

Parliamentary Inquiry into koala populations and habitat in NSW

Campbelltown Sitting 25/10/2019

Deponent: Dr. Stephen Phillips

Bona Fides: working on Campbelltown koalas since 1995. Various publications and reports, produced over a 20 year period that include but not limited to the following:

1. 1998. Koala Habitat Atlas: Project No. 5 – Campbelltown LGA
2. 2000. Tree preferences of koalas in the Campbelltown LGA. *Wildlife Research*
3. 2015. Review of Draft CKPoM for the Campbelltown LGA
4. 2016. Analysing the historical record: aspects of the distribution and abundance of koalas in the Campbelltown City LGA
5. 2016. Draft Campbelltown Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM)
6. 2017. South Campbelltown Koala Habitat Connectivity Study
7. 2018. Review of koala generational persistence across the Campbelltown City LGA 2012 – 2017.
8. 2018. Identifying least-cost dispersal pathways for koalas within the Campbelltown City Council LGA

Related studies:

9. 2018. Koala Corridor project - Campbelltown City Council & Wollondilly LGAs, Greater Macarthur growth area. Report to OEH.

Key Issues

Issue 1: Landscape / population context: the naturally occurring low density koala populations in Campbelltown & Wollondilly - Picton are amongst the few koala populations in NSW known to be recovering and so expanding their respective geographic ranges. Planning at all levels should be engaged in assisting the processes of recovery, rather than – certainly at agency level - functioning to undermine/impede it. Population sizes in both populations (now in narrow contact through the Gilead site) remain small (< 500) and are yet to achieve levels and distribution that afford long-term resilience.

Issue 2: A Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for the Campbelltown koalas has been available since 2016 but is yet to be approved by DPIE. Again and despite best efforts of Campbelltown Council staff, their capacity to implement and pursue sustainable koala management thwarted by Government inaction / obfuscation.

Issue 3: Gilead. The currently proposed development footprint for Gilead demonstrates little regard for sustainability principles, is yield driven and does not acknowledge the conceptual measures of connectivity (Key habitat linkages and Strategic Linkage areas) outlined in the draft Campbelltown CKPoM. I acknowledge that the proponent (LendLease) is under no legal obligation to do so given the lack of a ratified CKPoM, but argue that a supposedly engaged corporate citizen would at least attempt to give effect to the required measures.

Issue 4: Appin Road upgrade. The upgrade of Appin Road between South Campbelltown and the village of Appin Road is proceeding apace, again with no regard for the impacts on koalas. The REFs are notable for their disregard for available information / data, in one instance (LendLease Communities REF) relying entirely on the unsubstantiated personal communications of a government officer to discount previous relevant studies, issues of koala welfare and connectivity considerations (extract from 2018 Biodiversity Assessment Appin Road Upgrade, Mt Gilead by Lend Lease Communities will be tabled).

Issue 5: Greater Macarthur Priority Growth Area. The results of objective modelling commissioned by Government agencies in 2018 (at their request) has been discounted in favour of a poorly informed and naïve alternative promoted by a small group of government officers with little knowledge / expertise in landscape-scale koala management. Presumptions include: no future for koalas within GMGA or west of Appin Road (there is), build a fence on one side to keep them out (it wont) and hence no need to worry about connectivity or infrastructure to (there is). Relevant extract from the report to Government re Impacts on koala connectivity arising from full implementation of GMGA Structure Plan will be tabled.

Discussion Points / Recommendations: Matters of the quality of ecological reporting / advice in instances where development has potential for significant impact has been previously raised at Inquiry. Consideration could be given to a revision of Part 3 of SEPP 44 to remove requirement for CKPoM to be approved by the Director (DPIE), instead delegating responsibility for approval and review of plans to mooted Koala Advisory / Technical Group that remains

independent of government. Government agencies such as RMS should not be exempted from SEPP concepts / considerations and also be bound by same peer review process (i.e. an independent advisory body). For the purpose of road upgrades, standard infrastructure provisions should be mandated for incorporation.

Concluding comment:

The issues associated with koala management in the Campbelltown Wollondilly Picton areas provides an opportunity for government to demonstrate its commitment to koala recovery and sustainability principles by delivering a) a structure plan for the GMGA that reinforces and emphasises the need for ongoing koala recovery and the restoration and restoration of ecological processes, b) a template for the Appin Road upgrade that reflects best practice impact amelioration and c) a related development footprint for the Mt. Gilead stage that acknowledges and gives effect to the Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for Campbelltown.

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