

# Forest industry launches plan to protect koalas shifting to plantations

By: SUE NEALES, Rural reporter

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A koala in a timber plantation near Hamilton, Victoria. *Source:* Supplied

## **THE Victorian forestry industry has reacted to bad publicity over the deaths of koalas living in blue gum plantations in western Victoria and pledged to protect the native animals as trees are logged.**

There are approximately 171,000 hectares of eucalypt plantations in western Victorian and south-east South Australia, many planted as tax-advantageous managed investment schemes.

But the plantations have also proved attractive to large numbers of koalas, with concerns that now large areas of trees planted in the mid 1990s are approaching maturity, that koalas will be killed or injured in logging.

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries will today release industry-wide policy guidelines adopted by all its members in the so-called green triangle region, that commit to protect koala protection in blue gum plantations.

The policy pledges that all timber harvesting operations will first assess the number of koalas living in the plantations to be logged, and plan their operations in a sequence that encourages koala populations to move to adjacent reserves or immature plantations.

Logging contractors must also mark all trees with koalas in them with paint, and retain a minimum of five trees immediately adjacent to every 'koala tree'.

But such trees may subsequently be logged if and when the koala shifts from its perch.

Contractors must also assess after logging if any koalas have been killed or injured, and entrust any injured animals to wildlife carers.

VAFI chief executive Lisa Marty said the timber industry acknowledged there is a need for an improved approach to koala management.

"The industry shares the concern; we don't want to see koalas being hurt during harvesting," Ms Marty said.

"Our goal is zero harm; the implementation of these guidelines is a major step in a program of work to support koala welfare and improved wildlife management."