

TIME TO STOP LOGGING KOALAS TO EXTINCTION

Dailan Pugh, North East Forest Alliance, May 2023

The Forestry Corporation are now logging compartments 6 and 7 of Braemar State Forest. Before the 2019 fires this forest was found to have an exceptional density of Koalas, one of the most important Koala habitats on the Richmond River lowlands in north-east NSW, part of NEFA's proposed 7,000 ha [Sandy Creek Koala Park](#). This is only one of the 18 threatened species known to inhabit these compartments. This forest was severely burnt overnight on 8 October 2019, killing 50-75% of Koalas. Now the plan is to log 75% of Koala feed trees >30cm (the size preferred by Koala), over 5,000 large feed trees across the 187ha logging area. This is on top of the fire impacts, and will devastate recovering populations.

It is time for the new NSW Minns Government to honour their promise to protect Koalas. Please write urgently to the new Environment Minister Penny Sharp and the new Forestry Minister Tara Moriarty asking them to immediately stop logging important Koala habitat in compartments 6 and 7 of Braemar State Forest:

office@sharp.minister.nsw.gov.au

office@moriarty.minister.nsw.gov.au

Background

On [28 July 2019](#) NEFA undertook Koala scat surveys over what were then compartments 23 and 24 of Braemar State Forest (now renumbered as compartments 6 and 7) that was to be logged under a November 2017 Harvesting Plan (HP) that applied the requirements of the 1999 Threatened Species Licence (TSL). The area had recently been marked up for logging which was due to start in August.

At that time, in accordance with the 1999 Threatened Species Licence, the 2017 Harvesting Plan required thorough searches for Koalas ahead of logging and the protection of all Koala High Use Areas (HUAs), as well as the retention of 5 potential Koala feed trees >30cm diameter (dbh) per hectare.

NEFA's scat searches revealed an exceptional density of Koala scats and multiple Koala HUAs. NEFA wrote to Premier Gladys Berejiklian on 30 July 2019 asking her to urgently intervene to ensure that independent surveys were undertaken to identify all important Koala habitat in Braemar State Forest before logging started. In response, NEFA was informed that a new harvesting plan would be prepared, applying the rules of the new 2018 Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approval (CIFOA), which no longer require searches for, and protection of, Koala HUAs or any other exclusion areas for Koalas.

A new Harvesting Plan for renumbered compartments 6 and 7 of Braemar State Forest was released on 31 August 2019 (while the compartments had been renumbered the logging area remained the same). Under the new rules only 5 small (>20cm dbh) potential Koala feed trees per hectare need to be retained.

Across the [4 assessments of Braemar](#) undertaken by NEFA before the 2019 fire, 165 trees with Koala scats beneath them were identified, including 67 high use trees (>20 scats, the trigger for identifying Koala HUAs). Only a small part of the 185ha 'Potential Net Harvesting Area' in the renumbered compartments 6 and 7 had been assessed. NEFA estimated that over half the logging area qualified as Koala HUAs that should have been protected.

Compartments 6 and 7 are also known to be habitat for the nationally Endangered Southern Greater Glider and Vulnerable Yellow-bellied Glider, Grey-headed Flying Fox, and Slaty Red

Gum. As well as the State listed Barking Owl, Powerful Owl, Masked Owl, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Brown Treecreeper, Diamond Firetail, Dusky Woodswallow, Grey-crowned Babbler, Little Lorikeet, Squirrel Glider, Rufous Bettong, Little Bent-winged Bat and Weeping Paperbark. They also contain extensive areas of the Endangered Ecological Community *Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest of the New South Wales North Coast Bioregion*. Most of the logging area is Lowlands Spotted Gum-Box, with some Lowlands Grey Box, which only have 10% and 1% respectively of their extent reserved – far less than the target of 30% by 2030.

NEFA began to prepare for a blockade and to extend our 2013 Sandy Creek Koala Park proposal for the adjacent Royal Camp and Carwong State Forests to include Braemar State Forest. This all changed on the night of 8 October 2019 when the Busby's Flat fire burnt most of the proposal, eliminating Koalas from the most heavily burnt forests. After the fires drought persisted for two and a half months. NEFA's assessment of the impacts of the 2019 wildfire and drought on the proposed Sandy Creek Koala Park indicated the loss of most Koalas, but that Koalas survived in the less intensively burnt areas, including parts of Braemar. Phillips ([2021](#)) found a loss of 50-70% of Koalas.

Despite this, in August 2020 NEFA released the proposed 7,000 ha [Sandy Creek Koala Park](#) on the understanding that the surviving Koalas could over time repopulate the proposal. The proposal also documents the economic benefits from carbon sequestration, tourism and increasing stream flows gained from protecting the forest. Estimating that stopping logging would increase annual net CO₂ sequestration by an average of 44,200 tonnes of per annum (enough to offset the emissions from a town the size of Kyogle or Maclean), then worth \$687,000 per annum in Australian Carbon Credit Units

The Minns Labor Government was elected on 25 March promising to protect Koalas. The Forestry Corporation seized the opportunity of the chaos of the incoming government by approving a new harvesting plan for compartments 6 and 7 of Braemar SF four days after the election, presumably attempting to log it before the new Government can act on their promise to protect Koalas. NEFA wrote to the new Environment Minister Penny Sharpe on 3 April to bring this act of bastardry to her attention, asking her to ensure there was a full assessment of Koalas.

It is now identified as an active logging operation. Their 2023 logging plan is virtually unaltered from their 2019 plan, despite the increased Koala records and the massive impact of the 2019 fires. There has been no assessment of the surviving Koalas, and their plan allows for removal of 75% of Koala feed trees >30cm (the size preferred by Koala). This is 29 potential Koala feed trees per hectare, across the 187ha logging area this equates to over 5,400 large feed trees. This is on top of the fire impacts, and will devastate recovering populations.