

## Victorian wildlife advocates call for moratorium on blue-gum harvesting to protect koalas

ABC Ballarat / By [Laura Mayers](#)

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Conservationists are concerned about the damage the blue-gum harvest will cause to koalas. *(Supplied: Jessica Robertson)*

Wildlife advocates are calling for an immediate moratorium on the harvesting of blue-gum plantations across Victoria, to protect koalas.

Ballarat Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation Inc president, Jess Robertson, says she is concerned about thousands of koalas that live in the plantations.

"We're at a tipping point," she said. "It's a crisis because all the blue-gums are coming down now."

According to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) there are nearly 47,000 koalas living on blue-gum plantations across the state.

### **Key points:**

- Conservationists are calling for harvesting to halt on blue-gum plantations across Victoria
- There are nearly 50,000 koalas living on the plantations in the state
- The government says it has improved protection measures

Blue-gum is grown for the supply of both softwood and hardwood with large plantations in Central Victoria and Gippsland, although most are in south-west Victoria's 'Green Triangle'.

Each year, an estimated 8,000-10,000 hectares of blue-gum is harvested in that part of the state.

## **Calls for harvesting to halt**

Ms Robertson says she recently advised the department on how it could protect the koalas.

"It's a problem they don't know how to solve," Ms Robertson said.



Wildlife carer Jess Robertson is calling for stronger action to protect koalas on blue gum plantations. *(Supplied: Jessica Robertson)*

**"We are calling for an immediate moratorium for all blue-gum harvesting until a management plan is established ... and for a solution to be found for those koalas."**

Chief conservation regulator Kate Gavens said plantation operators must have a permit from the regulator to harvest where there are koalas present.

They also must consult with an ecologist to decide how to 'manage' the koalas.

"[It includes] having trained koala spotters on-site, retaining vegetation where you do spot koalas, and taking action if you do spot a koala," Ms Gavens said.

"It's a long-term industry in Australia, so, as we are seeing areas harvested, we are also seeing areas replaced," Ms Gavens said.

"The work that is done with ecologists is to identify where the opportunity is for koalas to move on to adjacent vegetation."

## **Scattered habitat**

But Ms said that "adjacent vegetation" was dwindling, leaving koalas vulnerable.

"The only vegetation they have is on national parks and state parks, the rest of the vegetation is really scattered and fragmented," Ms Robertson said.



Plantation companies must leave some trees around a koala if spotted, to avoid injuring it.  
*(Supplied: Jessica Robertson)*



Shane the Koala was taken in by wildlife carers after he became injured in South West Victoria *(Supplied: Jessica Robertson)*

"The National Parks are full with koalas, they already have populations. And any sort of over-abundance [DELWP] needs to control."

Wildlife veterinarian Dr Adrienne Lavinia said the primary reason injured koalas came into her care was 'overwhelmingly' because of cars.

She said the animals might "just happen to be crossing the road at the time when a car, at speed, is coming around the corner".

"Maybe it has been struggling for a food source — and they're having to move — and they're vulnerable to being hit by a car.

"It's a pretty sad picture we are seeing most of the time."

## **Stronger protections**

Western Victoria MP and Member of the Animal Justice Party Andy Meddick supported calls for better protection.

Unlike New South Wales and Southern Queensland, Victoria's 450,000 strong koala population is not defined as endangered.

But Mr Meddick is worried that if tree harvesting continues with no extra protection for the marsupials, the population will fall.

"The leadership has to come from the top-down — the minister, the government," Mr Meddick said.

"They all need to take a step back, listen to what carers, rescuers, and officers are saying and halt logging.

"Then they need to formulate a proper strategy that isn't just for the next 12 months, but is long-term."

Last week, the Victorian Greens announced a \$1 billion 'Zero Extinction Fund' to protect Victoria's threatened species.

A Victorian government spokesperson said: "We've strengthened the rules for protection of koalas in blue-gum plantations which sets mandatory minimum requirements for koala management during harvest operations."