

A spokesperson for NSW Environment Minister GABRIELLE UPTON said:

"The NSW Government's \$45 million Koala strategy is the biggest commitment by any state government to the preservation of koalas.

"The purchase and preservation of private land as priority koala preserves is a major initiative that is being taken up by landholders across the state. Examples includes 402 hectares of high quality koala habitat in the Southern Highlands which connects the Blue Mountains to wilderness areas of Morton National Park and 43 hectares of prime koala habitat on the Tweed Coast and five properties near Port Macquarie.

"In addition, the Biodiversity Conservation Trust is entering into long term conservation agreements to protect koala habitat on private land.

"The recently released Coastal IFOA better sets strict requirements for the permanent protection of threatened species in each forest harvesting site.

"On-the-spot fines for breaches have been increased from \$1,100 to \$15,000 and maximum penalties are up from \$110,000 to \$2 million.

"An intentional breach that causes significant environmental harm can now lead to a penalty as high as \$5 million.

"An example of this is the EPA current investigation following allegations of illegal activity in Gibberagee State Forest. The EPA is taking the allegations seriously and will consider the information as part of its investigation to determine if breaches have occurred and regulatory action is required."

A spokesperson for the NSW Environment Protection Agency said:

"The EPA is currently investigating a range of allegations made by a community group regarding a logging operation in Gibberagee State Forest.

" Forestry Corporation has voluntarily stopped work at the site.

"EPA has already visited the site and gathered evidence on four separate occasions since the complaint was first received in mid-February. Further field inspections are planned.

"As the investigation is in progress, no further comment can be made."

A spokesperson for the Forestry Corporation of NSW said:

"We are not currently working in Gibberagee and after community members raised concerns, we are reviewing the work we have done marking trees in the forest to confirm there are no issues.

"When we harvest pockets of forest for renewable timber, we adhere to the strict regulations that were developed by ecologists and other experts to protect koalas during timber harvesting and ensure they thrive after harvesting.

"You may be interested in recent research by the Department of Primary Industries that found there are 1.6 million hectares of koala habitat in Northern NSW alone, much more of this habitat is occupied than previously realised and timber harvesting has no influence on koala occupancy.

"You can find out more about that research at

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forestry/science/koala-research>"