

Koala Campaigns vs Koala Conservation

In the early 1990s, political campaigns to save the remaining local koala populations in south coast NSW began. This celebrity driven campaign included Bob Brown and Elisabeth Kirkby.

An initial outcome saw the transfer of State forest to the Tantawangalo Koala Nature Reserve. This was done to protect an estimated population of 40 to 45 mature adult koalas in the Devils Creek catchment of the Tantawangalo State forest. This population was said to be the most significant colony in south east NSW.

The protection of this koala population was later enhanced through the creation of the South East National Park.

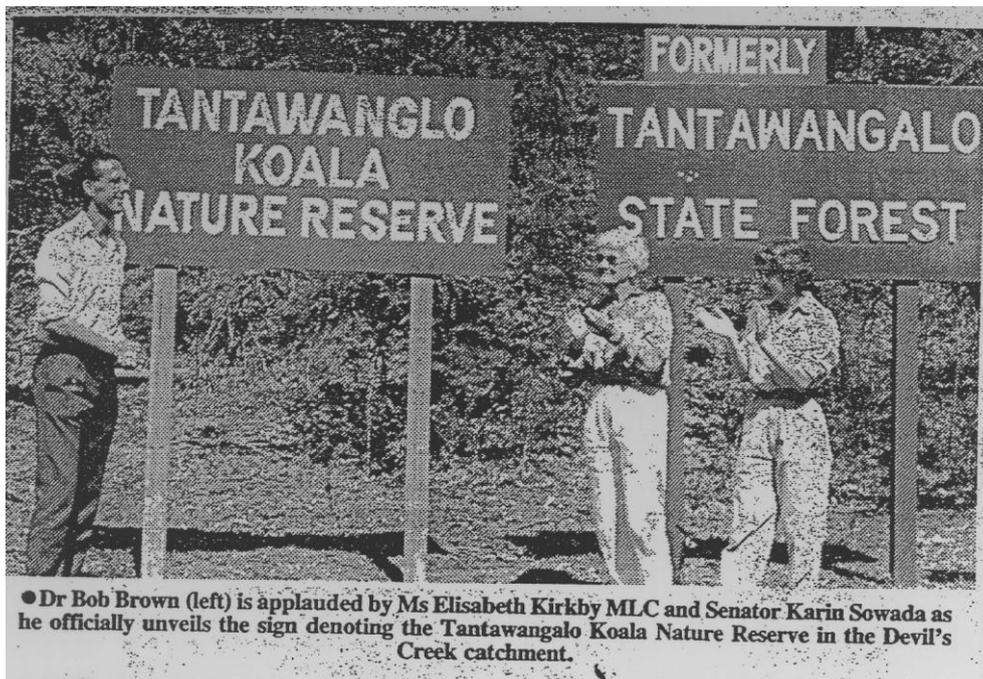


Photo from an Early 1990s edition of the Eden Magnet Newspaper

After more than 20 years of protection of this koala population from logging, the people of NSW might reasonably expect to hear that there has been a significant increase in the koala population as a result of this headline environment policy initiative of the Carr government.

On page 26 of the report *“Advice to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee) on Amendment to the list of Threatened Species under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act),”* the status of the koala population mentioned above received a one sentence mention:

“Recent intensive surveys show that a population at Tantawangalo/Yurammie is now very low and possibly extinct.”

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/197-listing-advice.pdf>

During the same timeframe, an active program of tree planting had been undertaken on farmland in the Gunnedah region of NSW.

A 2011 ‘Science Alert’ article reporting on koalas in the Gunnedah region stated:

“University of Sydney researchers have gained a rare insight into the habits of koalas, discovering simple tree planting may be the solution to expanding their habitat and allowing their populations to grow.”

<http://www.sciencealert.com.au/news/20110305-22115.html>

Over the past 20 years, blue gum plantations have been established in western Victoria. Consequently, koala numbers from remnant populations have exploded, as they take advantage of this large scale revegetation project.

Examples elsewhere show that strategic revegetation projects throughout former koala habitat will lead the long term population growth and survival of koalas. The creation of more national parks to “protect” existing populations may not be as effective.



Remnant Eucalyptus tereticornis with some regeneration

Wildfires are another significant threat to koala survival either downplayed or ignored by celebrity campaigners and their supporters.

A 1997 media report on fires in the Pilliga region stated in part:

“Hundreds of koalas and endangered creatures are believed to have been wiped out by the fire which has destroyed half of the 500,000 hectare (1.24 million acres) Pilliga forest and nature reserve near the township of Coonabarabran in northwest New South Wales.

State Forest research division scientist Rod Cavanagh said the Australian Koala Foundation had been monitoring 100 koala sites in the forest, of which 35 were known to have been in the part that was burnt out.

“Half the forest has gone, but not half the koalas, although there would probably have been hundreds of koalas affected, which is still disastrous,” he said.”

Unfortunately, the Pilliga fires were one of many that have decimated otherwise abundant koala populations in eastern Australia over the past 20 years.

In addition to habitat recovery and wildfire control, other threats to koala survival, including urban development, road kills, dog predation, and chlamydia disease must be actively managed.

It is not surprising that a number of non-government organisation (NGOs) forest campaigners also support the celebrity campaigners.

<http://southeasttimberassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Nature-Conservation-Council-Press-Release-re-Koalas-290998.pdf>

Some Questions.

Is dedication of more national parks the only way to save threatened species?

What role does active management play?

Do celebrity activists or political leaders ever learn from the long term success or failure of their headline environmental policies, or do they just move to the next campaign?

Where is the outrage from the “environmental conservation” NGOs when the national parks expansion policy fails to deliver the promised conservation outcomes?

Other reports on koala losses due to fire and other causes can be found at the following links:

<http://southeasttimberassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Wildfire-Impact-on-Koalas-Pilliga-Herald-Sun-031206.pdf>

<http://southeasttimberassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Wildfire-Impact-on-Koalas-Framlingham-Herald-Sun-290107.pdf>

<http://southeasttimberassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Koala-Road-Deaths-Port-Stephens-Examiner-151210.pdf>