

## **Loggers are set to destroy one of Australia's last remaining koala habitats.**

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The NSW Government has started sending contractors into the forests in South Eastern NSW.

Negotiations between the NSW Department of Environment and the state government agency responsible for logging, Forests NSW, appear to have failed to reach a compromise.

The irony is that the NSW Government last year ordered a survey to try and find koalas in the coastal forests that are now about to be logged. The survey, which was conducted across all land tenures, found a small, active population of about 30 koalas and is continuing.

It seems the NSW Government has now decided its contractual obligations to supply saw logs locally and woodchips to Asia are more important than protecting this much loved native animal, which is immortalized in Australian culture.

The disease, Chlamydia, plus loss of habitat have contributed to a dramatic decline in koala numbers over recent decades, with the species now close to being declared endangered.

"Soon it will be too late to save the species." Says Debora Numbers of koalas in Australia may be as low as 45,000 recent surveys by the Australian Koala Foundation show.

The koala population in South Eastern NSW was once healthy but in the last 100 years has been decimated by hunters interested in koala pelts and by logging.

Forests NSW have not publically given a date for the start of logging in the Mumbulla State Forest, no doubt expecting direct action from conservationists who forced loggers out of an area close by three years ago.

The issue will put heat on the new premier of the state of NSW, American-born Kristina Keneally, who was installed by the right-wing faction of the party recently.

And Commonwealth Minister for the Environment Peter Garret – a former rock star with internationally successful band Midnight Oil and environmentalist - has been asked to intervene.

Steve Phillips – arguably NSW most experienced and expert Koala scientist, said on ABC radio recently, " We have got the management prescriptions (for koalas) wrong, especially in the SE .... The small area of koala habitat remaining is such a precious resource .... They have just got to be protected so they can continue to expand ..... there is no longer any argument about what is important habitat".

NSW Minister for forestry Ian MacDonald stated in Parliament in 2008 that

despite recurrent financial losses, logging in native forests will continue, in order to support jobs.

Yet billions of dollars of taxpayer funds have been pumped into plantations as replacement timber and fiber for industry and export.

NSW Forests rely heavily on the outdated Regional Forest Agreements that were signed off in the late 90s giving new areas in National Parks to the state but retaining forests for logging. Conservationists say the industry is outdated and only propped up by political will and union backing.

These agreements are excluded from the Environment Protection Act (EPBC) as well as climate change and water supplies.

Will zoos soon be the only places to see koala? Will NSW Premier Kristine Keneally do her part and stop logging these coastal forests of Mumbulla, sealing the fate of these last few koala? It seems not despite 2010 being The Year of Biodiversity.

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