

Dear Editor,

It is unfortunate, especially for koalas, that the public funds going to the Koala Country Recovery Crew project (BDN 23 July) and the cultural burns in the Murrumbidgee Flora Reserve (BDN 28 July) are unlikely to help the species.

Most traditional burning was undertaken inland during winter in grassy ecosystems. In these areas low intensity burning can produce Ammonium/nitrogen ($\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$) that may last in the soil for a few years and provide a stimulus for grass growth.

Ecosystems in the Murrumbidgee Flora Reserves have a shrubby under-story, where burning exposes the soils and reduces the fungi and soil organisms that make nutrients available to plants. One of the burning sites is also in the home range of a female koala, one of only two known to have reared joeys over the past two years.

This 20 hectare burn is also adjacent to one of three much larger burns the NPWS plan to undertake. Works for the combined burns have involved bulldozing of trees including koala feed and habitat trees, directing road runoff into watercourses, stream crossings not protected with rock armouring, no protection of wet swampy areas, rollovers that collect water and on slopes exceeding 15 degrees with highly dispersible soils.

Rather than degrading habitat and polluting the environment, forest managers could be restoring biodiversity and the ecological processes that maintain soil fertility. They could also be attempting to understand whether the Bermagui shotgun club is the reason there is no interaction between koalas north and south of the Murrumbidgee river.