

# Koalas face carnage as loggers harvest timber plantations; wildlife carers call for action

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By Greg Hoy

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-22/koalas-face-carnage-as-loggers-harvest-timber-plantations/4836324>



Figures: Australian Bluegum Plantations in SW Victoria; a koala with a severed paw from mechanical plantation harvesting

## TRANSCRIPT:

**Chris Uhlmann:** As thousands of Australia's investors have discovered ploughing your savings into timber plantations has proven to be very bad tax refuge. Ironically those same plantations have turned out to be an alternative refuge for koalas driven from their dwindling natural habitat. But it's turning out to be a temporary and dangerous home as the koalas over suffer serious injury and even death when the timber is harvested, Greg Hoy report; but first a warning this report contains some disturbing images.

**Greg Hoy:** This is the cry of a koala in distress. To understand why he and those like him are in distress 7.30 took a revealing journey across south west Victoria and into South Australia; our aim to find and film large colonies of koalas facing great danger; their habitat shrinking they have made their homes in vast blue gum timber plantations which are increasingly being logged. Large numbers of koalas are being wiped out in the process and it's not a pretty sight.

*[Images of mechanical tree harvester cutting and stripping eucalypt trees and dead koalas on ground.]*

**Dr Stephen Phillips,** Australian Government Koala Working Group: We create a big brouhaha when we see it happening to cattle in a slaughterhouse in Indonesia, or somewhere like that ... but this is happening in our own backyards with a much bigger impact. This is an international icon which we are treating with some much disrespect and disdain.

[Image of a koala with a severed forearm and a dead koala mother and her furred joey.]

**Greg Hoy:** It was workers from logging and timber companies worried by what they'd witnessed who blew the whistle - anonymously – for fear of losing their jobs.

**Greg Hoy:** The koalas that were hurt in the process, what happened to them?

**Anonymous man:** Most of them just stayed out there [in the plantations].

**Greg Hoy:** How often would it happen?

**Anonymous man:** Oh, well it was pretty... it was like a daily thing. Oh ... sometimes a couple every hour; sometimes just one a day. You'd normally come across them on the ground ... already dead or pretty badly injured.

*[Image of man standing over a motionless, dead-looking koala lying on dirt.]*

**Tracy Wilson:** You'd on get a call for an injured koala if one of the guys on site didn't think it was right.

**Greg Hoy:** What would they say about the koalas?

**Anonymous man:** Oh... that it wasn't happening. We weren't dropping any or they weren't there.

**Greg Hoy:** They're there alright and the causality rate has been horrendous. Across the centre and south west of Victoria and in South Australia we visited many volunteer animal refuges struggling without help from industry or government to cope with casualties.

*[Image of a koala with two bandages forelimbs]*

**Tracy Wilson,** Wildlife Volunteer, Koroit: Broken limbs, impact wounds, broken backs, severed arm, dead mothers with joeys still alive. I had one 500 gram that had two healed broken arms and so we can only assume from that the mother had been dropped previous to this incident. And he had no obvious breaks but her intestines were just pulp.

**Jill Rolley** Wildlife Volunteer, Mt Gambier: This is "Jimmy" he was dropped in a plantation. One of the young blokes who worked on site actually rang me and I went and picked him up. He had a broken leg; he was lucky his injury was fixable. [Image of koala in a leg cast to a back limb]

**Greg Hoy:** Very rarely a company calls for help to get injured animals. This happened recently with wildlife rescuer Jill Rolley in Mount Gambier, South Australia.

**Jill Rolley:** I am aware that in that particular location there was 21 koalas killed; 14 of those I personally had to get euthanased [by vets]. From a recent plantation we got 28 out, and that include some of them that were dead and some that were alive. There was an original

estimate from one of the workers there that there were probably over 50 in that plantation; we're not sure what's happened to them.

**Shannon McKay**, Wildlife Volunteer, Warrnambool: They think 24 animals may have come in from this plantation and it was a fairly small one. So looking at the hectares of plantation in western Victoria and across into South Australia, I think we're facing a crisis with these guys.

**Tracy Wilson**: It's a huge issue and that's why Australians should care... they'll be a lot of koalas killed.

**Greg Hoy** walking in a plantation: Well we know there's one little creature up here and another one just over there. The question is how many more are there around here? Well according to the industry's own estimate there are some 8000 koalas within a 20 km radius of this plantation. Now this plantation's proprietor is the American-owned Australian Bluegum Plantations, which claims it has seen no incidents of koala deaths or injuries, but others beg to differ.

**Tracy Wilson**: It's garbage. We know it's happening we've had animals from their plantations; we know it is happening. It's, ahmm... denial; that's all it is. It is happening. And, ahhm... while they continue to say it is not, it really just makes them look worse, I believe. **Greg Hoy**: Australian Bluegum Plantations would not be interviewed. The scale of what the company has at risk is best understood by visiting the port of Portland. Here the US company and the half Japanese-owned South-West Fibre plan to export 1.2 million tonnes of bluegum logs and woodchip a year to Japan and China for paper production.

*[Cut to news report from Japanese Koala House in a zoo facility.]*

**Greg Hoy**: Both the Chinese and Japanese public have a great affection for the koala but no nothing of the dark secret that taints their paper production.

**Jill Rolley**: If this gets too public. There's a lot of fear with the logging companies around that if we talk too much about what's happening with the koalas that the industry will be brought to a standstill. We're talking money. They make big money out of this [plantation timber]; what's a dead koala?

**Greg Hoy**: No-one from industry would be interviewed for this program, leaving that to the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries.

**Andrew Pritchard**: We provide the overarching guidelines about how animals like koalas are supposed to be handled.

**Greg Hoy**: So do you actually run checks?

**Andrew Pritchard**: We, we... haven't previously. Ahhm... you know we take information that's been reported through to us and then work with industry as we are at the moment.

**Greg Hoy:** So you accept whatever the industry tells you is happening?

**Andrew Pritchard:** Ahh... no, look. We do, we do some on ground... assessments, ahm... with industry. So, so... it's hand in hand... we're working with industry for them to be able to achieve a better outcome than certainly what has happened in the past.

**Greg Hoy:** So no random checks?

**Andrew Pritchard:** No... no random checks.

**Tracy Wilson:** I just don't see how it's possible for an industry to self-govern something like that [koala welfare in plantations], it sure hasn't happened to date. Obviously an industry doesn't want to be exposed for doing the wrong thing. I think some people have been doing it for so long that they are just numb to it. It just... it's a job, they do it, these things happen.

**Dr Stephen Phillips:** There are things that you've just got to have in place. People on the ground to make sure animals aren't in trees that are pulled down and you know, pulled through shredders for example.

There's a compounded problem in Victoria because it's a very denude landscape; forest is contained in small patches across the landscape.

**Greg Hoy:** In the morning mist of Mt Eccles National Park this should be a happy ending a koala captured in a logged plantation in poor health is released into a small pocket of manna gum. His future, however, looks bleak; the food here is scarce, the competition fierce. Relocated koalas tend to pine for home. The familiar scent of big plantations in the distance will be hard to resist. This could well prove a fatal attraction.

**Tracy Wilson:** There simply isn't anywhere else and this is the nearest habitat and pretty much the only habitat, which is under stress from a koala population that already exists here.

**Greg Hoy:** So what chance would you give this koala?

**Tracy Wilson:** I really don't know.

*[Image of a stressed, recently released koala calling out in the tree tops]*

[ENDS]

