



Australian Koala Foundation

ACN 010 922 102

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Flawed habitat maps could derail Koala election commitments: experts voice grave concerns over NSW Government's new vegetation mapping

With the NSW Election coming up this weekend, both sides of politics have outlined ambitious new policies to save the Koala, however, these could inevitably become toothless tigers due to flawed vegetation mapping recently released by the NSW State Government.

Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) mapping experts have extensively analysed the State Vegetation Type Mapping (SVTM), released by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment in late 2022 and found that the state-wide maps may have been rushed, with many gaps and inconsistencies.

Compared with AKF's peer-reviewed scientific Koala Habitat Atlas – which maps the entire geographic habitat of the Koala across 1.5 million square kilometres – SVTM appears to take the lowest-common denominator dataset approach and fails to identify habitat at a fine scale - something that is crucial for koala conservation.

AKF Chair Deborah Tabart OAM said the incorrect habitat mapping is a significant concern for AKF as it has the potential to gravely impact the long-term survival of koalas in NSW.

"It is crucial that accurate and detailed koala habitat maps are available for councils so governments can make informed decisions with regards to development applications – without it, it's a greenlight to bulldoze straight through primary koala habitat," said Ms Tabart.

AKF analysed Port Stephens Local Government Area (LGA), where there is pressure for koalas to be listed as critically endangered due to the drastic decline in Koala numbers. AKF found the new vegetation mapping downgraded their primary habitat by an alarming 80% compared to the Koala Habitat Atlas.

"We simply cannot and will not incorporate this incorrect data into our Koala Habitat Atlas," Ms Tabart said.

"By severely under-mapping primary koala habitat, the NSW Government is essentially falsely highlighting areas where koalas cannot survive – potentially paving the way for devastating habitat clearing.

"SVTM appears to be a compendium of several maps, and because of the NSW Government's desire for a consistent state-wide mapping dataset, rather than on an LGA basis, many of the underlying maps have lost valuable information.

"For example, within the Port Stephens LGA for Medowie, Tilligery and Salamander Bay, SVTM misses 94% of primary habitat compared to the AKF equivalent mapping. *See *figure 1 & 2*

"Such large differences between areas of primary habitat are of great concern to the AKF – and it should be for the responsible NSW Government agencies as well," Ms Tabart added.

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“The Government and opposition both have grand plans and election promises for a Koala National Park, but correct mapping is essential for this - without it, it’s destined for failure.

“Rectifying the data flaws of SVTM should be a major priority for the incumbent or incoming government.

“We’ve clearly demonstrated that habitat maps derived from SVTM are grossly inadequate and will only serve to assist the further destruction of valuable koala habitat.”

AKF is the principal non-profit, non-government organisation dedicated to the long-term conservation and effective management of the wild Koala in Australia.

Over 80% of the Koala's natural habitat has been destroyed since white settlement of Australia, and almost none of the remaining 20% is protected. With Koalas now listed as Endangered in NSW, QLD and the ACT, AKF’s proposed Koala Protection Act aims to ensure that koala habitat is proactively protected by a revolutionary piece of legislation which will change environmental law forever.

To find out more about AKF’s Koala Habitat Atlas and plans to save the Koala, visit savethekoala.com

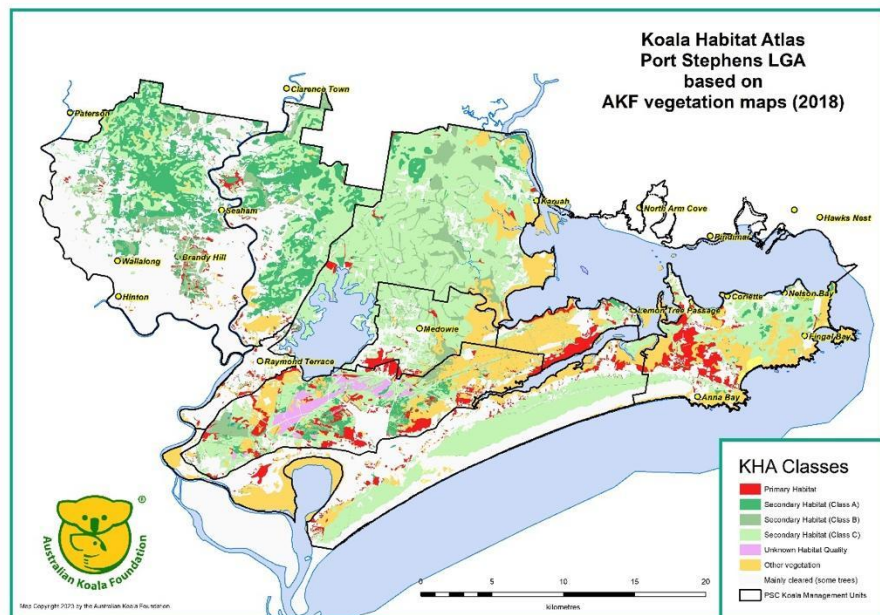


Figure 1: Port Stephens LGA Koala Habitat Atlas based on AKF vegetation mapping. Large areas of Primary Habitat are shown in the southern half of the map.

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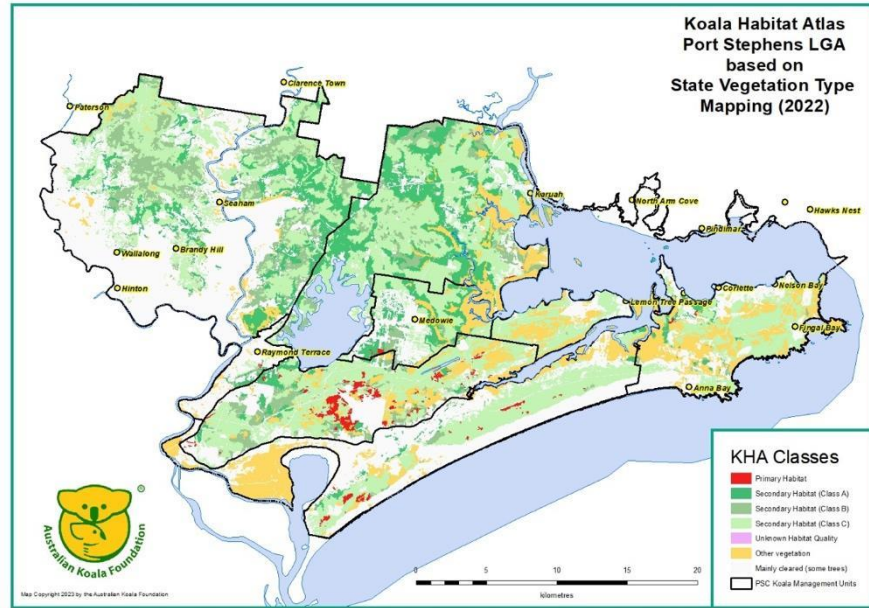


Figure 2: Port Stephens LGA Koala Habitat Atlas based on SVTM vegetation mapping.
This map shows 80% less Primary Habitat than the AKF map.

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