs in climate sensitive industries such as forest restoration, wildlife protection, and nature based tourism.

The Murrah Forest Reserve is a welcome beginning. But, to protect every native forest dwelling species, no matter where they live in our southern region, our view of the future should be to protect, connect, and begin to restore all our remaining forests.

*It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanates from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit. (Robert Louis Stevenson)*

*Dr Bronte Somerset*