

Dear Councillor ,

I understand at the next Ordinary Meeting of the Bega Valley Shire Council on Wednesday, 4 August 2021 councillors will be deciding on an application proposing additional shooting days for the Clay Target Shooting Range at the Murrah.

While noting the the Office of Environment and Hertiage have previously advised further noise testing and surveys for koalas are not required. Since that time the now Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has released a report on the genetic diversity and infection status (*Chlamydia* and KoRV) of koalas in the area (link below).

The report indicates that koalas south of the Murrah river do not have *Chlamydia* but those north of the river, including koalas now thought to be extinct in Kooraban NP, did or do carry *Chlamydia*.

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted disease and the fact that koalas to the south do not have it, infers there is no interaction and therefore no exchange of genetic material between koalas north and south of the Murrah river.

The report also indicates " . . . The risk of introduction of *Chlamydia* from Murrah State Forest to the Mumbulla populations cannot be assessed without information on how long *Chlamydia* has been present north of the Murrah River, and what animal movements occur between the populations and in what direction."

While there appears to no physical constraints that would inhibit interaction between the colonies, there are very few koala records in the Murrah within 5 kilometers to the west of the shooting range. In recent times the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has suggested there may be only 50 koalas left and these are constrained to forest between the Bermagui and Bega rivers. By any standards this number reflects a population that is critically endangered.

On February 8 2019, a Council representative attended a workshop on koalas in Bega, organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage. One of the barriers to conserving the species acknowledged at the workshop was the protection of koala habitat.

Unfortunately the evidence demonstrates protection of koala habitat requires measures in addition to just stopping logging. The uncertainty regarding impacts the shotgun range has on the species is compounded by a lack of surveys required to determine whether " . . . animal movements occur between the populations and in what direction."

In the absence of this information, a decision in support of the proposed application can only confirm Council's support for the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and its lack of interest with regard to protecting koalas and their habitat, beyond temporarily stopping logging.

Regards
Robert Bertram

Higgins, D. Phalen, D. Casteriano, A. Krockenberger, M (2017) Management of Small, Isolated, Coastal Population of Koalas in Southeast New South Wales: Final Report, June 2017. Koala Health Hub, The University of Sydney. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OjhFtHspMHCSq8cCr4fYx5dvjWbrt12h/view?usp=sharing>