



GREAT SOUTHERN KOALA FOREST

a diverse landscape proposal for south east New South Wales

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Bold New Plan to Save Australia's Rarest Koalas

A bold new plan to save Australia's rarest koalas has been launched on the far south coast. The NSW southern koalas are at greater risk of extinction than any other population in Australia after decades of logging, land clearing, disease and hunting for skins and current action to save them is not enough, according to SERCA's spokesperson, Prue Acton.

The Great Southern Koala Forest has been developed by members of the Far South Coast Branch of National Parks Association and supported by the South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA). The team of conservationists developing the plan are optimistic that it can work to save this national icon from regional extinction.

Mike Thompson said that the Great Southern Koala Forest (GSKF) will connect public forests from Kosciuszko to the coast. He explained: "In time we hope it will also incorporate measures on private land to encourage koala recovery".

Ms Acton said that the concept has been driven by an urgent need to protect threatened koala feed and shelter trees and provide corridors for koala migration and habitat for existing and future populations. "We believe that this will also provide sanctuary for many other threatened and endemic plants, animals and insects in our native forests. Current federal and State measures are simply not up to the job that is needed," she said.

"After carefully assessing the strategies available to Governments, we have concluded that a large-scale connected protective landscape has the best chance of saving Australia's rarest koalas from extinction. While the southern koalas are not a separate species they have a specific genetic identity which makes it important to save them."

She said that koalas were once common in the region but now teeter on the brink of local extinction. "Less than 70 individuals remain dispersed in forests between Bega and Narooma, with larger groups on the tablelands. While it was not logging for the woodchipping industry alone that has brought these koalas to this perilous situation, forest degradation and destruction are the biggest current threat. Unless something is done urgently, logging has the potential to finish them off."

"Other countries such as Chile and New Zealand have shown that ending native forest logging can have economic as well as environmental benefits. It has created jobs in eco-tourism and forest management, brought the wildlife back to degraded forest areas and created healthy biospheres beyond what was imagined," SERCA's Convenor, Dr Bronte Somerset said.

"A visionary step such as this would win international acclaim by helping to counter Australia's shameful record in mammal extinctions while protecting critical carbon sinks as a bolster against climate change," she added.

GSKF: www.gskf.org.au

NPA's Nature Magazine re GSKF: http://www.gskf.org.au/GSKF_Nature_NSW_Autumn_2015.pdf

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