

AUGUST 7 2019 - 6:00AM

Koalas in Kalang

- Janene Carey

Photos and Video

Document tendered by
Dr Oisín Sweeney
Received by
Tina Morshead
Date: 16 / 08 / 2019
Resolved to publish ☒ Yes / No



Large healthy adult koala spotted in compartment 128 of Roses Creek State Forest

Forestry Corporation's draft harvesting plan for the Kalang headwaters has a solitary location marked with a pink diamond - their symbol for koala - and the comment: "No Koala star search triggers were identified during pre-harvest surveys".

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But a team of citizen scientists who trekked into the area on the weekend of July 27-28 have documented evidence of very high levels of koala presence.



Found under a young Tallowood, 29 scats both adult and juvenile koalas

In compartment 128 of Roses Creek State Forest, they not only photographed a large healthy adult koala in a tree, they also found scats (faeces) under 25 trees.

Thirteen of the trees had the requisite number of scats (20+) to trigger the kind of star-shaped search radiating outwards that the Forestry document dismisses.

One tree had more than 90 scats, others had between 20 and 50, and some were a mixture of mother and joey scats.

Kalang resident Jonas Bellchambers led the group, which included Yasmin Maher, Mieka and Ariel Tobey, Dave Pfister, Jane Grant and Chris Ormond.

On June 24, in response to a query from the *Courier-Sun* about their plans for logging near the Kalang River headwaters, a Forestry spokesperson said: "This timber harvesting has been planned over several years with detailed ecological surveys, cultural heritage surveys and soil and water assessments undertaken as part of the planning process. Roding operations are currently underway and harvesting will likely start next month."

When told about the recent survey led by Jonas Bellchambers and asked how Forestry managed to miss what the community volunteers had found, the same spokesperson responded: "Forestry Corporation has not yet undertaken surveys for koalas in this compartment as this is done during the pre-harvest mark-up. We will certainly be looking for koalas when we get to this stage of the planning process and ensure we put in place the measures to protect koala habitat."

Ecologist Mark Graham said the scats found by the community volunteers indicated a thriving colony in the areas to be logged.

"They show a range of age classes, from babies, young animals and females through to large alpha males," he said.

Mark has also been exploring other compartments off the Horseshoe recently and said in each of them there are signs of koala habitat and presence.

"You'd have to be blind to not find evidence of koalas across these forested areas," he said.

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Mark Graham

Long-time Bellingen Environment Centre member Caroline Joseph said the news came as no surprise, as the area was a key part of the Great Koala National Park proposal that the BEC has been developing since 2012.

"We've always known the koalas were there," she said. "Their nursery is in Bongil Bongil National Park and the colony runs from Red Rock to Nambucca Heads."

"That ridge across the Kalang runs in to Oakes State Forest and that's where they cross over. Ever since we put the Great Koala National Park concept together, we knew that."

Jonas said the team on the recent survey also saw a Greater Glider and Glossy Black Cockatoos, both of which require large tree hollows to breed.



"Not only is it the majority of the Kalang catchment that they're going to log, it's also the most sensitive and ecologically important forests in our area that are outside national parks.

"It's a very sensitive area, a biodiversity hotspot."

Members of the Kalang River Forest Alliance and the Bellingen Environment Centre are calling on the NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean to intervene and support the proposal for a Great Koala National Park to protect Australia's most iconic species.

"Koalas on the NSW North Coast have declined by 50 per cent in recent decades," Jonas said.

"Many populations on the Mid North Coast have recently become extinct. The Kalang River headwater forests provide significant habitat to allow for the movement of koalas and ensure the maintenance of a healthy and viable population.

"These forests must be immediately protected from logging."