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**INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NSW  
Supplementary Material Tabled at Coffs Harbour Hearing  
4<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

**Documents tabled:**

**Update on recent Clarence Valley developments likely to impact koalas – Two case studies  
Compiled by Leonie Blain**

**Clarence Valley Council Flier: Reporting koalas in the Clarence Valley**

**NSW Koala Strategy 2018. Priority actions  
Highlights of the Plan. Status of 24 Strategy Actions as they affect Clarence Valley koalas.  
To Nov 2019  
Compiled by Pat Edwards**

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## **NSW Koala Strategy 2018. Priority actions**

### ***Highlights of the Plan. Status of 24 Strategy Actions as they affect Clarence Valley koalas. To Nov 2019***

#### **1) Create >24,000ha of new koala reserves and parks from State forests**

The government claims this is now completed, with parts of 11 State forests totalling 23,997ha (not the >24,000ha promised) now reserved for koalas and added to the national parks estate

There are not benefits whatsoever to Clarence LGA koalas, and on closer examination the benefits to koalas in general must be questioned.

Apart from 272ha (15%) of one State forest (Belanglo), and 3,600ha (65%) taken from three adjoining forests (Mt Lindesay, Donaldson & Unumgar), all other portions were already safe from logging under the Forest Management Zoning system. Of these, only Balanglo (entire forest) has some good koala records, though apparently not from the section now protected. The other forests have mixed quality habitat from Ok to poor, all with a scant few, relatively old, records of koala use. The quality of habitat in the parts now under NPWS protection is not known, and it can be assumed there were no koala records from any of them, since they aren't mentioned.

Of all that almost 24,000ha, just 2,669ha are now attached to an actual national park. These from Carrai SF (one koala record in year 2000, within 1.5km of the forest boundary), and Oakes SF (two records in 2013 from within the forest)

All other annexed portions bar one are now designated Flora Reserves within their State forests, with the one State Conservation Area. Yet Flora Reserves are not safe from big infrastructure projects (witness Wells Crossing FR v Pacific Highway upgrade), while SCAs, although without trails or amenities, can be used for human recreation, dog walking etc, are unmonitored and easily eliminated. All of these reserves are also under mining licences, from which only national parks are exempt.

Several other State Forests that are known to support high quality, high-use koala habitat have been totally bypassed.

#### **Fix priority road kill hotspots**

The Roads & Maritime Services has completed a few bits of road fencing around SW Sydney. Nothing has happened in the Clarence beyond a few koala alert signs, which came about through a cooperative effort by Council, personal input and other smaller grants, before OEH funding. There seems to be little else happening to benefit all koalas. Underpasses and overpasses are impractical for existing busy highways; floppy-top fencing can't be erected against every road through koala habitat, and RMS will not lower a speed limit for a mere koala. In reality there's not much that can be done with this action.

#### **Deliver a network of koala hospitals**

Apart from identifying Port Stephens as a suitable site for a new wildlife hospital, there seems to be no further plans. This could be a help to the Port Macquarie koala hospital when that facility is filled to capacity (like now with the bushfires). It could also serve as a halfway stopover for koalas being moved south to Taronga Park. It will be useless for koalas from Coffs Harbour northwards. These already compromised koalas must be shuttled at least 2 hours to Lismore's small volunteer managed koala care centre, or an additional 2 hours to Queensland's world renowned wildlife hospitals. All of these are currently packed to their rafters with burn victims from the still ongoing horrendous fires. There is a definite need for at least one more wildlife hospital, plus two or preferably three dedicated koala care centres and clinics with experienced veterinary attention to service the Tablelands and broad coastal area between Port Macquarie and the Queensland facilities. So far there is no suggestion of this being an option.

#### **Create a new single wildlife rescue hotline number**

Not yet done.

#### **Develop a Statewide koala habitat information base**

The Koala Habitat Information Base was published 12 September 2019.

It provides information on ▪ modelled koala habitat; ▪ a koala tree species index; ▪ mapped likelihood of koala occurrence; ▪ areas confidently mapped as inhabited by koalas; ▪ a vegetation map of NSW; ▪ regional areas of known koala significance. The benefits of all this to koalas is questioned, since any habitat and known koala occupied habitat can be logged and cleared wherever a Development Application is not required, with no need to check for the presence of, or use by, koalas

### **Conduct a citizen science survey to improve koala knowledge**

Citizen Scientist programs are being run all the time with the ease of a free app on a mobile phone. Surely, if we don't know enough about koalas by now to know exactly what they do, what they eat, and what they need to help them persist in the wild, there is little point in continuing with surveys and talk. It would be considerably more useful to fund experienced koala handlers to give lectures and demonstrations, to educate the public and school students as well as councils and developers on what koalas eat, how to know if they sick and in need of help, and how to safely handle and confine them for transport to a vet or a hospital for assistance.

### **Designate the Australian Museum as the official biobank for koala genetic material**

One thing achieved.

### **Pilot an app to collect information about koalas**

The NSW government has launched an app called I Spy Koala for the public to record a koala sighting through the SEED portal. Again, this is just another information gathering exercise, to enable development and management decisions. Again, more money going on discussion rather than on doing something useful, now, to slow the decline.

### **Increase wildlife care training for veterinarians and vet nurses**

This didn't happen until now, with fires still burning and koalas suddenly at the forefront of everyone's attention. The NSW government released \$1m above the \$4m dedicated old money for koala assistance, to fund veterinary work, equipment etc to help with koala care. Yet all private veterinary practices are overloaded with domestic pets, with little time to spare on native wildlife. In most cases they also have little to no understanding or knowledge of the native animal brought in. There needs to be training for dedicated wildlife and koala vets, who solely work in a wildlife hospital funded by the Australian taxpayer, whose animals these are.

### **Relocate koalas to unoccupied koala habitat**

It has always been the set rule that koalas cannot be just moved somewhere else, but must be returned to within the area or in relatively close vicinity of their familiar food sources. Any official translocation programs involve stressful prolonged periods of radio tracking and monitoring. Again, we need action now, to save those koalas we have left within their actual preferred habitat. The priority action should be to protect that habitat and assist its expansion by every possible means.

### **Research to significantly reduce the incidence of Chlamydia**

It is already well known that stress causes the onset of chlamydia in koalas. Prolonged scientific research to develop a vaccine against chlamydia, and also retrovirus, has been underway first in NSW and now in Queensland for at least a decade. This is not a NSW government initiative, and there is no obvious suggestion that NSW is contributing towards this research

### **Deliver priority research under a research plan informed by a research symposium**

Does anyone know what this means? Any research, plans and/or symposiums are typically costly. Also they typically have few to no beneficial outcomes. This clause perhaps means the public will get to know of any research results by way of a publicly delivered report. The cost of posting results online with an online forum for questions - possibly \$200 tops?

### **Monitor koala populations and their habitat through a statewide cross-tenure koala monitoring program**

Yet more monitoring and study. If this is happening, which is uncertain to the author, it can hardly be expected to make any more difference than all the other studies and monitoring programs gone before.

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*Compiled by Patricia Edwards, Clarence Environment Centre, South Grafton, December 2019*