

SouthEastTIMBERassociation

South East Timber Association Inc PO Box 773 Eden NSW 2551

The South East Timber Association (SETA) has over 120 members in south east NSW and East Gippsland. SETA members are strongly committed to ensuring public forests are available for a range of commercial and recreational activities and expect land management practices will maintain environmental values in the long term.

SETA expects the government to commit to ensuring forest and related policies strike an appropriate balance between social, environmental and economic outcomes, while minimising adverse impacts of policy changes on regional communities.

I am writing this submission on behalf of SETA, as many members have an interest in ensuring that the biodiversity of our forests, including koalas is maintained in the long term. I have worked in the forests in southeast NSW and East Gippsland for over 40 years and have only seen one koala in south east NSW and about 20 in East Gippsland in that time.

In most areas of south east NSW where koalas live, the population has a low density, with as few as 1 koala to every 200 to 300 hectares. The one koala I have seen in south east NSW was in the Tantawangalo section of the South East Forests National Park, over 6 years ago. I did report the sighting to a NP&WS staff member. I am concerned that a check of the NSW Wildlife Atlas data last year revealed the sighting had not been recorded. A recent check of the Murrah Flora reserves show a lot of records, with the majority being scat, rather than animal sightings.

Some SETA members attended the Bega community consultation meeting in February 2017 and several anti-forest industry people at the meeting alleged that harvesting of native forests is the biggest threat to koalas in southeast NSW.

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

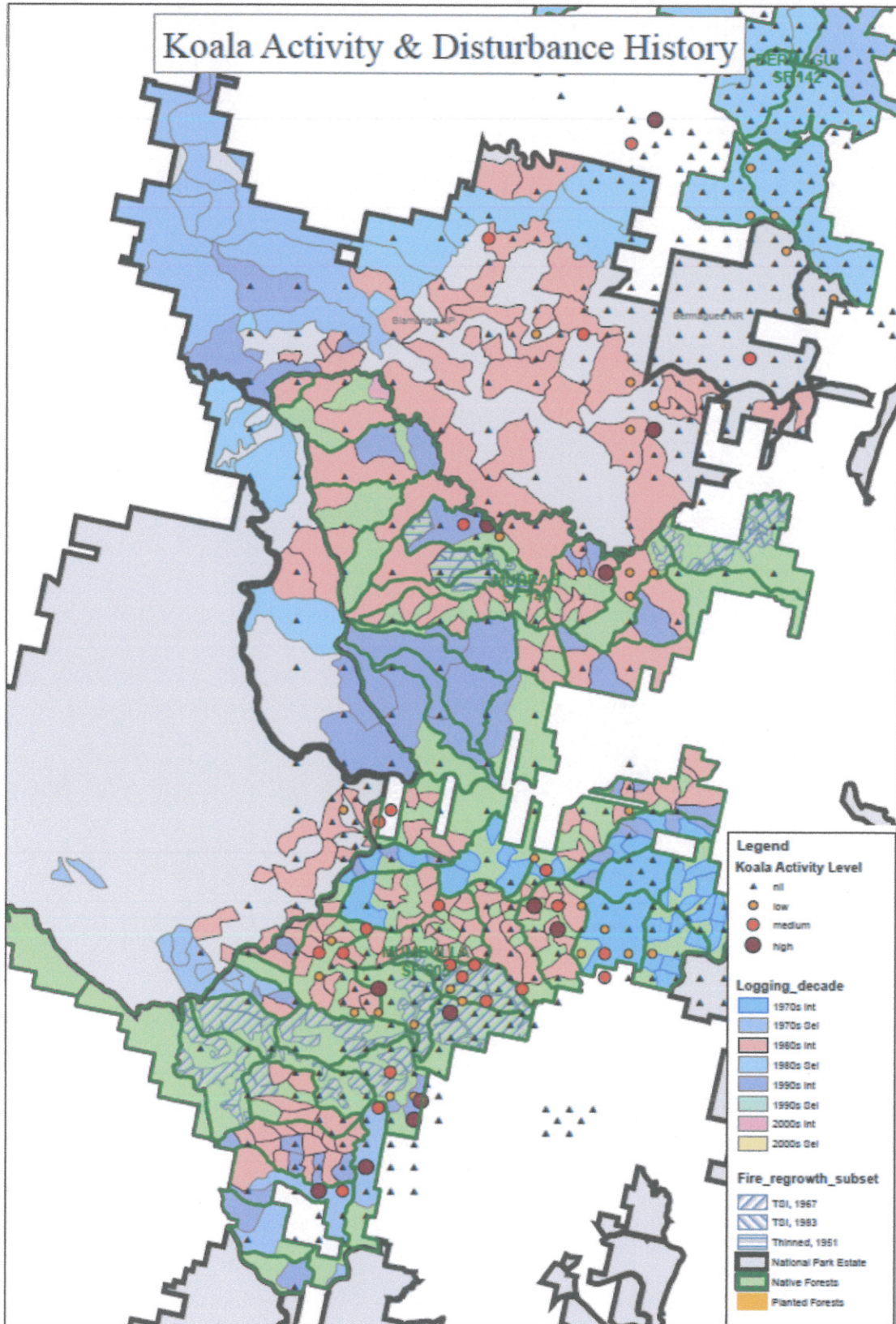
Tenure	# sites	# trees searched	# sites with KFPs	Occ. Rate	95%CI
Biamanga NP	128	3840	9	7.03%	2.6-11.5%
Gulaga NP	8	240	0	0.00%	NA
Bermagui NR	38	1140	4	10.53%	0.7-20.3%
Mimosa Rocks NP	9	270	0	0.00%	NA
Mumbulla SF	176	5280	38	21.59%	15.5-27.7%
Murrah SF	55	1650	8	14.55%	5.2-23.9%
Bermagui SF	89	2670	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, is associated with higher levels of koala activity than the adjoining, less disturbed national park hence the dedication of the Murrah Flora reserves in March 2016.



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

Aside from predation and disease, the biggest threat to koalas is wildfire. In January 2013, I spent 19 days without a break, assisting in the control and mop-up of a bushfire in the Kybeyan area. Despite the efforts of all the fire fighters, the initial run of the fire impacted the largest koala population in southeast NSW, which had an estimated population of 300 animals. It was estimated that about 50 percent of the population was killed by the fire.

It was no surprise to me or other SETA members who helped fight the fire and minimise the impact on the koalas, that not one of the “conservationists” who have campaigned and protested against our industry, put one minute into protecting the koalas.

During the last half of 2016, I was one of a range of stakeholders, who reviewed the draft Murrah Flora Reserve management plan, which had been written behind closed door prior to the flora reserve announcement in March 2016. Fortunately, all the members of the committee recognised the potential that one wildfire has to eliminate the Murrah reserve koala population and fuel and fire management will be a key part of future reserve management.

Given the Flora Reserve status gives much greater flexibility for active management of the forest, to address fire risk and optimise koala browse, it is important that the management plan be approved by the Minister as soon as possible. The reserves may, in future, provide valuable information of management of koala habitat.

SETA members were very pleased that less than 2 weeks after the flora reserve announcement, 3 members paid a visit to the reserve and located a female koala and joey.



Kerry the Mumbulla Koala

If the government wants to maintain or even increase koala populations, it needs to accept that higher density koala populations are associated with suitable browse conditions. In the Murrah Flora reserves, these conditions are associated with areas of regrowth and also some areas of mature trees that have been badly stressed in the past decade and have epicormic crowns, with relatively nutritious foliage.



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Mature Eucalypt with Epicormic Foliage

Mature trees in the final years of their life do not provide long term habitat for koalas. There are examples in Victoria where koala populations have rapidly increased, to the extent that over browsing has ended up killing their preferred browse species, resulting in starvation of most, if not all the koalas.



Eucalypts Killed by Koala Browsing (Photo MojoNews.com.au)

Active management of regrowth forests, along with revegetation of former areas of koala habitat in southeast NSW, will be key components to the maintenance of an ongoing optimum koala population. Lock up and leave reserve management will contribute to the ongoing decline in the NSW koala population.

Norman Wilton

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SETA Vice President

