



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE Inc

87-89 Skinner Street

South Grafton 2460

Phone/ Fax: 02 6643 4611

Web site: www.cec.org.au

E-mail: admin@cec.org.au

Document tendered by

MR JOHN EDWARDS

Received by

ANDREW RATCHFORD

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Deputation to JRPP on Hickey St development. Sept. 2019

We have been asked not to waste time speaking about concerns raised in our submissions, as you would already have read and considered those concerns. In this case however, the Clarence Environment Centre has actually written 3 submissions, and a supplementary submission to the various reincarnations of this proposal, We have also made a comprehensive submission to the referral to the Federal Government, so we sincerely hope you've been provided with all of those documents.

I will avoid too much emphasis on the two supposedly protected endangered ecological communities that are about to be bulldozed, or the habitat for the dozen or more threatened species that were found to be utilising the site. Nor will I enlarge on the fact that you will be considering approving that destruction without any off-sets being provided.

Instead I'll present a bit of history, highlighting the many plans and strategies, local and state, whose recommendations have been totally ignored when dealing with this project. I'm starting way back to the late 1980s when the National Parks and Wildlife Service became concerned at the way urban development was contributing to the decline in Koala numbers all along the coast.

Iluka was one of those coastal settlements submitted an exhaustive study of the history, size, distribution, food preferences, and the problems facing the koalas. That resulted in a strategy which was released in 1990, recommending the following.

- ***Koala habitat should be protected and enhanced, and degraded habitat regenerated with areas linked by corridors of food trees.***
- ***Tree planting should be carried out in identified corridor areas and sand-mined areas.***
- ***Authorities and community should take actions to reduce the impacts on koala by identified threats, including the consequences of development.***
- ***Areas containing stands of forest red gum should be protected either through habitat zoning in the Maclean Shire LEP, or instruments available to the NSW government.***
- ***Maclean Council be asked to **impose a Tree Preservation Order on forest red gums**, prohibiting their removal without consent, and***
- ***Areas identified as essential corridors between feeding habitats be protected.***

Of course, the area identified for these strategies was the current development site, which was then crown land, and areas immediately to the west and north.

However, those recommendations seemingly meant little to the Maclean Shire Council, under whose watch no rehabilitation works were carried out, and who instead approved the clearing of a sizable parcel of that land to add 9 holes to the golf course. That was followed by the approval of Sovereign St development which saw an even larger slice of forest bulldozed including, I'm told, old growth forest. As a result, by 2000 the Koala was declared all but extinct on the peninsular, and the endangered coastal emu population disappeared into oblivion at about the same time.

Early this century, the project site became privately owned, and the subsequent forced amalgamation of Councils saw a plethora of documents produced all proclaiming to provide "ecologically sustainable

development” with grand sounding principles such as “intergenerational equity, and the precautionary principle. There was the CV Sustainability Initiative, and ‘Valley Vision 2020’, which “*identified the need to develop a biodiversity strategy to outline how the ecology and biodiversity of the LGA would be protected.*”

The CV Biodiversity Management Strategy was published in 2010, with an opening statement assuring it: “*aims to make clear what Council is responsible for and what it plans to do to preserve the biodiversity of the region under the broader sustainability umbrella*”. It goes on to make comments such as: “*The Clarence area is a stronghold for populations of a number of species, including the endangered Coastal Emu population*”. Of course 9 years on the Coastal Emu is not only extinct on the Iluka peninsular and all but totally extinct everywhere else in the valley, with not a single action having been undertaken to reduce any of the identified threats. Actually, a speed limit on Iluka Road was imposed for a while in an attempt to reduce road kills, but our local member soon bowed to impatient locals demands and that was lifted.

The Mid North Coast Regional Strategy had been released a year earlier in 2009, making a great number of what turned out to be little more than “motherhood” statements. One example was that the Strategy would: “*Protect high value environments, including threatened species, vegetation communities and habitat corridors by ensuring that new urban development avoids these important areas*”. However, those statements didn't prevent Clarence Valley Council immediately rezoning the Hickey St land from rural to residential, and subsequently approving the site's development. So much for protecting endangered communities and threatened species habitat.

The Strategy also assured us that: “*Land use and transport planning will be integrated to minimise the need to travel, and to encourage energy and resource efficiency*”. Residents here require a 60km round trip to the nearest hospital or high school, and a 160km journey to Grafton and back, the nearest source of real employment opportunities. All of this making a mockery of that statement.

Another statement claims Strategy plans to: “*Protect the coast and the character of coastal villages by limiting growth to the agreed growth areas of towns and villages leaving greenbelts between settlements*”. This has always been puzzling. An agreement between who? Iluka was never on the agenda as a “growth area” during the months of community engagement that preceded the publication of the Strategy. It wasn't until months later that the maps were released identifying Iluka as one of those growth areas.

There was almost universal objection to the notion of Iluka being a growth area, and despite it being the very embodiment of a “coastal village”, and not fitting any of the Strategy's motherhood statements, that mapping was immediately approved unchanged.

Then there came The Koala Plan of Management for Ashby, Woombah, Iluka, also published in 2010. Reading that document we are assured that:

“*The primary aims of this Koala Plan are to ensure that the current extent of koala habitat is maintained and improved, and not reduced; and to mitigate processes which are limiting koala occupancy rates and/or population sizes*”. We are also assured that among the overall objectives of the Plan, Council would:

- *minimise the potential for adverse impacts and disturbances to current and future areas of koala habitat;*
- *protect koala habitat in order to, as a minimum, maintain koala populations across their current range;*
- *create, manage and/or restore koala habitat linkages and corridors;*

All of these mirror those recommendations of the 1990 strategy. However, none of this was enough to persuade Council to knock back this development or even consider insisting on biodiversity off-sets. Instead, 14 hectares of Koala movement corridor, and some core habitat, will be removed, without any off-set at all

So why, given all the directives, and guiding principles that have been provided, purporting to protect our critically important biodiversity, do we now see ourselves here today, pleading for a last minute reprieve on behalf of those that have no voice.

John Edwards
Clarence Environment Centre