

**Submission  
No 80**

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

**Organisation:** Tilligerry Habitat Association

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I am a volunteer at The Tilligerry Habitat, a 9 hectare Crown Lands Reserve managed by the Tilligerry Habitat Association. We receive approximately 500 visitors a month, half this number are from overseas and have made the journey to our reserve with the sole purpose of seeing a koala in the wild.

For the past four years I have been responsible for logging all live koala sightings in the Tilligerry Habitat and submitting the information to Port Stephens Koalas, who in turn add the sightings to the national database. When I first started to record the sightings koalas were regularly spotted in all areas of the Habitat, many appeared to be passing through using the Tanilba Bay Sailing Club, the foreshore boardwalk and Caswell Reserve as their route through. These were often koalas we did not recognise and only saw once or twice before they, presumably, carried on their way.

Now we generally see the same couple of koalas, one very old female who stays near our visitor centre and a male who ranges around the eastern end of the Habitat and rarely any others. These findings were borne out by the recent drone survey over the area carried out by the Office of Environment and Heritage which found three koalas one day and two the next.

When trying to attribute reasons for this decline I would point to two particular problems:

1. Loose dogs.

The area has a real issue with dogs off lead or just allowed to roam the neighbourhood. We know a newly released koala was killed by a dog within days of being back in the wild a couple of years ago and loose dogs cause stress to koalas and humans alike. Koala deaths caused by dogs are usually only reported when witnessed by someone other than the dog owner. As a result of repeated reports to the ranger about an aggressive, free roaming dog in the Habitat, I spoke to the ranger only yesterday (28.7.19) and asked about the possibility of occasional patrols with fines being levied for off lead dogs, this does not have to happen very often for word to get around on social media.

2. Loss of Habitat.

Port Stephens Council's relaxed policy for residential tree removal means that most days we hear trees being felled in the streets around Tanilba Bay and our home in Lemon Tree Passage. This leaves the koala corridors disjointed making it difficult for them to travel freely and find mates and is almost certainly a factor in the change in sighting patterns in the Tilligerry Habitat. Programmes to replace felled trees with new planting do nothing to alleviate the immediate problem as it takes approximately thirty years for a Eucalyptus Robusta to reach the size needed to become a koala food tree.