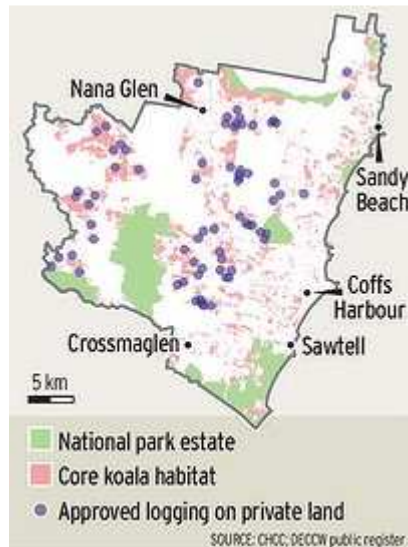


Coffs Harbour koalas lose habitat to red tape

Sydney Morning Herald – by Saffron Howden

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THE state Environment Department has approved logging of almost 2000 hectares of significant koala habitat contrary to its own guidelines, conservationists say.

Since 2007, at least 60 separate logging applications on private land have been approved in areas containing "core koala habitat" around Coffs Harbour, according to an analysis by the North Coast Environment Council.

The department does not dispute the council's figures, but said the Coffs Harbour koala plan of management, which identifies the vulnerable species' local habitats, is not officially gazetted.

Because of this, the prohibition on logging that normally applies to important koala habitats under state environmental planning policies could not be enforced in that council area, the department's director of landscapes and ecosystems conservation, Tom Grosskopf, said.

"We're helping them to get their plan updated and get it going," he said.

But local environmentalists are appalled and have accused the department of playing word games. The environment council's vice-president, Susie Russell, said the department knew full well where the region's key koala areas were. It had been integral in mapping the habitats, but was ignoring the results and approving their destruction.

The NSW Private Native Forestry code of practice prohibits forestry operations in core koala habitats.

Mr Grosskopf said that despite the logging approvals around Coffs Harbour, the department protected koalas.

The department could not say when the koala management plan would be officially gazetted.