



## Dead trees on Cape Otway

**According to State and Federal Government, Victoria now has an “overabundance of Koalas”. Really?**

Koala management in Victoria has been confounded and let down by this notion for years and years, perhaps ever since the figure of 180,000 Koalas in the Strathbogie Ranges was first bandied around in 1995.

We can see this currently playing out on Cape Otway. Let me try and explain what we think is happening in Cape Otway and what has plagued Victorian translocation programs for nearly 80 years.

In different soil types Koalas eat different species, but, if I can use the human food pyramid as an example - they need meat, potatoes, pumpkin, beans, peaches, ice cream and a dinner mint.

I imagine Government scientists will, as always, dismiss my simplistic wording, but I am sure the people of Australia will get this.

In healthy Victorian habitats, Koalas will have a varied diet from a range of food trees. There is the meat (the primary Koala food species) – in Victoria these are species such as monkey gum, common manna gum and river red gum.

The meat is served with vegetables (the secondary Koala food species): potatoes (blue gum), pumpkin (coastal manna gum), carrots (messmate) and beans (brown stringybark). And the meal is rounded off with ice cream (swamp gum), maybe some pudding (mountain ash) and an after-dinner mint (narrow leaved peppermint). Yes, the mint is actually a mint!

This diversity is important, both for the Koala, but also for the trees to keep them healthy.

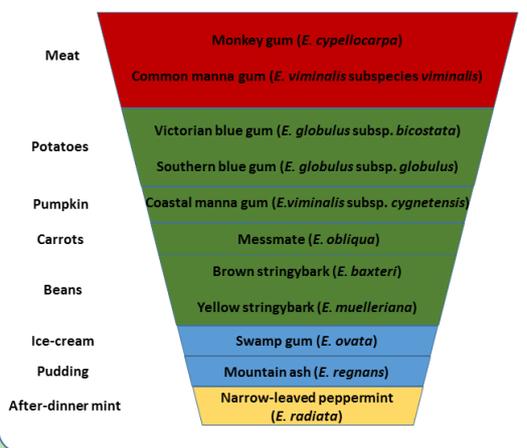
Note that most people think that manna gum is just manna gum, but there are in fact two different types of manna gum that grow in the Otways. Koalas vastly prefer the common manna gum, which does not grow on the soils found on Cape Otway. Then there is coastal manna gum, which does grow on the poorer sandy soils of Cape Otway. It is not a primary food source for Koalas in Victoria (see Koala food pyramid).

In Cape Otway, the Koalas only have one choice: pumpkin (coastal manna gum). That is their sole food source. The other components of a healthy diet are completely missing. They have been eating pumpkin for nearly 34 years. No wonder it is disastrous for both the Koala and the trees.



## Victoria's Koala Food Pyramid

Koalas in coastal areas of Western Victoria would normally be eating this:



- Meat
- Potatoes
- Pumpkin
- Carrots
- Beans
- Ice-cream
- Pudding
- After-dinner mint

- Monkey gum (*E. cypellacarpa*)
- Common manna gum (*E. viminalis* subsp. *viminalis*)
- Victorian blue gum (*E. globulus* subsp. *bicostata*)
- Southern blue gum (*E. globulus* subsp. *globulus*)
- Coastal manna gum (*E.viminalis* subsp. *cygnetensis*)
- Messmate (*E. obliqua*)
- Brown stringybark (*E. baxteri*)
- Yellow stringybark (*E. muelleriana*)
- Swamp gum (*E. ovata*)
- Mountain ash (*E. regnans*)
- Narrow-leaved peppermint (*E. radiata*)

Koalas translocated to Cape Otway in 1981 have only had:

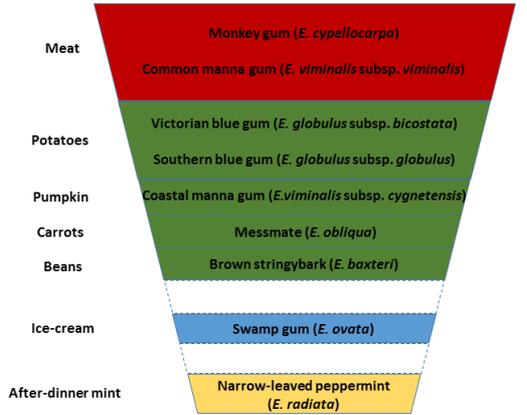


- Pumpkin
- Pumpkin
- Carrots

- Coastal manna gum (*E.viminalis* subsp. *cygnetensis*)
- Coastal manna gum (*E.viminalis* subsp. *cygnetensis*)
- Messmate (*E. obliqua*)

\* Koalas will not be able to use these trees until 2025 (at the earliest)

The Victorian Government is going to relocate Koalas to areas around Lorne. The AKF thinks these trees should be present at any potential release site<sup>‡</sup>:



- Meat
- Potatoes
- Pumpkin
- Carrots
- Beans
- Ice-cream
- After-dinner mint

- Monkey gum (*E. cypellacarpa*)
- Common manna gum (*E. viminalis* subsp. *viminalis*)
- Victorian blue gum (*E. globulus* subsp. *bicostata*)
- Southern blue gum (*E. globulus* subsp. *globulus*)
- Coastal manna gum (*E.viminalis* subsp. *cygnetensis*)
- Messmate (*E. obliqua*)
- Brown stringybark (*E. baxteri*)
- Swamp gum (*E. ovata*)
- Narrow-leaved peppermint (*E. radiata*)

‡ AKF assumes the Victoria Government has checked to see whether these species are present before releasing any Koalas.

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Tree plantings in the area since 2012 have focussed on planting more pumpkins (coastal manna gum), with some carrots (messmate). I would be embarrassed if I was the one responsible for choosing the wrong species of tree to plant at Cape Otway.

Sadly, Koalas should never have been put into this landscape, because the preferred trees (meat) for Victorian Koalas do not grow well on these soils. Indeed, Koalas did not ever live in Cape Otway prior to the 1981 translocation (Koalas were moved to the Cape in 1981 to provide a tourist attraction). There were none there. The release site was a disastrous choice, like many other release sites I have seen and experienced.

Couple that with other problems on the Cape – the bracken fern, the lack of connectivity, the presence of plant pathogens etc. – and it is no wonder the trees are dying and the Koalas are wasting.

The Victorian Government does not have the slightest interest in attempting to disentangle what is driving tree deaths in the area; the only response is the reactive culling of Koalas.

Until the Victorian Government is prepared to look at the problem holistically, rather than the usual band-aid solutions (culls, fertility control, translocations – as far as we know without ethics approvals, without veterinary guidelines) Koalas and the trees on Cape Otway will continue to suffer.



