

Koalas die in controlled burns

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AUTHORITIES have defended the death of several koalas in a recent controlled burn in the Otways.

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.

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.

"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 NSW said, 'Forget it, it's not worth it'."

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