



Media Release

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Nutritional quality of habitat key to koala numbers in state forests

Research released today into koala response to forestry has found that the nutritional quality of trees is critical for koala survival and selective harvesting did not have an adverse impact upon koala numbers on surveyed north coast state forests.

This is due to the types of trees left after harvesting as some trees such as tallowwood have higher nutritional quality than others such as blackbutt. The existing forestry rule set mandates the retention of priority koala browse trees as well as other habitat protections.

These findings have emerged from a three-year research program independently overseen by the NSW Natural Resources Commission.

The Natural Resources Commissioner, Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte, said “koala density was higher than anticipated in the surveyed forests and was not reduced by selective harvesting. This research is the most comprehensive conducted of its type in NSW to date.”

With support from a panel of experts in koala ecology and forest science, the Commission selected eminent scientific researchers from the Australian National University, Western Sydney University and the Department of Primary Industries Forest Science Unit to undertake the research. The researchers investigated koala movement, occupancy, density, diet and the nutritional quality of koala habitat on state forests.

As Professor Durrant-Whyte states, “this research suggests that it’s not so much about tree size but having a good tree species mix post-harvest to maintain koala numbers. However, north coast forests are diverse so I caution applying these findings to other areas without further research.

“The Commission has also engaged researchers to investigate how koalas are recovering from the 2019/20 wildfires. There remains many critical knowledge gaps about koala populations across NSW, but this piece of research helps to fill in one piece of the puzzle of one of our iconic species.”

“I am concerned however, there are greater threats to the long-term survival of koalas in NSW’s forests. In particular, climate change is a threat to the future integrity of koala habitats due to increased frequency of wildfire and prolonged periods of heat stress”, said Professor Durrant-Whyte.

The NSW Government tasked the Commission to deliver the independent research program in 2018. The research was funded and undertaken as part of the whole-of-government NSW Koala Strategy 2018-21.

The research report can be found [here](#).

Other key research findings include:

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- the average nutritional quality of NSW north coast hinterland forests for koalas is relatively low compared to forests in other locations across the koala range from Queensland to South Australia, which restricts the landscape's capacity to support koalas
- koala density was mostly similar between state forest and national park sites that included similar forest types, and regrowth from historical harvesting.

About the Natural Resources Commission

The Commission provides independent, evidence-based advice to the NSW Government to sustainably manage natural resources over the long term and ensure the wellbeing of current and future generations.

Our work includes independent advice on complex issues, oversight of contested forestry issues, assurance in water planning and implementation, and audit and evaluation in a range of areas.