

MEDIA RELEASE:

John Marsh, Manager of Animal Welfare, Potoroo Palace Native Animal Education Sanctuary. 22 March 2015

Koalas in our region are suffering. They are suffering to the point where they are on the verge of extinction. This is not exaggeration but fact. Just over 100 years ago the Koala population, of what is now referred to as the Bega Valley Shire, was in excess of 100,000 Koalas. Today there are less than 100 Koalas in the Bega Valley Shire!

Many experts agree that the major contributing factor to the rapid decline in Koala numbers in this region was due to the extreme rate of land clearing that took place. It was not the fur trade. It was not disease. It was loss of suitable habitat and suitable food trees that led to the dramatic loss of Koalas in our region.

Unfortunately, we have not learnt from our past mistakes and this loss of habitat and suitable food trees is continuing thanks to Forest Corp NSW and the State Government—who not only support, but subsidise logging operations in our Native Forests. We cannot allow this to continue. We must not allow this to continue.

Some of the areas that Forest Corp has their eyes on for future logging operations are home to the remnants of our Koala populations. When questioned about the impact this will have on the Koala populations, their answer is along the lines that 'the Koalas will just move out of those areas and re-establish themselves in others'.

This shows two things: firstly, a complete disregard for the well being of our Native Wildlife; and secondly, a complete lack of knowledge about the habits and requirements of Koalas.

Koalas have very specific requirements concerning their diet. The regrowth that occurs after intensive logging operations, which Forest Corp takes great pride in pointing out, is of little or no use to the Koalas. Silvertop Ash *E. Sieberi*, the dominant re-growth species, is not a Koala food tree. Yellow Stringybark *E. Muellieriana*, the next most common re-growth species, is listed as a supplementary food tree (but right at the bottom of the list).

The She Oaks which also occur in vast numbers in regrowth forests are not eaten at all. Even if the re-growth species were of suitable food tree varieties, Koalas cannot survive on re-growth. Koalas need old growth, mature trees to feed on in order to survive. As far as the Koalas are concerned, re-growth forests are useless! I will not, in this letter, go into the catastrophic effect re-growth forests have on increasing the likelihood and intensity of bushfires. Again not helpful to survival of Koalas.

Koalas also have to rest or sleep for 18 - 20 hours per day in order to digest their food. Eucalyptus leaves are an extremely energy intensive food to digest. The only way Koalas have enough energy to digest their food is to rest or sleep for 18 - 20 hours per day. Eucalyptus is also an extremely poor source of nutrition, so Koalas

get very little energy from their food. A Koala's gut also has to work at digesting food 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If a Koala's stomach gets empty and stops working at digesting, it does not automatically restart the digestive process even if more food is consumed.

How can Forest Corp.—and by way of complicity, the NSW State Government—expect an animal, our Koala, which is only active for a maximum of 4 - 6 hours per day, has very little energy, and needs to continually feed on suitable food tree species, to just move out of areas being logged, out run the bulldozers and reestablish itself in other areas?

Please, we must stop this senseless destruction of our Koalas habitat and their livelihood before it is too late.

Sincerely,
John Marsh
Manager of Animal Welfare
Potoroo Palace Native Animal Education Sanctuary.