

**Submission
No 330**

INQUIRY INTO KOALA POPULATIONS AND HABITAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Clarence Valley Council

Date Received: 20 March 2020

Good afternoon

Clarence Valley Council wishes for you to consider this late submission to the *Parliament of New South Wales Inquiry into Koala populations and habitat*. It is understood that the inquiry is no longer receiving submissions, but Council feels it is relevant to provide detail on its active involvement in koala conservation. This is demonstrated through the implementation of our draft *Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for Ashby, Iluka & Woombah*. Additionally, programs such as the koala register <https://www.clarenceconversations.com.au/koalaregister>, and community education through our Project Officer highlights our work in this area.

The following comments are offered in response to the terms of reference:

(a) the status of koala populations and koala habitat in New South Wales, including trends, key threats, resource availability, adequacy of protections and areas for further research,

- Some koala populations in the Clarence have been recognised by Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) as under threat, through the mapping of ‘areas of regional koala significance’.
- Council was successful in gaining a \$100,000 education grant from the NSW Environmental Trust for koalas and emus in the Clarence. This project has launched community engagement programs through the employment of a project officer for the duration of the two year project which is due to finish in September 2020 (outcomes for project to date noted in section (f) below).
- Monitoring via our ‘Koalas in the Clarence Valley’ engagement page has revealed individual populations of koalas in areas that previously showed very few sightings. Lawrence is one particular area that has seen an increase in koala records, where a local resident has provided over 800 sightings of more than 10 individuals in the last 18 months, where previously only 14 sightings existed on the NSW Wildlife Atlas (BioNet).
- The lack of reliable vegetation mapping has restricted the identification of potential koala habitat. This is coupled with a lack of support and associated funding from State government to aid Council in the development of suitable scale mapping in order to identify habitat and support the protection of koalas on private land.

(b) the impacts on koalas and koala habitat from: (i) the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals and Regional Forest Agreements, (ii) the Private Native Forestry Code of Practice, (iii) the old growth forest remapping and rezoning program, (iv) the 2016 land management reforms, including the Local Land Services Amendment Act 2016 and associated regulations and codes

- Council has no comment on this terms of reference at this time

(c) the effectiveness of State Environmental Planning Policy 44 - Koala Habitat Protection, the NSW Koala Strategy and the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, including the threatened species provisions and associated regulations, in protecting koala habitat and responding to key threats,

- Council prepared a *Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for Ashby, Iluka and Woombah* that was adopted in 2015 by Council, and the recommendations incorporated into the relevant DCP’s. This was despite the plan being rejected by DPIE due to the differences in recognised preferred koala feed trees for the Clarence and those listed on SEPP 44. This excluded the majority of our Council area from being identified as ‘core koala habitat’ under that SEPP (now replaced by the Koala SEPP). The inability to formally recognise

areas in our region as ‘core koala habitat’ due to the differences in PFKT in the Clarence on private land is a hindrance to protecting the local koala populations from development.

- Although there are relatively few Clarence Valley specific research reports, recent research into koalas around Waterview Heights near Grafton, revealed Clarence koalas exhibit a range of unique and specific needs that differ from neighbouring LGA’s. These differences can be attributed to low nutrient soils which result in slower growing poorer nutrient trees, and coupled with widespread historic land clearing has resulted in a landscape that has a low carrying capacity for koalas. The timeframe in the Clarence for a suitable PFKT to become palatable is estimated to be up to 15 years (I.e. when the tree grows to 30 cm diameter at breast height).
- The low carrying capacity, and the delay in palatability of PFKT has implications for securing koala populations when habitat is under threat. For example where KPOMs are produced as part a development application that plans to remove habitat, management strategies that rely on offsetting the loss of habitat through compensatory planting, can easily result in habitat loss and resultant population decline, due to the delay in the palatability of trees, regardless of recommending replanting ratios of 10:1.
- Similarly, historical land clearance has resulted in a sparsely vegetated landscape, exposing koalas to threats from dogs and cars when coming to ground to access other trees. Therefore the clearing of even individual trees can have an enormous impact on Clarence koalas, as they are forced to travel even further on the ground to access suitable habitat. This kind of clearing is not covered by the SEPP.

(d) identification of key areas of koala habitat on private and public land that should be protected, including areas currently at risk of logging or clearing, and the likely impacts of climate change on koalas and koala distribution,

- The identification of key habitat is currently restricted in the Clarence due to lack of adequate scale vegetation mapping, and lack of scientific studies into the Clarence population of koalas which differ significantly from neighbouring Council areas due to the differences in rainfall, soils, and vegetation types.
- Council’s koala education project including the koala register has highlighted the widespread occurrence of koalas across our LGA, including those on private land. A review of state government support given to council’s to help protect koalas on private land, including incentives for habitat improvement and protection, needs to be undertaken.
- The Clarence as yet has not been offered landholder incentives to conserve koala habitat on private land from the Biodiversity Conservation Trust, but neighbouring Councils such as Lismore have been offered these incentives.

(e) the environmental, social and economic impacts of establishing new protected areas to conserve koala habitat, including national parks, and

- Post widespread fires in NSW, it is essential that a diversity of locations of protected areas are developed across a variety of landscapes and vegetation types, to protect populations from the impacts of climate change.
- There is identified interest from community members to assist with koala conservation, and community assistance should be included as a valid management strategy. The community feel very strongly regarding the management of protected areas, and could provide much needed on ground support in a variety of capacities.

(f) any other related matter.

- There is a growing need to increase the capacity of existing local community nurseries to assist in growing local provenance koala food trees for replanting in the Clarence Valley.

- Council is implementing an Environmental Trust project to support education and awareness actions which have strengthened support for the conservation of koalas throughout the LGA, and aids in further defining where core habitat is through the koala register. Outcomes to date include:
 - Coordination of koala and wild dog monitoring with wildlife detection cameras.
 - Management of the koala register, including compilation of data, analysis of records and quarterly upload to BioNet.
 - Educational film produced by a local photographer, reaching 251 people.
 - 17 Community engagement events, training sessions or public briefings, with an impact of 544 people; including Register launch events, SAT Training, Koala Food Tree Identification.
 - 12 educational products, reaching 2877 people; including information pamphlets, koala food tree identification booklet, landholder letters, community survey, online news articles, CVC website updates.
 - 5 CVC community newsletters to rate payers with koala content reaching 19,000 people.
 - 7 Social media posts with 85 interactions.
 - 1 media release reaching over 36,000 people via newspaper articles, radio interviews and online print.
 - Case study submitted for use and attendance at Domestic Dog Interactions with Wildlife (DPIE workshop) targeting reducing impacts of dogs on koalas.
 - Development of online case study about the koala project on DPIE Koala Country website (awaiting approval for publication).
 - Working with Lawrence community to support protection of koala food trees in the Lawrence power alignment upgrade.
 - Support for contacting landholders for koala likelihood mapping by Biodiversity Australia.
 - Mapping of koala habitat in GIS to develop knowledge within Council that could form the basis of an LGA-wide Plan of Management, pairing against other known vegetation and sighting layers for understanding ecology for koalas.
 - Sourcing and coordinating additional funds from Saving our Species regarding community engagement around koala food tree identification and habitat needs of koalas.

Thank you for considering this submission, and for further information you may contact _____, NRM Officer or _____, Project Officer on _____.

Yours faithfully
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