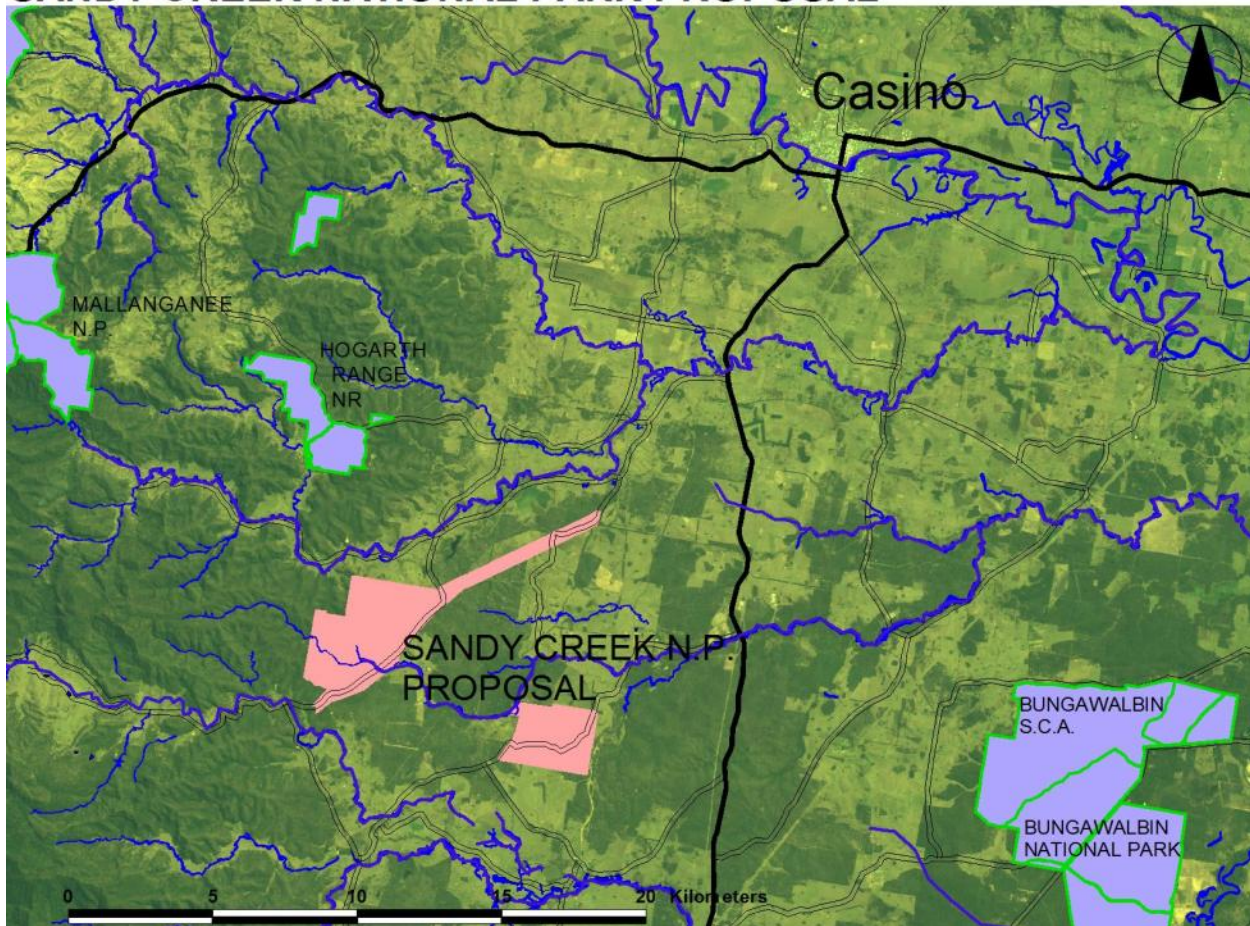


Sandy Creek National Park Proposal

North East Forest Alliance, Revised March 2017

It is proposed to create the 2,100 ha Sandy Creek National Park in the headwaters of the Richmond River south-west of Casino. The proposal is comprised of two parts, including part of Royal Camp State Forest (compartments 13-16, 1,500ha) and the whole of Carwong State Forest (600ha). These forests are primarily proposed for protection for their exceptional importance for Koala conservation in an area where populations are in decline and in danger of extinction. The proposal is comprised of inadequately reserved ecosystems, includes 2 Endangered Ecological Communities, and incorporates the known habitat for the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater, 3 Endangered plants, one Vulnerable plant, and 17 Vulnerable animals. There is the potential to improve its long term integrity by voluntarily acquiring intervening freehold land which has also been assessed as being of high value for Koalas.

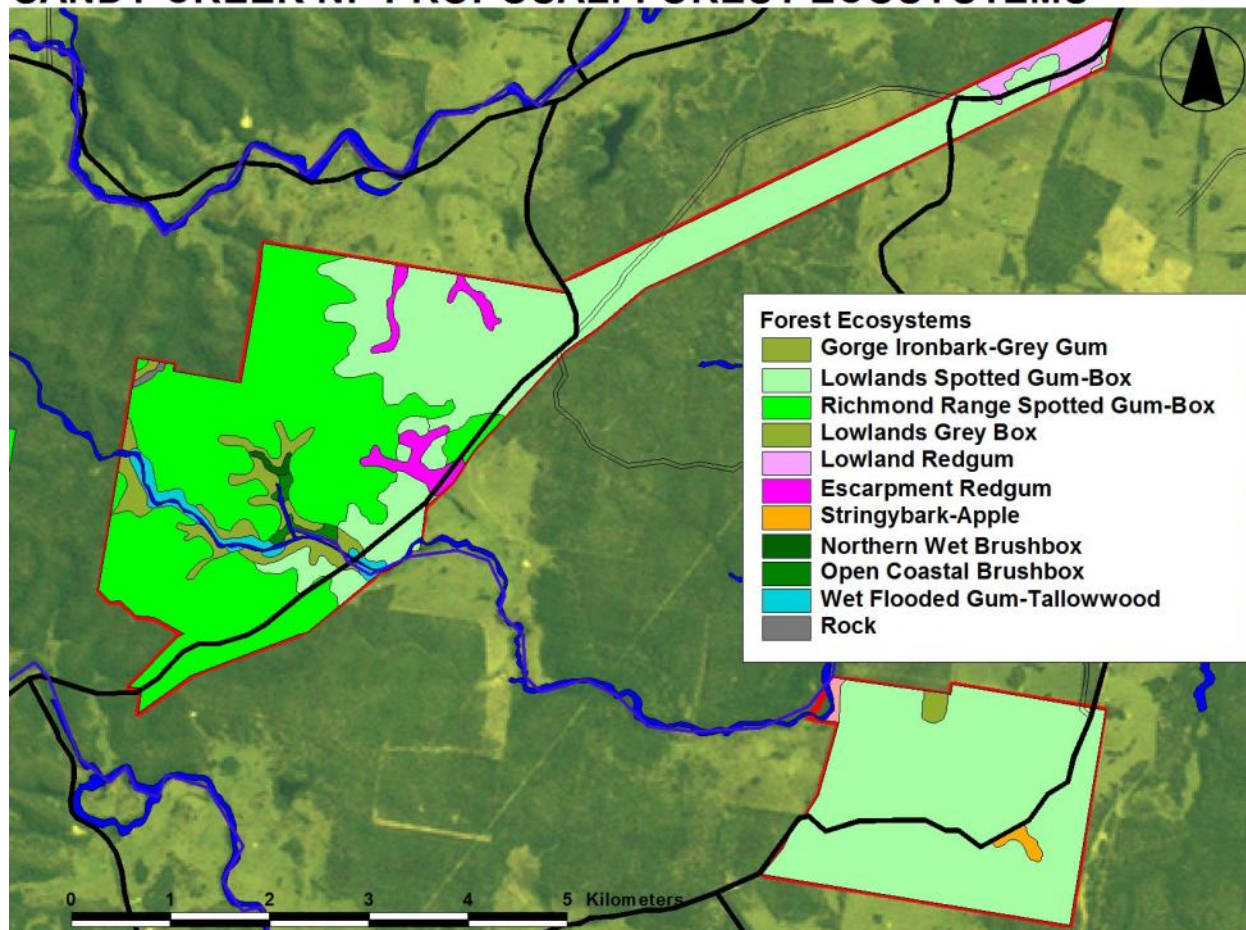
SANDY CREEK NATIONAL PARK PROPOSAL



The forests are dominated by Spotted Gum, Grey Gum, Grey Box, Grey Ironbark, and various red gums. Narrow Leafed White Mahogany, Red Mahogany, Flooded Gum and Brush Box occur along drainage lines (particularly Sandy Creek) which also include the endangered ecological communities of Swamp Sclerophyll Forest and Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest.

There are a variety of other eucalypts mixed in with these, including hundreds of the nationally vulnerable Slaty Red Gum (*Eucalyptus glaucina*) which achieves densities of 5-10 per hectare. The NSW endangered sedge *Water Nutgrass* (*Cyperus aquatilis*) and the endangered herbs Native Milkwort (*Polygala linariifolia*) and *Oldenlandia galioides* occur in the proposal and are all threatened by grazing and logging activities.

SANDY CREEK NP PROPOSAL: FOREST ECOSYSTEMS



Ten forest ecosystems have been mapped within the proposal. Eight of these are classed as inadequately reserved in that they have not achieved the national (JANIS 1996) forest reserve targets, with 96% of the extent of forest ecosystems within the proposal required to contribute towards satisfying national reserve targets. The proposal makes a particularly significant contribution towards unmet targets for Richmond Range Spotted Gum-Box (17%) and Lowlands Spotted Gum-Box (46%).

The critically endangered Regent Honeyeater has been recorded, and, along with the Vulnerable Black-chinned Honeyeater, is one of the many nectivorous species particularly threatened by the loss of mature eucalypts through logging. There are also numerous threatened species occurring that depend upon the large hollows provided by old eucalypts for nesting, with the Powerful, Masked and Barking Owls being recorded from both Royal Camp and Carwong State Forests. Other vulnerable tree hollow-dependant species recorded include the Squirrel Glider, Yellow-bellied Glider, Hoary Wattled Bat, Glossy-black Cockatoo, Brown Tree-creeper and Little Lorikeet. Additional threatened species recorded

within the proposal include the Rufous Bettong, Bent Wing Bat, Little Bent-wing Bat, Square-tailed Kite, Little Eagle, and Grey Crowned Babbler.

RESERVE STATUS OF FOREST ECOSYSTEMS IN SANDY CREEK PROPOSAL.

Ecosystem	Hectares in Sandy Creek	% National Reserve Target Met in Reserves	Hectares Needed to meet target
Northern Wet Brushbox	4	100	0
Open Coastal Brushbox	11	88.3	168
Wet Flooded Gum-Tallowwood	31	35.5	2,342
Gorge Ironbark-Grey Gum	80	100	0
Richmond Range Spotted Gum-Box	690	33.8	4,157
Lowlands Spotted Gum-Box	1151	55.4	2,484
Lowland Redgum	37	35.5	13,647
Escarpment Redgum	42	61.7	3,216
Lowlands Grey Box	7	1.7	14,110
Stringybark-Apple	7	51.9	4,151
TOTALS	2060		

Royal Camp and Carwong State Forests have clusters of Koala records and have been the subject of recent surveys confirming the presence of a regionally significant population. The area appears to be an important Koala sub-population and the focus for koala conservation in the Northern Clarence–Southern Richmond regional populations (i.e. Scotts 2013). Within the proposal Koalas have been found to prefer Grey Gum, Grey Box and the various red gums for feeding, favouring trees over 30cm diameter at breast height.

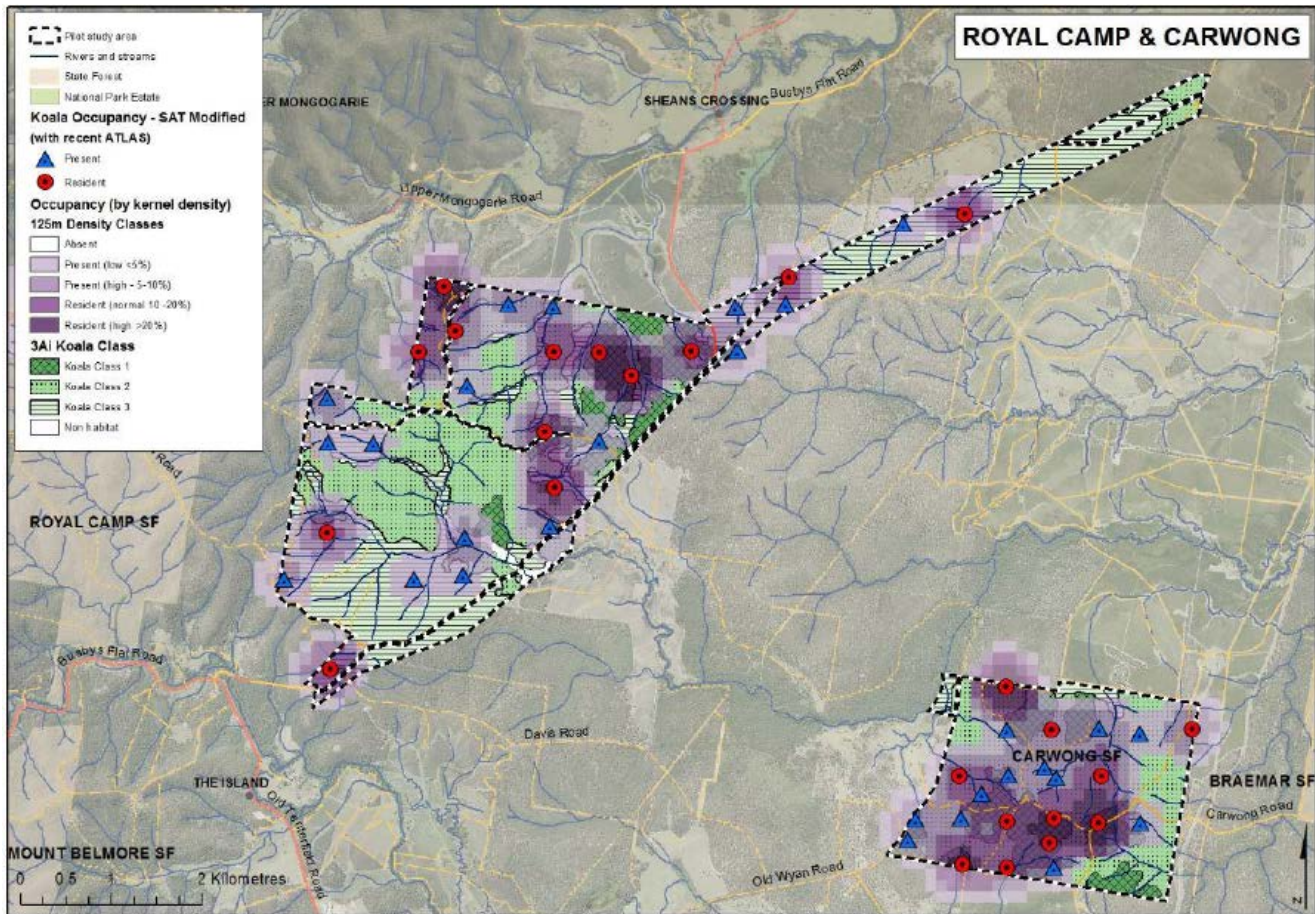
In 2012 the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA, Pugh 2012) stopped the Forestry Corporation illegally logging a Koala High Use Area in Royal Camp SF, with 4 other Koala HUAs about to be logged. The EPA found that the Forestry Corporation had not adequately looked for Koala scats and had logged 61 trees and constructed 405m of snig tracks within a Koala High Use Area.

When the Forestry Corporation resumed logging nearby a few days later NEFA again caught them out. The EPA confirmed that the unrepentant Forestry Corporation had not adequately looked for Koala scats and had logged 7 trees and constructed 230m of snig tracks within another Koala High Use Area. The Forestry Corporation continued logging and were found by NEFA to have logged another Koala HUA.

When the Forestry Corporation proposed to begin logging in compartment 13 in 2013, claiming no Koalas were present, NEFA (Pugh 2014) found extensive Koala HUAs within the proposed logging area. Based on his inspections of Royal Camp State Forest, wildlife expert David Milledge concluded: *"The level of Koala activity revealed by these searches is amongst the highest I have recorded in my experience of over 20 years conducting Koala scat surveys in coastal and escarpment forests in north-eastern NSW. This highlights the significance of Royal Camp State Forest in supporting a dense local Koala population and possibly one of the most important on public land in the region"*.

The Environment Protection Authority again confirmed NEFA's findings, informing the Forestry Corporation that they found *"areas that indicate koala high use that is ongoing and contemporary"*,

noting “Based upon these findings and recent findings made from investigations undertaken in compartments 14, 15 and 16 of Royal Camp State Forest, the EPA considers these areas contain koala habitat and play an important role to Koala populations in the region”.



Records and potential Koala habitat (based on Plant Community Type) identified by EPA (2016) for Sandy Creek National Park proposal.

The then Minister for the Environment requested the EPA to determine the regional significance of the koala population, with the subsequent report by Dr. Steve Phillips (2014) for the EPA finding a resident koala population within Royal Camp that “*should be considered important at all levels of assessment*” due to the koala populations of the encompassing Richmond Valley LGA being found to be “*endangered on the basis of international, national and state-based conservation criteria*”.

In August 2014 the Forestry Corporation engaged Jim Shields to search for Koalas using a sniffer dog, they detected 14 Koalas at a mean density of 0.36/ha in 11 hours of searching.

There are also numerous Koala records in Carwong State Forest. Pre-logging fauna surveys in 1998 found Koala scats throughout the forest, with numerous high use trees, including many with both small and large scats indicating the presence of females with young. Based on Koala records, in November 2014 NEFA first proposed the creation of the 2,100 ha Sandy Creek National Park incorporating both Royal Camp and Carwong State Forests.

The EPA (2016) study of 4 key areas of State forests known to once have good Koala populations once again verified that Royal Camp and Carwong State Forests have significant populations of resident Koalas:

The activity results and Phillips' (2013) report both indicate that Royal Camp and Carwong state forests support extensive areas of koala occupancy and habitat utilisation, and that in compartment 13, at least 50% of the habitat is utilised and conforms to optimal utilisation of secondary habitat by a low density population. The project found that 80% of Carwong and 58% of Royal Camp State Forest is utilised, which supports Phillips' (2013) results. On this basis it can be concluded that habitat in Royal Camp and Carwong is source habitat, where reproduction exceeds mortality on average over time. (p84)

It is further noted (p86):

In relative terms, Carwong appeared to be the least disturbed by logging and fire. Having both wildfire and multiple recent logging events absent for approximately 20 years, appears to correlate with overall highest occupancy compared with other pilot areas that have experienced multiple, more recent silviculture treatments. This result aligns with Smith's (2004) findings that koala prefer areas of least disturbance.

It is also important to recognise that these forests are regionally, if not nationally, significant as a study of Koalas across the Richmond Valley LGA (Phillips and Weatherstone 2015) identified "two "Important Populations" as defined for purposes of the Federal Government's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999", as "key source populations for breeding and/or dispersal", including "Habitat to the north of Rappville in the general vicinity of Royal Camp and Carwong State Forests and associated lands". They also found:

Extent of Occurrence of koalas across the RVLGA has remained relatively unchanged over time. However, further analyses of habitat occupancy rates has indicated a statistically significant decrease over the last 3 koala generations of ~33% in the amount of habitat actually being occupied by koalas. This trajectory, if left unchecked, will lead to increasing endangerment of the RVLGA's koala populations over coming years.

There can be no doubt that the proposed Sandy Creek National Park is of immense importance to the regional survival of Koalas and provides significant habitat for a variety of other threatened species. It is obvious that the habitat value of the forest for most species has been significantly diminished by past logging and grazing, and that exclusion of these activities will allow habitat values to improve over time, notably for Koalas.

EPA (2016) Koala Habitat Mapping Pilot: NSW state forest Report. Environment Protection Authority

Phillips, S. (2014) Koala Habitat/Occupancy Assessment – Compartment 13 Royal Camp State Forest. Biolink report to EPA.

Phillips, S. and Weatherstone, C. (2015) Koala Habitat & Population Assessment: Richmond Valley Council LGA. Biolink report to Report to Richmond Valley Council.

Pugh, D (2012) NEFA Audit of Royal Camp State Forest. North East Forest Alliance, <http://www.nefa.org.au/audits>

Pugh, D, (2014) North East Forest Alliance submission to: Performance of the NSW Environment Protection Authority (Inquiry), (vi) the regulation of forestry practices in Royal Camp State Forest. North East Forest Alliance. <http://www.nefa.org.au/audits>