

**INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Lemon Tree Passage Parks, Reserves and Landcare Group

Date Received: 23 July 2019

22nd July 2019

Submission to NSW Parliament Inquiry into koala populations and habitat in New South Wales.

Lemon Tree Passage Parks, Reserves and Landcare Group is a small group of volunteers (approximately 15 members), in the Port Stephens region of NSW. The parks and reserves we work in are home to a small koala population.

Since 2003 we've been building knowledge and collecting data on local koalas. We've identified individual's markings, noted the dates between sightings of the same koala and tracked their movements through the area. Many sightings of koalas occurred in the same tree i.e. they seem to have favourites. Most koala sightings have been recorded in koala feed trees (especially eucalyptus robusta and terreticornis), but they've also been seen in non-feed trees such as casuarina. In 2018, a female with a joey was sighted. We noticed when the joey was young, they seemed to spend a lot of time in the melaleucas.

Some of our members are also members of Port Stephens Koalas who've been involved in rescues of sick koalas and re-located koalas when they are at risk e.g. being in the middle of the town.

We're not aware of any koala deaths due to dog attack or cars in Lemon Tree Passage for the last 10 years, but in the last five years we know of 5 koalas that have died from disease.

Over the last 16 years, we've noticed a decline in the numbers of koalas seen, both anecdotally and in reference to records submitted to Port Stephens Koalas, on the Atlas of Living Australia and Port Stephens Council's Koala Map. We believe the reduction in sightings is mostly due to the reduction in suitable habitat available for the local koala population, caused by the following:

- * A large area of adjacent bushland in the nearby town of Tanilba Bay (ironically named Koala Bay Estate) was developed for housing.
- * Many of the fences in Lemon Tree Passage have been changed from timber to the colorbond type that koalas cannot climb and this restricts access to many food trees in people yards and their ability to move through their home range.
- * Severe storms, especially the 2015 "super storm", brought down many mature trees in Lemon Tree Passage.
- * In the following 18 months Port Stephens Council allowed the removal of trees close to houses, without requiring pre-approval.
- * Erosion of the foreshore has caused large trees to fall, especially in Koala Reserve, Rudd Reserve and Kooindah Park. Salt water inundation and flooding of parks has killed trees growing away from the water's edge.
- * Two separate bush fires in 2018, burnt out many hectares of adjacent bushland.

Along with other Landcare groups in Port Stephens, our tree planting and bush regeneration projects focus on improving and connecting habitat but we have serious concerns for the future of koalas in Lemon Tree Passage.

Recently, our group participated in the Office of Environment and Heritage Wildlife Research survey and we realised we have gathered a lot of knowledge of the koalas living in our backyard. Still, we despair that the simple, small steps we are taking are not enough and it will be too late to save them.

Co-ordinator Lemon Tree Passage Parks, Reserves and Landcare Group