

1 Description

Koalas are easily recognizable from their bear-like appearance and are well adapted for climbing, with long front limbs and specialized paws for gripping branches. Males are larger (averaging 12 kg in Victoria) than females (8.5 kg), with a broader face.

The Koala's scats (faecal pellets) are also easily identifiable, being very hard on the outside with a slightly ridged and oval shape, green-brown in colour and consisting entirely of vegetable matter. Scats are usually found at the base of trees and, when fresh, smell strongly of eucalyptus. They are somewhat easier to find than the animals which often sit motionless in the forks of branches, except when drawing attention to themselves by the grunting and snoring-like calls of the males or the high-pitched wailing cries of females.

Koalas are normally quite lethargic due to their low energy diet of eucalyptus leaves. They are infrequently seen on the ground when moving for short distances between foraging trees.



2 Operational management

2.1 Plantation harvesting

- Refer to the decision tree in Appendix 1 when harvesting any eucalypt plantations.
- Harvesting of all eucalypt coupes should proceed in a way that pushes koalas towards refuge areas and does not cut off escape routes. If not covered in the Timber Harvest Plan, discuss with the HVP supervisor.
- Trees where Koalas or scats have been seen during marking or planning of the coupe may be marked using an alternative coloured tape (refer to the planning checklist). These trees and others in the immediate area (within at least 15 metres radius) must be visually inspected before any felling takes place. Any trees with

Koalas still in them must be retained (as below), along with an escape route (avoid clear-felling right around for as long as possible). If Koalas are no longer present, they may be felled. Extra vigilance should be applied when operating anywhere within coupes where Koalas have been seen.

- Any tree with a Koala in it should be retained as long as necessary for the animal to relocate, along with trees immediately adjacent (eg. within 5m, and canopies touching), even if it means leaving the tree(s) standing when the operation is finalized. These trees may be removed later for site re-establishment, provided the animals are not present. For the safety of both people and animals, relocation of Koalas should never be attempted except where unavoidable and as a last resort, then only when arranged through the HVP supervisor and conducted by qualified handlers.
- In some coupes, particularly isolated blue gum plantations, an area of plantation may be marked for retention as a koala refuge and this should be indicated on the Timber Harvest Plan. These areas (usually 50+ trees) must be retained if any koalas are present at completion of the operation. If certain that no koalas are present, the trees may be cut with approval of the HVP supervisor.
- Operators should take a brief look around the immediate work area for Koalas, scats and presence of other animal species (eg. nests in trees) before commencing work and following rest or lunch breaks.
- If Koalas or fresh scats are encountered in a coupe, or Koalas heard within or close to the coupe area, the District Forester should be notified immediately so that planning controls may be upgraded if necessary. Most scats are found within 1 metre of the base of trees animals have been using.
- If injured Koalas or orphaned juveniles are found during the course of an operation, immediately contact the HVP supervisor. If the supervisor can't be reached, contact the HVP Stewardship Forester or the Southern Ash Wildlife Centre (Colleen Wood) directly at Rawson on **(03) 5165 3583**. Capture and handling protocols (above) apply. Note that the Southern Ash Wildlife Centre's primary function is rescue and rehabilitation of Koalas. For other species, or if either of the above contacts cannot be reached call the 24 hr emergency wildlife rescue number: **13 000 WILDLIFE or 13 000 94535**.
- If a tree with a Koala in it is accidentally felled and any injury to the animal is evident (eg. blood, limping) or if the animal climbs a tree and remains in the same place for several days, this should also be reported to the Southern Ash Wildlife Centre. Injuries are not always evident or may be more severe than they seem, requiring medical attention.
- Orphaned or separated juveniles smaller than the size of a football (as a rule of thumb) will need assistance to survive, and should also be reported.

2.2 Road construction

- All trees in native forest (custodial land) or plantation where new roads are being constructed, should be inspected before felling. If Koalas are found, treat as for harvesting operations (leave the tree and those adjacent standing until the animal leaves, and have the animal relocated only as a last resort by following the protocols above).

Appendix 1: Decision tree for management of Koalas while conducting eucalypt harvesting operations.

A: Look/listen for Koalas & fresh scats after work breaks in the immediate area of operation, and be as vigilant as possible while operating harvesters in all eucalypt plantations.	Koala seen in tree Heard/scats seen but Koala not found Koala not noticed, accidentally injured.	Go to B and D Go to D Go to F and D
B: Mark tree with koala in it for retention. Retain tree and those immediately adjacent as long as the koala remains, and make operators aware of presence. Postpone harvesting right around to leave an escape route for as long as possible, or until the animal moves on.	Koala relocates Koala does not relocate during operation	Go to C Go to E
C: Resume harvest of marked tree(s)		Return to A
D: Notify HVP supervisor, supervisor to look for Koalas/record presence of Koalas on coupe plan or site dairy.	Koala found Koala not found	Return to B Return to A
E: Retain koala tree(s) after operation is complete. Animals may be relocated only if the tree(s) have to be felled and there is no other alternative, but the HVP supervisor must be notified and professional help employed.		
F: If a koala is accidentally injured or orphaned, contact the HVP supervisor or Southern Ash Wildlife Centre on (03) 5165 3583 or the 24 hr emergency wildlife rescue number: 13 000 94535 . Do not handle without advice.		Return to A