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Date: Apr 21, 2012 05:18pm AEST

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Geelong 14C - 26C . Mostly sunny

News Geelong

Three koalas die in controlled burn

Peter Begg | April 19th, 2012

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AUTHORITIES have defended the death of several koalas in a recent controlled burn in the Otways, saying more were killed in the bushfires they are trying to prevent.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment said five injured koalas were discovered after a controlled burn near Wye River. The department said three koalas were euthanased and two taken to shelters.

The department's Otways district manager, Andrew Morrow, said the risk of wildlife injury or death during a planned burn was very low compared to that of severe bushfires.

"Across the whole burn program in the Otways about 40 burns per year there are very few reports of injured wildlife," he said.

"The Wye-Kennett Jeep Track burn is the only planned burn in the Otways in the past three years where injured koalas have been reported."

Mr Morrow said low-intensity fires with "limited canopy scorch" were conducted in areas known for high wildlife populations.

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He said the department also deployed a wildlife officer to monitor planned burn sites to address animal welfare needs and contact wildlife shelters, when required, for injured animals.

"The Department of Scorched Earth (DSE) strikes again" **DSE lover not**

"A DSE wildlife officer was tasked to monitor and respond to any wildlife welfare issues associated with planned burn at Wye River-Kennett River recognised as an area with a high koala population," Mr Morrow said.

"The Wye-Kennett Jeep Track burn was completed successfully, with unburnt gully areas of high quality fauna habitat and refuge value retained.

"The limited scorch of trees ensured minimal impact on koala food sources within the burn area."

Mr Morrow said autumn provided suitable conditions for the planned burning program, and the Otway district had completed planned burns over approximately 4000 hectares for 2011/12.

He said further burns were scheduled this week near Aireys Inlet, Deans Marsh and Forrest.

Carlisle River Wildlife Shelter's Ron Anstis yesterday questioned the value of controlled burns.

"My wife did a course into the topic of whether it was worth having these burns and she couldn't come up with an answer," he said.

"Opinion is divided ... the chief fire bloke in New South Wales said, 'Forget it, it's not worth it'."

Mr Anstis said that kangaroos, wallabies and possums were also often caught up in controlled burns.

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DSE lover not of Geelong Posted at 5:19pm Thursday

The Department of Scorched Earth (DSE) strikes again

Evelyn Kerr of Barwon Heads Posted at 2:29pm Thursday

"My wife did a course...." she must be an expert. The fire ecologists, scientists, fire behaviour experts and Bushfire Royal Commission can't all be wrong. Controlled burning definately works and actually provides refuge for wildlife during big bushfires. No controlled burn is as hot as the bushfires on Black Saturday or Ash Wednesday. Well done DSE keep up the planned burning to protect people, houses and wildlife.

sallu Posted at 1:58pm Thursday

Must have been a pretty hot controlled burn for the koalas to have perished. Low intensity fires dont kill koalas but high intensity crown fires do.

Steve of Grovedale Posted at 1:17pm Thursday

Animals die in controlled burns, no way... wouldn't they send a team in to clear the area first? Ha ha... interesting how we don't hear of the deaths, of the animals (must be heaps) but we think about how good the end results are, less fuel to burn in the fire season. Do people care, only when they have to, if a burnt animal



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