



Caldera Environment Centre Inc.

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Koala Strategy Submissions
PO Box A290
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3rd March 2017

Draft Saving Our Species Iconic Koala Project.

Caldera Environment Centre (CEC) has been established in Tweed Shire for the past 25 years to promote the protection of the environment. Tweed Shire is an area of high diversity of native flora and fauna, Koala conservation has been a focus of continued CEC campaigns. Within the coastal areas of the Tweed and Byron Shires Koala numbers have been declining rapidly. CEC has supported Tweed Shire Council through the Koala Connections project and has a representative on the Tweed Coast Koala Management Committee. CEC also supports our local Koala rehabilitation group Friends of the Koala.

We complement the Minister for initiating the recommendation of the Scientific Committee to undertake the five year project to guide Koala management through the Priority Action Statement. Unfortunately the implementation of the funded projects for 2016 -17 were late coming on board and there has been some confusion as to the allocation of funds to local government areas. This has gone in hand with reduced environmental protection through the adoption of the Biodiversity Conservation Act and OEH restructure with significant changes in staffing.

We are still unsure of the intended allocation and prioritisation of Government funds to be spent on Koala conservation over the five year period.

The koala populations throughout the Northern Rivers region vary greatly from small fragmented populations in or adjacent to urban areas through to more viable populations in the more secure larger areas of reserves and adjacent private land. In Tweed and northern Byron east of the Pacific Highway was declared endangered by the NSW Scientific Committee in April 2016. This population has received some funding through Koala Connections and Councils but requires further habitat protection and expansion. The Northern Rivers regions is densely populated and large residential developments (Kings Forest, Cobaki Lakes, Dunloe Park and West Byron) are proceeding and will have huge impacts on the Koala populations.

CEC generally supports the Chief Scientists recommendation in the "Report of the Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Key Areas for NSW".



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Unfortunately the Report's recommendations fall short of stopping the key, overarching cause of koala collapse which is anthropogenically-induced changes to habitat to which these iconic animals have little or no time to adapt.

Recommendations to which we specifically comment are listed below;

Recommendation 3

That Government publish a state-wide predictive koala habitat map within three years of receipt of this report, with immediate priority given to improving coverage of the north coast.

CEC support the preparation of the predictive mapping which were informed at the community information session should be completed by mid 2017. We do have concerns that this mapping may not identify important areas of Koala habitat that form fragmented links to core habitat e.g stands of Camphor Laurel, plantings and paddock trees. We recommend that the Koala habitat map for the Northern Rivers includes these areas.

Recommendation 5

That Government improve outcomes for koalas through the Biodiversity Conservation Bill and associated Regulations

CEC has concerns that this legislation will improve outcomes for Koalaas.

We support the recommendations as proposed by Friends of the Koala;

- Government exempts koala habitat from code-based clearing under the Biodiversity Conservation Act and associated Regulations.

Failing that:

- The Biodiversity Conservation Act and associated Regulations protect koala habitat by:
 - (a) Ensuring that koala habitat maps are suitable for use through the Act and Regulations
 - (b) Ensuring that koala habitat is included in Category 2 (Regulated Land) on the native vegetation regulatory map and identifying and implementing appropriate controls
 - (c) Including predictive koala habitat and likelihood of koala occupancy information in the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) threshold sensitive values map
 - (d) Including impacts on the best quality koala habitat as 'serious and irreversible impacts'
 - (e) Including koalas in the monitoring programs to be established under the legislation.

Recommendation 7

That Government agencies identify priority areas of land across tenures to target for koala conservation management and threat mitigation

We support this recommendation in principle and we agree that the Northern Rivers be given priority.

In regard to identifying additions to the NPWS estate, CEC has been contacted by a representative of the National Parks Association and support the areas within the Northern Rivers identified in *Blueprint*



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for a comprehensive reserve system for koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) on the North Coast of New South Wales (2015) being;

- *Western Border Ranges, subject to the agreement of the Native Title holders, covering 32,234ha over thirteen state forests including Beaury, Richmond Range, Mt Lindesay, Unumgar and Yabbra which is estimated to support over 1,000 koalas. This proposal will help to link seven existing World Heritage properties and a recognised biodiversity hotspot;*
- *Sandy Creek National Park comprising Carwong and part of Royal Camp State Forests near Casino to protect 2,100ha of logged forest estimated to contain 50-200 koalas.*
- *Tweed Coastal Range National Park covering 2550ha of habitat for the endangered Tweed-Brunswick Rivers koala population of approximately 140 animals.*

CEC considers that the purchase of private land should be included to extend the NPWS estate and that the current amount of \$10 million over five years is inadequate particularly considering land prices on the north coast.

Recommendation 10

That Government facilitate the exchange of information among land managers, local government, the research community and the broader community.

CEC recommend the inclusion of key environmental and rehabilitation groups.

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We support the state wide actions listed below and make comment where relevant.

1. Support for licensed koala rehabilitation providers

CEC supports funding and support be provided to Friends of Koala who so professionally manage Koala rehabilitation in the Northern Rivers region of NSW.

2. Status and management of koalas in the NSW National Parks Estate

Park-precinct development and optimising use of park assets to be achieved by encouraging private investment, adapting existing facilities and creating new tourism and visitor experiences, is a state-wide OEH target for 2016-17.

NPWS estate in the Northern Rivers region is utilised for many activities. No doubt OEH has data on the usage of reserves and those which support Koala population. High usage reserves such as Wollumbin NP have known Koala populations on the lower flanks of the reserve. Although the current high visitor usage which is generally restricted to the summit track is unlikely to impact on the Koala population, expansion of tourism on the lower adjacent slopes could impact on Koala habitat. Similarly in other NPWS estate the introduction of private enterprise and tourism could increase impacts. The current OEH mapping which is in progress



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at present is supported by CEC but needs to be complemented by a sound understanding of the usage of the habitat by Koalas. In coastal Tweed and Byron Shires there is detailed mapping of Koala habitat and intensity of occupation whereas in the west of the shires information is limited.

3. Koala Citizen Science Community of Practice

CEC understands that the Koala Citizen Science Community of Practice is an OEH undertaking which is supported by the Saving our Species program although not presently funded. This program could be funded from the SOS Iconic Species project.

CEC generally support the recommendations in the Tweed Coast Koala Plan of Management and our continued representation on this committee. CEC has a good relationship with Council and support the implementation of the KPOM.

Regards

Rhonda James
Co-ordinator