

SouthEastTIMBERassociation

Koalas in Mumbulla and Murrah State Forests

The conventional wisdom among “save the forests” activists, is all it will take to secure the survival of koalas in southeast NSW, is to put all the remaining state forest into national park. Unfortunately, survey data gathered in recent years suggests that more needs to be done to ensure koalas remain part of our local biodiversity.

About 20 years ago the south coast icon koala population was protected in a nature reserve and later, the Tantawangalo section of the South East Forests National Park. A 2011 Federal Government document stated: “Recent intensive surveys show that a population at Tantawangalo/Yurammie is now very low and possibly extinct (TSSC 2012p).” See page 26.

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

An outcome of the Regional Forests Agreement (RFA) process in the late 1990s, was a significant increase in the National Park estate, primarily as a result of the transfer of State Forests to National Parks.

RFA negotiations in southeast NSW resulted in, what was considered at the time, to be the best koala habitat in state forests between Bega and Bermagui being transferred into the Biamanga National Park. If the activist view of koala conservation held true, koala numbers in the National Park would then increase and numbers in logged State Forest would decline.

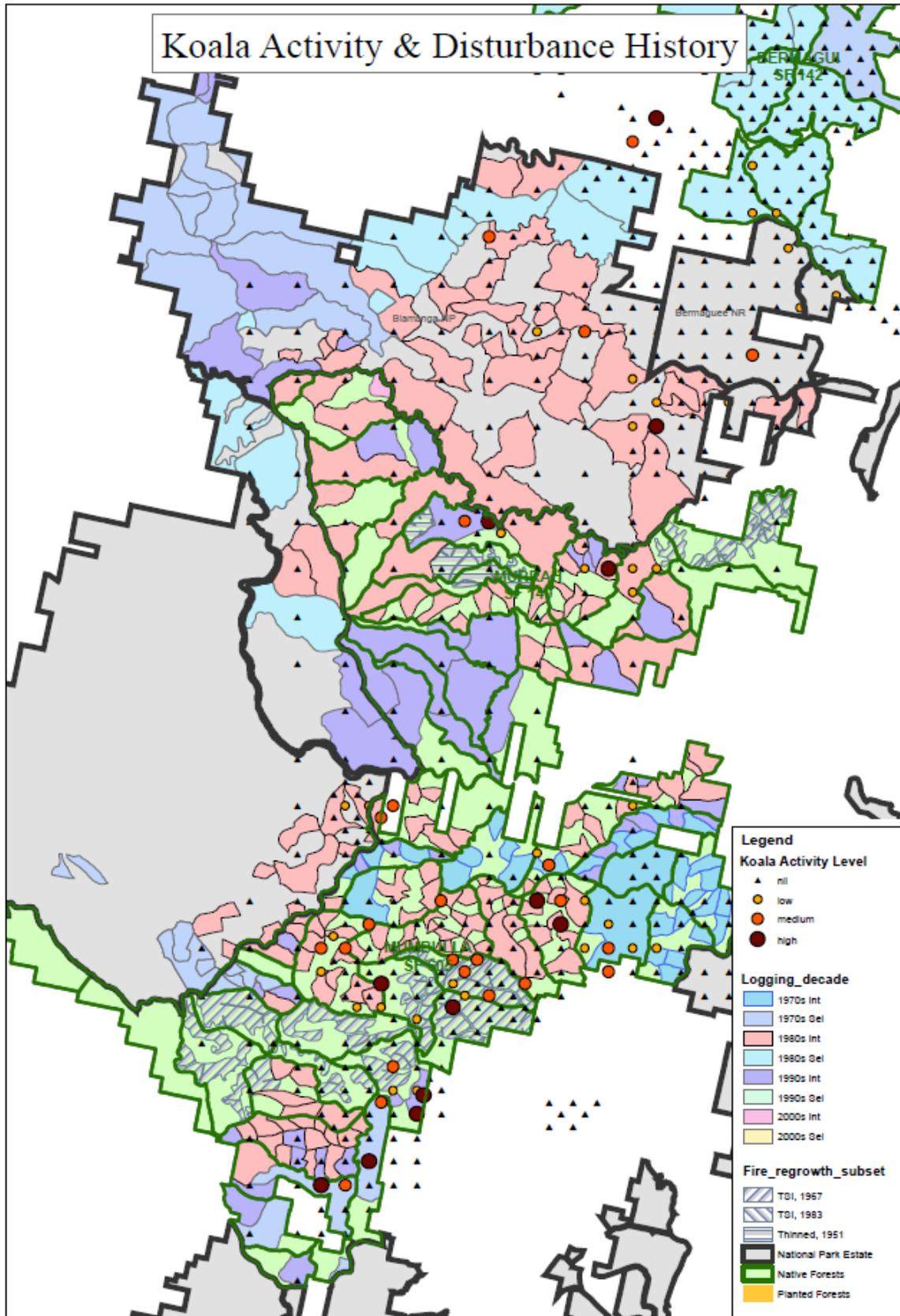
The following survey results for koala faecal pellets (KFPs) show a different outcome.

Tenure	# sites	# trees searched	# sites with KFPs	Occ. Rate	95%CI
Biamanga NP	128	3840	9	7.03%	2.6-11.5%
Gulaga NP	8	240	0	0.00%	NA
Bermagui NR	38	1140	4	10.53%	0.7-20.3%
Mimosa Rocks NP	9	270	0	0.00%	NA
Mumbulla SF	176	5280	38	21.59%	15.5-27.7%
Murrah SF	55	1650	8	14.55%	5.2-23.9%
Bermagui SF	89	2670	3	3.37%	0-7.1%
Private Land	72	2160	2	2.78%	0-6.6%
Other Aboriginal Land	14	420	2	14.29%	0-32.6%
All National Parks	183	5490	13	7.10%	3.3-10.8%
All State Forests	320	9600	49	15.31%	11.3-19.3%
Total All Sites	589	17670	66	11.21%	8.7-13.8%

An overlay of koala activity with disturbance history shows that State Forests subjected to past harvesting operations, including the production of sawlogs and pulpwood used to produce wood chips, does not result in the loss of koalas.



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The table and the map confirm that, with the proper management controls, koalas can coexist with timber production.

Perhaps Robyn Parker had a better understanding of this issue than her critics.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-10-27/logging-protects-koalas-says-nsw-minister/3604000>

Despite the good news about koalas, the Murrah/Mumbulla State forests and the Biamanga National Park are at a cross road. Much of the mature forest is in serious decline. There is evidence across the forest that many of the tree crowns are composed of epicormic shoots, rather than healthy branches.



Crown of Epicormic Shoots Mumbulla State Forest

It is to be hoped that some koalas still survive in the Tantawangalo forest and that future management regimes can be developed to ensure there is a viable, even if it is a low density, population.

Based on experience from Gunnedah and blue gum plantations in western Victoria there may be some lessons to help understand what can be done in south east NSW to ensure there is a larger land base, including private property, that is potentially suitable for koalas.

Some key issues that need consensus between key parties include:

1. Stand stocking and age profile: – is what evolves after a major disturbance event the best way to improve koala habitat, or is some form of management intervention required from time to time?



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2. Fire management: - does “total fire exclusion,” with occasional mega fires provide healthy forests and viable koala populations in the long term?
3. Revegetation projects, with a focus on koala habitat of interest to private landowners. How many owners and where is land in relation to known koala populations?
4. What are the best species for local projects?



Female Koala with Joey Mumbulla State Forest 2016