

GIPAA - DPIE - 1298 – Record #1

Background

Survey Methods

Draft Guideline, Appendix C, Koala Habitat Protection, SEPP 2019.

Note:

- PCT is used in the survey methodology to map the presence of ‘koala use trees’ “in preparation of a Koala Plan of management”.
- “An area of land which has been assessed by a suitably qualified and experienced person in accordance with the Guideline as being highly suitable koala habitat”.

Reference to:

Part B

Presence of highly suitable koala habitat.

“Results of the sampling within each PCT must be shown separately and not summed for the overall site. Where 15% or greater of the total number within any PCT are the regionally relevant species of those listed in Schedule 2 (see Appendix A), the site meets the definition of highly suitable koala habitat” (Page 45).

Questions:

1. *What is the ‘scientific basis – peered reviewed’ for the use of this percentage?*

SEPP 44 specified that a concentration of 15% of the koala tree species listed in the SEPP met the definition for *potential koala habitat*. This percentage has been carried across to the new Koala SEPP’s *highly suitable habitat*. 15% continues the policy intent of SEPP 44 and is still relevant in most regions (e.g. in some regions it should be lower than 15%). EPA analysis shows that the 15% threshold is required to capture highly suitable koala habitat that is left in the landscape.

2. *Where can the definition of ‘highly suitable koala habitat’ sourced and what is the source of this text?*

Highly suitable koala habitat is defined in the draft Guideline on page 44: “Where 15% or greater of the total number of trees within any PCT are the regionally relevant species of those listed in Schedule 2 (see Appendix A), the site meets the definition of highly suitable koala habitat.”

This definition is based on the definition of *potential koala habitat* which existed under SEPP 44. The Department intends to include this definition in the glossary in the final version of the Guideline for easy reference.

3. The “regionally relevant species” of trees, what is the scientific source of this criteria?

In *A Review of Koala Tree Use Across New South Wales (2018)*, the former Office of Environment and Heritage (now EES) identified there were 137 tree species used by koalas. In 2019, consultation with koala experts led to the list being refined to 123 species. These 123 species were categorised into 9 distinct regions (Koala Management Areas), according to what trees koalas prefer to use in various areas. The number of species used regionally by koalas ranges from 9 in the Riverina region to 65 in the Central Coast region. This represents the most contemporary science.

Refer to report at: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/a-review-of-koala-tree-use-across-new-south-wales>.

Reference to :

“A tree is taken to be a plant with a diameter at breast height over bark (DBHOB) of 10 cm or greater.” P 45

Questions:

1. What documented decision process occurred that defined a tree in this manner along with Schedule 2 (Annexure a) without reference to the concepts of ‘moderately suitable habitat’ and ‘low suitability habitat’.

The definition of tree is to ensure only trees of suitable maturity are considered for. The SEPP and draft Guideline do not refer to ‘moderately suitable habitat’ or ‘low suitability habitat’, because only core koala habitat triggers the development application process. Habitat which does not meet the definition of *core koala habitat* (which includes a consideration of *highly suitable habitat*) is not relevant.

2. What documented decision process occurred that determined the scientific basis – “peered reviewed” for including trees as small as 10 cm DBHOB?

Refer to EPA Koala Habitat Mapping pilot <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/-/media/epa/corporate-site/resources/forestagreements/koala-habitat-mapping-pilot-160038.pdf>

3. What documented decision process occurred to cause the list of tree species in Schedule 2 Annexure A of the draft Guideline not differentiated between trees that provide food, shelter or other use, being three distinct and recognised categories?

The Department intends to update the SEPP and the Guideline to refer to the listed trees as ‘koala use trees’, in recognition that some of the listed species are shelter trees,

whereas others are feed trees. Both feed and shelter trees are of equal importance to koalas.

4. What modelling was done using the definitions in the same model or separately of:
 - a. the 15% figure, and
 - b. the tree species in Schedule 2 Annexure A of the draft Guideline?

Refer to answers above.

Further relevant records::

- EPA Koala Habitat Mapping pilot <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/-/media/epa/corporate-site/resources/forestagreements/koala-habitat-mapping-pilot-160038.pdf>
- <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Animals-and-plants/Threatened-species/koala-habitat-information-base-technical-guide-190534.pdf>
- Phillips and John Callaghan (2011) Spot Assessment Technique reference included in the draft Guidelines