



VEGETATION CLEARING & KOALAS

INFO SHEET 8

Native vegetation clearing and koalas on Northern Rivers macadamia farms – practical guidelines

This information sheet has been developed to assist Northern Rivers macadamia farmers in their decision making when it comes to clearing native vegetation near koala habitats. It has been collaboratively produced by the Australian Macadamia Society, Friends of the Koala Inc, Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority and Lismore City Council.

Why we need to protect koalas

The Northern Rivers region of NSW is acknowledged as a stronghold of that very special Australian icon, the koala. In NSW, the koala is listed vulnerable to extinction under both NSW and Australian Government threatened species legislation. That means it is a species which is threatened with extinction unless the circumstances and factors threatening its survival or evolutionary development cease to operate.



The loss of mature koala habitat (due to urban development, road works, agricultural activities, forest logging etc) is the major threat facing koalas today. The koala is arguably now on the brink of disaster in many parts of its remaining geographic range including the Northern Rivers, because loss of habitat...

1. means a loss of food source for koalas
2. creates barriers to movement which isolate individuals and populations resulting in elevated disease levels and inhibited reproduction, migration and population growth, and
3. forces koalas to spend more time on the ground where they are at increased risk to dog attack and road fatalities.

The only way to save koalas is to save their habitat; the forests where they live, and which they must have to survive.

What is native vegetation?

Australia's native vegetation is one of the richest and most fundamental elements of our natural heritage. Native vegetation binds and nourishes our ancient soils; shelters and sustains wildlife; protects streams, wetlands, estuaries, and coastlines; absorbs carbon dioxide and emits oxygen. Depletion and destruction of native vegetation is a primary driver of land degradation, salinity and declining water quality, and is the biggest cause of biodiversity loss.

'Native vegetation' means any of the following types of indigenous vegetation:

- (a) trees (including any sapling or shrub, or any scrub),
- (b) understorey plants,
- (c) groundcover (being any type of herbaceous vegetation),
- (d) plants occurring in a wetland.

Native vegetation can include '**remnant**', '**regrowth**' and '**planted**' vegetation (including windbreaks and buffer plantings), all of which can form an important patchwork of habitat for koalas and other indigenous wildlife. These guidelines are principally focused on **planted native vegetation** which provides food and habitat for koalas. The lineal windbreaks planted by orchardists are especially significant, providing vital corridors across agricultural lands and enabling the spread of genetic diversity.

Decision making and planning when deciding to clear

It is important not to lose sight of the big picture when deciding to clear vegetation on your property. The decisions you make will have an impact on the wider landscape and environment. Some questions to consider:

1. Does the vegetation need to be removed?

What broader landscape or wildlife value do these trees have? Are they important koala food or habitat? For a list of common koala food trees in the Northern Rivers region, visit the Friends of the Koala website.

Why are you clearing? If it is because of the danger of falling branches, are there any alternatives (e.g. thinning, lopping, or diverting roads)?

Does it all need to go? Can some be left, particularly areas/trees that form part of wildlife corridors? Can it be replaced in another area?

What forward planning can you do? If the trees are no longer acting as effective wind breaks, should you replant new trees before old trees are removed so that you still have protection?

Would removing the vegetation affect any environmental accreditation you may currently have?

2. Will the vegetation clearance need approval?

When it comes to vegetation clearance on your property, it is absolutely essential you know your rights and responsibilities, and gain the necessary approvals often needed to remove native vegetation on farms.

- i) The **Native Vegetation Act (2003)** and the **Native Vegetation Regulation (2005)** outline the management of native vegetation on private and public land in NSW. These rules promote the conservation and regeneration of native vegetation and also seek to ensure personal and public safety. As a general rule, under the Native Vegetation Act, all clearing requires approval through either a Property Vegetation Plan (PVP) or a Development Consent, unless it is: (i) on land that is excluded from the NV Act; (ii) categorised as excluded clearing; or (iii) a permitted clearing activity.
- ii) The **Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA)** is the consent authority for vegetation clearing on rural lands in the Northern Rivers region. You should contact the Alstonville CMA office for more information before you begin clearing. The **Office of Environment and Heritage** is the compliance authority for the *Native Vegetation Act*.
- iii) In addition, regulations vary between local government areas, so contact **your local Council** for guidance.

What to do when clearing

- 🍷 **Plan the operation.** Use reputable contractors and always ascertain that they have a good understanding of the legislation, as any infraction may result in serious issues for both the contractor and the landowner. When selecting a contractor, ask them what experience they have with koalas and how they manage working with and around them. If you are a contractor or manager, make sure the farm owner understands the issues and has been agreed to your plan.
- 🍷 **Notify people.** Let your neighbours (and local Council for large scale removals) know about your intention to clear. It is especially important to let your neighbours know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Inform them of the steps you have taken to gain approval and minimise the impacts. A little effort before the event can save a great deal of conflict later. It is also an investment in the ongoing relationship.
- 🍷 **Monitor koala presence in the trees before and during clearing.** If koalas are in the trees, you are not allowed to move them on (*National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974 Clause 118A*). Postpone the clearing until they have moved or start to clear trees that are clear of koalas. Talk to your contractors about their planned strategies and how they will manage it.

- 🍷 **Have a contingency plan.** If koalas are found distressed or harmed, contact Friends of the Koala which is the wildlife organisation licensed to rescue koalas in the Northern Rivers.

Things to consider if replanting

- 🍷 **What and how should you plant?** Contact Friends of the Koala for a list of koala food trees and koala food tree planting advice. Please note, these may vary in different localities, soil types etc.
- 🍷 **Design your plantings and choose plants to best meet the purpose.** Plants for windbreaks may be different to those for spray drift mitigation, or riparian zones, koala habitat, owl nesting, or biological control. A well planned planting may be able to fulfil more than one function.
- 🍷 **Where to plant? Consider links to other vegetation and the use of understoreys.** Contact your local CMA and the Office of Environment and Heritage for more information. Contact the AMS for information on spray buffer plantings (or see AMS Fact Sheet 6: Living and Working in Rural Areas).
- 🍷 **Where possible, work with your neighbours to create corridors or sizeable areas.** Speak to your neighbours (whether they have orchards or not), local land care groups and try to cooperate to create larger areas and more effective corridors. Consider applying for funding to prepare a Site Plan to guide the implementation of ecological restoration and corridor enhancement.
- 🍷 **Maintain your plantings.** Plantings will need to be maintained via weed control, replacement, and possibly watering.

Other things to consider

- 🍷 **Private land conservation agreements.** Consider conservation agreements; there are a number of options for landowners (e.g. Land for Wildlife – local government, Partnership Agreements – NRCMA, Voluntary Conservation Agreements – OEH, Conservation Covenants – Nature Conservation Trust, Wildlife Land Trust etc) which may add to your ‘green’ credentials. Also refer to the Environmental Defender’s Office (NSW) book: A guide to private conservation in NSW (which can be downloaded at www.edo.org.au).
- 🍷 **Insurance/OH&S.** Please ensure you have the appropriate level of insurance, and are adhering to the new Occupational Health & Safety regulations (which came in to effect in January 2012) when clearing.
- 🍷 **Clearing near powerlines.** Visit the Essential Energy website if you are clearing near powerlines and other utilities. It contains information on which trees are unsuitable for planting near powerlines, and tree planting and trimming guidelines. Contact Essential Energy for more information.
- 🍷 **Waste.** Have you considered what will happen to the arboreal waste?
- 🍷 **Avoiding conflict.** Refer to AMS Fact Sheet 6 which contains a checklist for avoiding land use conflict at individual property level.
- 🍷 **Grants and assistance.** Contact the AMS for information on grants and assistance for reworking orchard layout and design, on-ground replanting, revegetation, and other works.

Information and resources

- 🍷 Legislation: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/vegetation/nvmanagement
- 🍷 Northern Rivers CMA: www.northern.cma.nsw.gov.au or Tel: 6627 0170 (Alstonville office)
- 🍷 Lismore City Council: www.lismore.nsw.gov.au or Tel: Ecologist 1300 87 83 87
- 🍷 Ballina Shire Council: www.ballina.nsw.gov.au or Tel: 6686 4444
- 🍷 Byron Shire Council: www.byron.nsw.gov.au or Tel: 6626 7000
- 🍷 Friends of the Koala: www.friendsofthekoala.org or email: info@friendsofthekoala.org
- 🍷 Friends of the Koala 24/7 Rescue Hotline: 6622 1233
- 🍷 Australian Macadamia Society: info@macadamias.org or Tel: 6622 4933
- 🍷 Office of Environment and Heritage: info@environment.nsw.gov.au or Tel: 131 555
- 🍷 Essential Energy: www.essentialenergy.com.au/content/vegetation-management or Tel: 13 23 91
- 🍷 Occupational Health & Safety guidelines: www.workcover.nsw.gov.au or Tel: 13 10 50