

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation: Friends of the Koala, Inc

Name: Mrs Lorraine Vass

Position: President

Telephone:

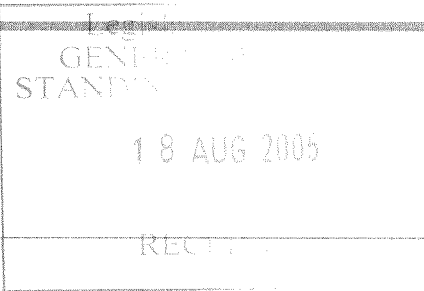
Date Received: 18/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

GPSC4 GPSC4 - Friends of the Koala, Inc. Submission

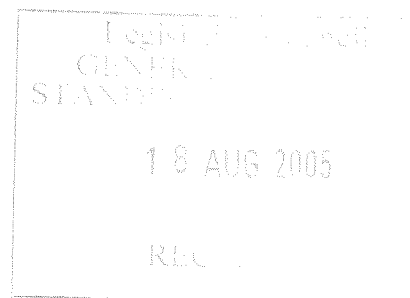
From:
To: <gpscno4@parliament.nsw.gov.au>
Date: 18/08/05 7:44:37
Subject: Friends of the Koala, Inc. Submission



Please find attached the submission of Friends of the Koala, Inc. regarding the threat to koalas in the Ballina to Woodburn section of the upgrade proposals.

Lorraine Vass
President
Friends of the Koala, Inc.

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 4
Legislative Council, Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000.



Re: Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades - Ballina to Woodburn – Submission

Dear Sir

This submission represents the view of the membership of Friends of the Koala, Inc., a voluntary wildlife rehabilitation group with an energetic involvement in habitat restoration as well as education and advocacy about the plight of the Northern Rivers' remaining koala populations. Our membership numbers approximately 230. We have been engaged in this work for 20 years.

Friends of the Koala has major concerns related to a number of the route options (particularly options 2A-2C) proposed for the Ballina to Woodburn Pacific Highway Upgrade and the likelihood of *significant impact* upon *known* core koala populations.

In our view the best option for the koalas and for the environment generally is to widen the existing route of the Pacific Highway. The ecology of the area through which the Highway passes is already degraded and it is the most direct route. Having said that, of the route options which have been on display, we support options 1A in Section 1, 2F in Section 2 and 3B in Section 3 because they involve minimal clearance of native vegetation, thus loss of koala habitat and fragmentation of wildlife corridors will be largely avoided.

Koala Populations within the Study Area

The study area for the Ballina to Woodburn Upgrade provides habitat for the largest koala populations in the Lower Richmond Valley. Although studies undertaken by Geolyse Consultants did not detect koalas across the majority of the study area (only at sites A, B and J); large viable populations of koalas are well known. Friends of the Koala's records show some 134 callouts within and in close proximity to the study area. We know this only represents a fraction of the total koala population because of the observations of long-term residents as well as the findings of surveys and studies over the years. The areas in which these populations exist include Rileys Hill, Bagotville, Meerschaum Vale, West Wardell, Lumleys Lane, Coolgardie and Whytes Lane.

Explanation of our Preferred Route Options

Section 1

Preferred Option - 1A

Option 1A is our favoured route option in Section 1 as it will not require the clearance of any koala habitat, will not fragment any known populations or create impacts upon wildlife corridors. This

option passes very close to the existing alignment of the Pacific Highway, an area not known to support core koala populations as very little habitat remains.

Other Options

Options 1B and 1C will require the clearance of koala habitat to the north and east of Woodburn and in the vicinity of Rileys Hill. They are also located closer to known koala populations within the southern sections of Broadwater National Park.

Section 2

Preferred Option - 2F

Option 2F is the by far our preferred option in Section 2. It will not require the clearance of any areas of *known* koala habitat, will not have any impacts upon any koala movement (wildlife corridors) and will not impact upon any known koala populations. Option 2F is the preferred option in Section 2, as impacts created by the other options will *significantly* impact upon major *known* koala populations. Furthermore, no koala impact mitigation measures are likely to be required in Section 2F, considerably reducing the economic expense of this option.

Other Options

All other route options in Section 2 (Options 2A-2E) will create a *massive impact* upon known core koala populations. The options of greatest concern are Options 2A, 2B and 2C, as these options will fragment to the point of destruction known dispersal corridors for koalas in the Rileys Hill, Bagotville, Meerschaum Vale, Lumleys Lane and Buckombil areas. These options will fragment both north-south and east-west movement corridors for the largest koala populations in the Lower Richmond River area. Furthermore, Options 2A-2E will require the clearance of very large areas (>150ha) of *known* core koala habitat, an unacceptable outcome when other options will not require the clearance of *any* koala habitat.

Section 3

Preferred Option - 3B

As Section 3B passes along the existing alignment of the Pacific Highway, impacts upon koala populations will be relatively limited. Limited clearance of habitat for koala populations in this area will be required compared to Option 3A, and the impacts upon koala movement corridors will be considerably less than Option 3A.

Other Option

The construction of Section 3A at the foothills of Coolgardie and the Blackwall Range will require the clearance of known koala habitat, and will fragment known east-west koala movement corridors in this locality.

Other Issues of Significance

Construction Stage Impacts

To our knowledge, no consideration has been given to the construction stage impacts upon koala populations. Presumably construction will require the haulage of large quantities of road construction materials through major areas of core koala habitat. Consideration must be given to these impacts

Koala Health

It must be understood that the koala populations within the Ballina to Woodburn Upgrade area are amongst the healthiest across the Northern Rivers. They exhibit few disease affected animals and require a very low level of rescue related to health difficulties.

The greatest causes of ill health in koalas are loss of habitat and stress. The construction of a six lane Highway through known areas of koala habitat will both reduce available habitat (through vegetation clearance) and stress animals (through loss of habitat, disturbed population function and loss of dispersal corridors). This will lead to major declines in the health of the largest koala populations remaining in the Lower Richmond Valley (up to 500 animals across the study area).

Conclusion

In New South Wales the koala is listed as *vulnerable* under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. What vulnerable means in this context is that the species is likely to become endangered unless the circumstances and factors threatening its survival or evolutionary development cease to operate.

The Minister for the Environment has before him a State-wide *Recovery Plan for the Koala* which provides a framework for the development of regional plans to assist the survival of the species in New South Wales.

Many of the route options released for public comment in the Ballina to Woodburn Pacific Highway Upgrade will create a **SIGNIFICANT IMPACT** upon koala populations. Very limited field surveys undertaken for the assessment of route options have failed to locate any koalas in areas known to support high density (core) populations. A far greater effort is required to assess the presence, density and habitat utilisation patterns of koalas in the study area, before any sound decisions can be made in relation to impacts upon koala populations.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Vass
President
Friends of the Koala, Inc
17 August 2005