

MEDIA RELEASE: JAPANESE PAPER GIANT THREATENS KOALA SURVIVAL, South East Region Conservation Alliance, 09.10.11

One of the most critical populations of koalas in Australia is under threat from logging to supply one of Japan's biggest paper manufacturers, Nippon Paper.

Koala habitat in Bermagui State Forest in the New South Wales south east, is being destroyed to supply woodchips for the Nippon Paper Group. A Committee of the Australian Parliament recently found that koala numbers are falling at an alarming rate, but state owned forests are exempt from environmental laws to protect threatened species. The koala is already listed as an endangered species by the United States Government.

Conservation group South East Regional Conservation Alliance (SERCA) is calling for an end to native forest logging and woodchipping.

The woodchips are exported from the Eden woodchip mill, which is owned by the Nippon Paper Group.

"We are concerned that logging for woodchips has the potential to make the koala extinct in south eastern New South Wales," said Ms Lisa Stone, Convenor of SERCA.

Although koala numbers are dangerously low in the region, they are still breeding in nearby Mumbulla and Kooraban forests, with a good chance of recovery if their habitat is left undisturbed.

"It is vital that the Bermagui forest, which provides a link between the two known koala populations should not be logged," Ms Stone said.

"The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has expressed concern over the future of our koalas, listing them as one of the species most under threat from climate change," said Ms Stone. "Habitat loss is one of the biggest threats driving koalas to extinction."

Conservationists also claim that the woodchipping industry is subsidised because the logs it chips are priced at below market levels.

"This means that NSW taxpayers, in effect, are subsidising the Japanese paper giant," she said.

"We are determined to protect public native forests and move all Australia's public native forest wood production into sustainably managed plantations."

"We believe most Japanese people would be horrified if they knew that commonly available paper products were putting at risk the future of this much loved animal," she said.

“We are calling on Nippon Paper to stop using native forest woodchips and source woodchips from plantations only and help protect Australia’s remaining koala habitat.”

For Information: Lisa Stone 0428640271 Harriett Swift 0414908997