

## **To the Natural Resources Commission**

### **Re: Draft Coastal IFOA Monitoring Program**

I am a veterinarian with a special interest in koalas. I have been observing and recording koalas in the Macleay Valley for over thirty years.

I have read this document with interest and have to wonder why it has taken 20 years since the Regional Forest Agreements commenced to develop a monitoring and evaluation program. The loss of koala habitat and decline in koala numbers in both State Forests and private forests in the Macleay Valley is apparent in most of the SF that I have been visiting in the last 20 years. Urgent action is needed

In 2001 I moved to Dondingalong, near Kempsey and started walking in the nearby State forest, Maria River SF, Cmppt 31. The forest had just been logged when I moved there and it has been logged again in 2010 and 2017. Three months after I moved there my neighbour brought me a sick adult female koala suffering from malnutrition and chlamydia. She went to the Koala Hospital but did not come back. Monitoring of scats in the catchment in the SF where she came from indicates a male koala still visits the area but no sign of another koala. Seven years later on the other side of this compartment I saw another female koala, actually in the NP but heading for the SF and I identified that area as a key area and never went back there until after the last logging operation in 2017. When the harvesting had finished I walked down a snig track heading into this area and found a large Ta tree with > 20 scats underneath one particular branch next to the track About 20 metres further down this snig track I found another tree with a single scat from a different koala, a male. I have monitored this area every year since and there has been no sign of the female returning to this tree and the male did return on two occasions but the last scat he left was grey and slimy and I suspected he wasn't well and there has been no sign since.

This is a work in progress for me, but so far in 20 years, 2 adult female koalas have perished in this compartment, both it seems impacted by harvesting operations Both these females were mature adults possibly aged so coming to the end of their life. A male koala continues to follow their breeding season pattern of behaviour moving up the first catchment, calling but there is nobody home anymore. Calling males do not always indicate occupancy or the presence of a female.

The question is where are the offspring? Is too frequent logging preventing recruitment of young koalas into the area?

**The impact of the harvesting operation. The disturbance.** The impact of disturbance on a koala is mostly underestimated.

1. The noise of machinery and chainsaws and human voices, trees being felled close by, the dust.
2. The snig track driven right next to the key trees which were marked
3. The log dumps close to the key koala areas. The ongoing disturbance from firewood collectors at the dumps.
4. The loss of key food and breeding trees
5. The disturbance and chaos of the loss of established wildlife tracks through the forest due to felled trees.
6. The impact of disturbance on koalas has become much more serious since the introduction of chlamydial disease into the population.

I do not see ecological sustainability. The prescriptions are inadequate and there is no requirement to consider koalas except for marking KF trees for retention and even then only “preferred trees” are marked whereas koalas eat a suite of tree species within a forest according to the season or climate. This means the secondary food trees are not protected and the koalas suffer further loss of potential food trees.

It is not just the number but also the quality of koala food trees which are selected for retention. The palatable food trees in any forest must be identified (more research and field technology needed) and no go zones must be enforced in active koala habitat.

I therefore would welcome an evaluation of the effectiveness of the prescriptions for koalas in SF in this proposed monitoring program

#### The Bigger Picture

I am also collecting koala information throughout the areas surrounding Maria River SF Cmpt. 31. Private Native Forestry is also having a serious impact on the koalas and may have wiped out the source population for this catchment. I am anxiously waiting for reports of sightings or calls this breeding season.

The fundamental issue with Maria River ST Cmpt. 31 is that it should have been recognised as an important koala area and included in Kumbatine NP back in 1995. Perhaps it is not too late?

#### Further Questions

Was this last harvesting operation I have described in Maria River SF Cmpt.31 a deliberate act of animal cruelty? FC were aware it was historically a koala area and the trees were marked but they showed no consideration for koala welfare and now the koalas have apparently perished. Was there a breach of regulations or just routine inconsideration? I have observed similar lack of consideration for koalas in the other compartments of Maria River SF and also in Tamban SF.

Does NSWFC really want to protect threatened species in SF? Whenever I have reported Glossy Black Cockatoo nests to NSWFC they have later disappeared and never returned. Are NSWFC workers involved in the wildlife trade?

I welcome the opportunity to comment on and participate in the Draft Coastal IFOA Monitoring Program. It is extremely important that koalas are given maximum protection from disturbance in SF and NP. I am also increasingly concerned about Hazard Reduction Burning in koala habitat in NP and NR and monitoring of koalas in NP must be initiated urgently. Every koala is precious and must be nurtured. I do not see much nurturing by Forestry or NP workers.

Koalas are not an easy animal to study not only because they are naturally cryptic but also because they are becoming rare in many areas. The methodology used for the monitoring program must be robust. I still think looking for scats, although time –consuming, is the most informative. Interpreting the data for evaluation will be challenging but the 4 year monitoring period hopefully will produce enough information to guide improvements and other recommendations.

Yours faithfully

Vanessa Standing

