

## Minutes of the Tweed Coast Koala Management Committee Meeting held Tuesday 8 December 2020

### Venue:

Council Chambers, Murwillumbah Civic Centre

### Time:

2.00pm

### Present:

Cr Katie Milne, Simon Dawson, Bill Hoskins, Rhonda James, Lorraine Vass, Scott Hetherington, Jo Green, Mark Kingston, Marama Hopkins, Tracey Stinson.

### Apologies:

Jenny Hayes.

Scott opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country.

### Minutes of Previous Meeting:

**Moved:** Lorraine Vass

**Seconded:** Rhonda James

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Tweed Coast Koala Management Committee meeting held Tuesday 3 December 2019 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings of that meeting.

### Actions carried over:

#### **OA1. Identification of sites for koala food tree plantations**

Marama to draft memo to Director Engineering requesting the identification of any sites that may be suitable for the establishment of a koala food tree plantation. The specifications and draft terms of agreement, should there be suitable sites, will be included to inform consideration of the request.

**Status:** *Further discussions have been held with Director Engineering and some potential road reserve and council land locations have been proposed for further investigation.*

#### **OA2. Koala drinkers**

Lorraine to investigate and report back on the current plans for installation and maintenance of the Friends of the Koala drinkers.

**Status:** Initial information provided by Lorraine - 30 have been installed in Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore and Richmond Valley on a variety of tenures; and a report is in preparation. The project is now being managed through 'Saving our Species' program.

**Action:** *Scott to contact Billie Roberts (DPIE) and find out current status, use and potential for application on the Tweed Coast.*

#### **OA3. Site visit – Lot 919 Pottsville**

Scott to arrange a site visit with Tracey and Rhonda to discuss the overall site management of Lot 919 and progress of the Friends of Cudgen Reserve Environmental Trust project

**Status:** An initial arrangement was made in March but cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

**Action:** *Scott to arrange for first committee meeting of 2021 to be held at the Pottsville site.*

#### **OA4. Letter to NSW Police**

Scott to draft a letter to NSW Police on behalf of the Mayor requesting enforcement of the speed limits in the koala zone on Clothiers Creek Road

**Status:** Complete.

#### **OA5. Visit to Port Macquarie koala hospital**

Arrange for a sub-group of the committee to visit Port Macquarie Koala Hospital after the current fire season to investigate fire preparedness and response strategies.

**Status:** To be completed. Discussion confirmed an ongoing interest in this site visit and also the requirement for analysis and clarification of any changes and implications likely arising out of the 2019-20 bushfire enquiry.

**Action:** *Scott to contact Cheyne Flanagan at Port Macquarie Koala Hospital and discuss potential visit.*

**Action:** *Scott to compile analysis of relevant implications of the bushfire enquiry for distribution and/or discussion.*

#### **OA6. Vandalism – Pottsville Wetlands**

Scott to report Caroline Street issues to Rangers and request inclusion of this location in scheduled patrols.

**Status:** Complete.

#### **Business Arising:**

##### **BA1. Resignation of committee member**

Scott advised that he had received notification from David Norris of his resignation from the committee due to personal reasons and that he had responded to David's email offering thanks on behalf of the committee.

##### **BA2. New KPOM project staff**

Scott introduced Jo Green who has been appointed for 12 months (from September 2020) to deliver the habitat restoration actions of the Tweed Coast KPOM.

Scott also advised that a second full time 12 month position has also been approved and an officer identified (but not yet confirmed). This position's role is to assist with the wrap up of the 2015 KPOM actions, compile and analyse outcomes and share good news and lessons learned. This position is scheduled to commence in February 2021.

##### **BA3. Successful ARC Linkage grant application**

Scott advised that a \$372,498 grant has just been received for the project – *Private Land Conservation in a Dynamically Changing and Risky World*. This project is a three year extension of a current project funded through the NSW Koala Strategy Research program.

The current project partners are University of Queensland, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Biodiversity Conservation Trust and Tweed Shire Council. This project aims to generate new knowledge about the effect of climate change on adoption and outcomes of private land conservation agreements. It will use an innovative social-ecological approach focused on koalas. Expected outcomes include an innovative framework to help make decisions about private land conservation investments under climate change. This should provide significant benefits for government and non-government organisations by providing solutions to climate-proof their conservation investments on private land in a rapidly changing world.

#### **BA4. Recommended land acquisition – Clothiers Creek Road**

Scott advised that the landowner of Lot 2 Clothiers Creek Road had the property listed seeking EOIs for purchase until 2 December 2020. Representations have been made by council and community members to the NSW Minister for Environment recommending that the land be purchased and added to the Cudgen Nature Reserve. Marama advised that NSW DPIE officers had been in contact seeking further details about koala activity and habitat on the site.

#### **Agenda Items:**

##### **A1. Habitat restoration actions**

Jo provided an overview of the current and planned habitat restoration projects being funded through the KPOM. This includes:

- Jo has contacted 30 initial landowners in high priority locations which resulted in 11 site visits and 5 project sites now underway. A number of adjoining landowners at Durambah and two at Pottsville have joined the program.
- Jo is also managing a 2.6ha restoration project in Cudgen Nature Reserve (Johannsen's), funded through a KPOM development offset. A request for quote has been issued for restoration contractors and a contractor has been engaged to complete necessary access track upgrades and maintenance.

##### **A2. Tweed Coast KPOM and SEPP status**

Mark provided an update on the status of the Tweed Coast KPOM and the current situation with SEPP Koala Habitat Protection 2019.

The SEPP Koala Habitat Protection 2019 and Guidelines generated significant political and media interest due to amendments to the SEPP made and the LLS Amendment Bill proposed.

Significant consequences for councils and koalas were evident including exempting Private Native Forestry from the SEPP, preventing councils from having a land use decision making role with regard to any forestry operations, allowing for some clearing in E-zones and all other currently protected SEPP lands (including coastal wetland and littoral rainforest under the Coastal Management SEPP). The bill did not get passed in the Upper House and has been referred to Parliamentary Committee and amendments made to revert to the 1995 SEPP44.

**Action:** *Mark to contact Catherine Cusack MLC to provide a briefing and discuss opportunities to assist with getting the Tweed Coast KPOM approved.*

### **A3. Kings Forest status update**

Mark provided an overview of the current planning and approvals status of the Kings Forest development proposal:

- After 22 versions of the KPOM, now close to finalising another 20 management plans prior to issuing of construction certificate.
- Offset plantings are required to be commenced before bulk earthworks (includes 22ha on the site known as 'Turners Land').
- A submission is in preparation to the Independent Pricing and Regulation Tribunal regarding the proposed special rate to cover the management plan implementation costs.

### **A4. Project update – Saving our Species regional koala conservation and recovery**

Nine properties have been approved for conservation agreements by BCT with site assessments and site values reports in preparation (represents more than 300ha of land in the areas of highest regional significance for koalas).

Assisting WWF with identification of sites for projects including voluntary acquisition, drone seeding and habitat restoration.

Habitat restoration actions funded in Byron Shire and road strike mitigation actions in Lismore City also underway

### **A5. Project update – Pottsville koala facility, site restoration and management**

- Facility construction now complete.
- Council and National Trust Association Queensland (NTAQ) (for Currumbin Wildlife Hospital [CWH]) finalising Memorandum of Understanding for operation of the facility and lease/licence arrangements.
- CWH finalising NSW wildlife licensing and veterinary approvals.
- Operational costs for years 1 and 2 secured through NTAQ and WWF.
- Working towards commencing operations in early 2021.
- Tree plantation now being maintained by Council.
- Friends of Cudgen NR project progressing extremely well.

### **A6. Project update – proposed regional koala conservation strategy**

- Proposal sent to NSW Minister seeking funding for 5 year program incorporating development of the regional strategy, 3 yearly activity monitoring and part time regional coordination.
- WWF also interested in opportunity to invest in these actions to assist with coordination and prioritisation of their projects.
- Proposal also sent to Federal Minister for Environment after announcement of \$18M funding for koalas in late November.

### **General Business:**

#### **GB1. Vote of thanks**

Thanks from Tracey for patience, ongoing support and contributions throughout the year.

#### **GB2. 'Paper road' road reserves**

Katie raised the issue of looking further into 'paper road' road reserves in the TCKPOM area and their potential for koala habitat revegetation of food tree plantation locations.

# Minutes

**Action:** *Marama to prepare a map of 'paper road' road reserves on the Tweed Coast for distribution amongst the committee and further discussion at the next meeting.*

## **Next Meeting:**

A proposed meeting schedule for 2021 is provided below:

Tuesday 9 February 2021: 2.00 – 3.30pm (on site at Pottsville koala facility)

Tuesday 11 May 2021: 2.00 – 3.30pm

Tuesday 10 August 2021: 2.00 - 3.30pm

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.

## **Action summary:**

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**Action:** Scott to contact Billie Roberts (DPIE) and find out current status, use and potential for application on the Tweed Coast.

**Action:** Scott to arrange for first committee meeting of 2021 to be held at the Pottsville site.

**Action:** Scott to contact Cheyne Flanagan at Port Macquarie Koala Hospital and discuss potential visit.

**Action:** Scott to compile analysis of relevant implications of the bushfire enquiry for distribution and/or discussion.

**Action:** Mark to contact Catherine Cusack MLC to provide a briefing and discuss opportunities to assist with getting the Tweed Coast KPOM approved.

**Action:** Marama to prepare a map of 'paper road' road reserves on the Tweed Coast for distribution amongst the committee and further discussion at the next meeting.

## **EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S COMMENTS:**

## **EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS:**

## **Tweed Coast Koala Management Committee update 05 May 2020**

### **Kings Forest**

- Bushfire management plan is the current focus. Expert fire ecologist engaged by consultants to prepare the plan. Highly significant and complex body of work ensuring long term habitat persistence and condition through integration of appropriate fire management actions to overall site design and management.

### **Habitat restoration**

- 2 new private land sites on Tweed Coast identified and planning work commenced.
- Planning and preliminary habitat restoration works commenced for council owned Cudgerie Reserve at Cudgera Creek.
- Continuation of koala habitat restoration works at Pottsville Wetland, Pottsville Environment Park, Koala Beach and Hastings Point Waste Water Treatment Plant.
- Ongoing support to Friends of Cudgen Nature Reserve to implement *"Friends conserving koala habitat and connectivity on the Tweed Coast"* Environmental Trust grant at Lot 919, Koala Beach
- Supported Tweed Landcare Inc Environmental Trust grant delivery through in-kind support for 7 ha of koala habitat restoration works on Round Mountain private land site.

### **Pottsville koala holding facility**

- Development consent granted 29 April
- Requests for quotes on construction to be advertised and assessed during May
- Services construction to commence 01 June
- Bulk earthworks and road works to commence 08 June
- Land swap finalisation imminent with NPWS land gazetted as part of Cudgen Nature Reserve

### **State Environmental Planning Policy Koala Habitat 2019**

- Submission on draft guidelines made
- Tweed Coast KPOM submitted for approval under clause 17 of the new SEPP. Included submission of updated koala habitat mapping.

### **Monitoring**

- Marama and Tanya continued SAT assessments of planting sites. Includes training Byron Shire Council staff in method.

### **NE Hinterland koala habitat and recovery project**

- Ongoing interest and progress with voluntary conservation agreements in all shires.

### **Fire management**

- Funding secured through the Australian Government Bushfire Recovery and Resilience funding for hazard reduction burns in council bushland reserves, including to reduce risk to koalas and their habitat

## Research projects

- ARC Linkage project wrapping up – regional conservation strategy framework in preparation and funding opportunities being explored
- Koala conservation on private land – landholder survey currently live and being completed throughout study area and an ARC Linkage grant application has been submitted for additional 2 years research funding.

## Other FYI

- Council's draft Climate Change Policy – *Net Zero by 2030* is currently on public exhibition until Monday 18 May and we would really like to encourage you to provide your feedback. The draft policy provides information about Council's role as a community leader in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and assisting the community to do the same. Council has stepped up its response to climate change by laying a firm policy foundation for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting the Tweed to the impacts of climate change. Council has set an aspirational target to reach net zero emissions from its operations by 2030. You can have your say and make a formal submission on the draft policy at [www.yoursaytweed.com.au/climatechange](http://www.yoursaytweed.com.au/climatechange).
- 10,000 koala food trees will be provided by the NSW Saving our Species program for a koala food tree plantation used by Currumbin Wildlife Hospital and Wildcare Australia. Council has assisted to facilitate this given the role of Currumbin Wildlife Hospital in treatment and rehabilitation of northern NSW koalas.
- Regional koala communications group met in April:
  - New vet commenced at Friends of Koala (FoK) and having positive outcomes already. New equipment/facilities (incl. portable x-ray, rapid chlamydia test) also acquired
  - Future Councillor workshop to update on FoK/comms group work proposed for all councils
  - DPIE carrying out post-fire surveys which are returning good occupancy levels in various southern locations
  - New guidelines (roads, habitat restoration etc.) to be published soon on Koala Strategy website.
  - Ballina developing a koala toolbox/info session for roadworks crews, well received by staff, to be shared around other councils when complete.
- Funding bid submitted through Australian Government COVID-19 stimulus package to replace failing koala fence on Tweed Coast Road and install 'Koala Zone' road stencils at 2 koala black spots identified in the Tweed Coast KPOM.



## **Tweed Coast Koala Management Committee update 19 June 2020**

### **Koala habitat planting use assessments**

- Koala activity assessments completed for four planting sites on public land so far. To continue at other sites in coming months, and sites to be included in future Tweed Coast habitat studies (next monitoring event due in 2021).
- Significant koala activity recorded at all sites.
- SAT survey method training provided to two Byron Shire Council staff.

### **Pottsville koala holding facility**

- Utilities have been installed and the building pad cleared.
- Bulk earthworks (access road, construction pad and other earth moving) commenced Monday 15 June.
- Assessment of tenders for shed construction in progress.
- Operational budget in development in collaboration with Currumbin Wildlife Hospital.
- Food tree plantation well established.



Image: food tree plantation (1800 trees) at Pottsville, June 2020.

### **Koala habitat restoration**

- Contracts issued for site maintenance of koala habitat plantings for remainder of 2020.
- Planning work commenced on 2.5 ha habitat revegetation project at Cudgen Nature Reserve.
- Site action plan in preparation to guide restoration works during 2020/21 for priority private landholder site at Duranbah.
- Friends of Cudgen Nature Reserve restoration and rehabilitation grant project progressing successfully including planted habitat trees and restoration areas.
- Update of Koala Beach Habitat Restoration Plan commenced, incorporating the inclusion of the Council portion of 'Lot 919'.



### **Additional koala food tree plantation**

- Proposal prepared for Director Engineering and follow-up meeting held.
- Planting on Kingscliff Wastewater Treatment Plant not supported, but other potential sites identified and to be investigated.

### **Regional projects**

- 11 conservation agreements under negotiation through the North East Hinterland regional project. Collaboration with the other regions also funded through this program (Port Macquarie-Hastings and Wingacaribee) on the development of a standardised monitoring method and program underway.
- Framework and funding proposal for the development of a regional koala conservation strategy in preparation through the ARC Linkage project.
- Community survey complete and first 3 papers in preparation for the NSW Koala Strategy Research program project. An ARC Linkage application to extend this project has also been submitted.

### **Pottsville Environment Park HR burn**

- Follow-up vegetation monitoring in progress (10 months post-burn).
- Koala activity present in all plots (n=5) assessed so far.

### **Dunloe Park urban land use area**

- No information or progress has been provided by the proponents, nor council planning staff.



Image: Friends of Cudgen Nature Reserve koala habitat planting, June 2020

## **Tweed Coast koala management committee update September 2020**

### **Pottsville koala holding facility**

- Food tree plantation has completed initial 12 month maintenance period. Well established and now to be maintained by council.
- Construction commenced – footings for slab being installed week commencing Monday 14 September; access road, construction pad and all site works completed.
- Operational budget prepared in collaboration with Currumbin Wildlife Hospital.
- Invitations to invest in operational costs have been issued to NSW state government Koala Policy division and through the National Trust / Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary Foundation.
- Transfer of land from NSW NPWS now fully complete.
- Evidence of koala use recorded in restoration plantings at the site.



Image: Pottsville koala holding facility site pad ready for construction September 2020

### **Duranbah fire**

- Bushfire incident at Duranbah burnt 298 ha north of Clothiers Creek Rd, including into Cudgen Nature Reserve at Forest Hill in late August.
- Council maintained contact with NSW RFS, NPWS, Friends of the Koala and Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers throughout the fire and inspected the site immediately after the event.
- Based on NPWS advice and the site inspection, it was positive to confirm that there was very limited canopy damage in forested areas. The inundation of the paperbark forest due to rain in the previous weeks seems to have limited the intensity of the fire in these areas.
- No direct impacts on koalas were able to be determined, although there was a number of koala road incidents nearby in the days following the fire that may be related.



## **Koala road incidents and mortalities**

- A number of koala road strikes occurred in late August at Clothiers Creek Rd and on the M1 at Chinderah
- Council responded with the installation of an additional mobile variable message sign, update of the messages on the two fixed variable message signs, installation of temporary 'koala ahead' road signs and distribution of a media release and social media posts.
- NSW Police also contributed through assigning a police officer with a speed radar.



Image: Temporary koala ahead road warning signage installed on Clothiers Creek Rd

- Information has also been provided to NSW RMS and Geoff Provest to identify the significance of the issue on the M1 at Chinderah. The situation at this location is:
  - There is quite good quality koala habitat on the northern (river) side of the M1 at Chinderah. It is all on private land and is quite limited in extent, but includes a lot of large preferred koala habitat trees.
  - The habitat on the southern (Kingscliff) side of the highway is not as good quality, though would certainly have formed part of overall habitat extent at some point in time and continues to improve in condition.
  - The fencing along the M1 through this section is incidental only and comprises a mix of RMS sound abatement walls and fencing, together with fences on private landholdings.
  - This results in koalas being able to readily access the M1 but then finding themselves restricted from being able to get out of the roadway safely. I suspect the limited habitat on the northern side and the physical barrier of the river to the north increases the likelihood of koalas trying to move southward in this location.
  - There is also no lighting on the M1 north of the BP Chinderah. Given large trucks will be regularly travelling at speed in the left hand lane through this area, the risk of koalas being hit is significantly increased.

- Most of this information was provided to RMS in a report they commissioned Biolink to prepare in 2015. Council has submitted several direct requests to RMS for the matter to be addressed, generally in response to each of the 5 koalas killed at this location since 2015.
- Our assessment of the required actions at this location are:
  - A detailed assessment and implementation of fencing and connectivity options that intentionally and effectively excludes koalas from the motorway, and provides an alternate option to move north to south.
  - Given the topography at this location, an overpass is likely the only viable option to achieve this connectivity.
  - Installation of lighting in the meantime to ensure good visibility.

#### **Proposed Far North Coast Regional Koala Conservation Strategy**

- A proposal has been drafted for submission to NSW DPIE and Minister Matt Kean seeking funding for the preparation of a Far North Coast Regional Koala Conservation Strategy. The strategy will be based on the outcomes of the ARC Linkage grant research project and will also include ongoing three yearly regional koala activity monitoring as per the 2018 survey, with the next monitoring event to be undertaken in 2021.

#### **General business**

- There has been significant koala activity, including many rescues and some releases throughout late August and September. This has included incidents at Terranora, Banora Point and Norries Headland at Cabarita.
- The KPOM team have been liaising with NSW DPIE on including the Tweed Coast and Far North Coast koala activity monitoring as sites under the NSW draft Koala Monitoring Framework.
- Council is still waiting on feedback and/or approval from DPIE for the Tweed Coast KPOM under the 2019 Koala SEPP that was submitted for consideration on 01 March 2020.
- Worked with Northern Rivers councils, DPIE and FoK to deliver Koala Habitat Restoration Summit. Planning for centralised register of habitat restoration project data across the region commenced.
- Joeys reported from Pottsville Environment Park, Cudgen NR at Tamarind Ave.