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MEDIA RELEASE

KOALA PARK RELIES ON HOPE NOT STRATEGY, DECIMATES INDUSTRY

Today's announcement of the decision to create a full-size Great Koala National Park on the Mid North Coast of NSW is a missed opportunity to maintain a sustainable timber industry and a stable koala population. Instead one is being decimated while the other is built on hope.

After a 14 month assessment process which included seeking input from industry, the government has settled on the one option with the weakest evidence and the most problems, CEO of the Australian Forest Contractors Association Tim Lester said.

"We engaged in the assessment and consultation process in good faith on the basis of the government's twin election commitments of a koala park and a sustainable timber industry. But the government has accepted ideology over evidence and hope over science," he said.

"National parks have a terrible record when it comes to protecting populations of threatened species because hope is not a strategy. We are at risk of repeating the same mistakes.

"It is not a strategy to hope that koalas will be ok in an unmanaged forest. It is not a strategy to hope that more tourists will come to an area that already has a bustling tourism industry, and change their spending patterns to maintain small businesses and communities. It is not a strategy to hope that the cost of managing a national park, already significantly more than the cost of the state forest, will improve the NSW Budget bottom line.

"The greatest irony is that the NSW National Parks' own research shows the claim that koalas are under threat in this area is wrong. The population of koalas in NSW state forests is high and stable thanks to an active and sustainable forest management regime that has been in place for more than a century. The idea that a sustainable timber industry and rich biodiversity are incompatible is pure ideology and not backed by the scientific evidence or history.

"It is now up to the government to implement a fair and equitable package for industry that provides compensation for the businesses, workers and communities who are having their lives and livelihoods turned upside down by a flawed decision based on a flawed premise."

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Contact

Tim Lester, Chief Executive Officer, 0437 524 933, tim@afca.asn.au