

Logging Audit of Royal Camp State Forest

19th August

Following audits conducted at Royal Camp State Forest, south east of Casino in northern NSW, Forests NSW stopped logging operations in Compartment 14 and 15, and moved into the adjacent Compartment 16.

Last weekend we audited that ongoing logging in Cpt. 16, and the eastern end of Cpt 15, and once again we found numerous high use koala feed trees (more than 20 scats fecal pellets).

Upon reaching Compartment 15, we are faces with a large, clearly old-growth, Spotted Gum tree stump that had been logged. The 2.5 metre section above the cut had been discarded close by because of the rotted centre which is evident on the stump itself (see at right).



That old growth tree was by far the largest tree within sight (see below).



Examination of the remains of the tree's crown revealed multiple hollows, all large enough to accommodate a glider, small possum, or provide nesting sites for a variety of native birds the depend on tree hollows for that purpose (see below).



As has been the case in every forest audited by NEFA and other groups on the North Coast of NSW, the number of hollow-bearing trees marked for retention ('H' for hollow-bearing and 'R' for recruitment habitat) fell far short of the 10 per 2 hectares required. Not only that, but the requirement to retain those trees with the largest diameter at breast height, had also been ignored with examples such as that pictured below.



That supposedly hollow-bearing tree had no hollows, measured just 35cm diameter, and at a point approximately 5 metres above the ground the trunk was severely damaged through constant contact with an adjoining tree, making it unsuitable for timber. The likelihood of that tree surviving long term is highly unlikely.

The search for koala scats revealed that Forests NSW had undertaken a cynical exercise of marking up koala feed tree species with a 'K', Forest Red Gums, Grey Gums, and Grey Box, mostly saplings that were too small for logging.

The heavy leaf and bark litter intermingled with dense Blady Grass that surrounded the bases of all trees in the forest was undisturbed. We examined all the trees marked with a 'K', and all other koala feed species that we encountered, including stumps of trees that had been logged. We did not find a single tree where that dense leaf litter had been disturbed, showing clearly that no attempt had been made to search for scats.

Our examination on the other hand, did locate a number of high use trees within the compartment, counting 20 scats or more, the details of which have been forwarded to the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) for investigation.

While we did not assess the overall ecological values are high in compartments 15 and 16, it is nevertheless koala habitat which should have received appropriate attention. However, that has clearly not happened.

We find the ongoing failure to retain the required numbers of hollow-bearing and recruitment trees to be unacceptable. The EPA has given us repeated assurances that their inspectors are aware of the current shortcomings, and will act to improve the management of habitat trees. However, across both compartments we found numerous logged large trees with limbs containing hollows similar to those pictured above, which could, indeed should, have been retained.

All of these matters have been raised, once again, with the EPA. If we receive any positive feedback we will be sure to forward them on to you.

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John Edwards
Honorary Secretary
Clarence Environment Centre.