

SUBMISSION: Draft Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Amendment (Native forest Bio-material) Regulation 2013.

SAY **NO** TO THE BURNING OF NATURAL NATIVE TREES FOR ELECTRICITY



This submission is written from the perspective that overturning the ban on using native forest timber will continue to place our forests and their wildlife at risk.

Sapphire was born at Potoroo Palace, Merimbula. She is hairier and larger than most commonly known koalas. She belongs to a unique Southern Koala species or genotype whose ancestors were Australia's original koalas. Her kind lives in a few of our south coast forests in New South Wales. These koalas were almost extinct, but this year, surveys show that they may be recovering, as about 60 have been located in local forests.

This is very exciting for our community because, if this species had *carte blanche* in the forests, it would allow them to continue to come back from the brink of extinction. It could mean that our children may be able to walk into the forests and actually see them in their natural habitat.

Sapphire's cousin koalas in SA, NSW and Qld. were recently added to the Federal Vulnerable Listings under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC). Logging in the State's native forests is permitted by Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), which are exempt from the power of the EPBC Act. So although koalas elsewhere are protected, Sapphire's home range is logged to supply the export woodchip market.

These are precarious times for Sapphire's family and friends. They do not need another threat to their habitat.

But another threat has arisen in the State government's draft plan to overturn a ban on burning native forest wood for electricity. This would give a green light for the construction of electricity plants powered almost exclusively by native forests and Sapphire's habitat. I believe that this deeply flawed plan is being proposed in an attempt to prop up the collapsing export woodchip market.

And we have good reason not to trust lip service paid to any constraint on what the definition of 'waste' actually means. History has shown that skepticism is justified because it has been proved in courts that forest logging contractors have bent or broken the rules which are supposed to govern their activities. They receive paltry fines which are all funded by the taxpayer in the end.

We are well justified in believing that 'waste' will include any tree, that is not good enough for the sawmills, could cut and burned for energy. This doesn't mean just sawdust and woodchip waste but whole trees including the darker red-wooded trees that koalas favour.

The Government sees this as creating 'renewable' energy but forests aren't crops as they don't grow back seasonally but take 150 years to bear habitable hollows for wildlife. True renewable energy sources are wind, tide, and solar – these should be in the spotlight and sought over – not practices emanating from the 18th century.

I'm imagining knowing that native trees had been burned so I could watch TV or run a sewing machine! This is environmentally antiquated. The human race has advanced beyond this absurdity. We have become technologically sophisticated in terms of communication, science, health, transport, etc. Does the Government really think that the creation of energy via a practice of burning native forests is synchronous with the levels of progress made in other scientific fields? It is a sad indictment on the people who consider it to be cutting edge technology.

It already has a bad reputation as, sadly, the practice of using native forests for energy is known in the retail electricity industry as 'dead koala power'.

To let our forests burn for electricity could sound the death knell for Sapphire and her species. Koalas like Sapphire, and the wildlife found in these forests, need to be free to live, to roam and to breed without the threat of losing habitat.

For the sake of all wildlife, for future generations and for the health of the planet, the ban on burning any part of natural native forests for electricity must stay firmly in place.

Dr Bronte Somerset
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