

MEETING NOTES

MidCoast Koala Reference Group

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| Date | 3 June 2024 | Time | 11:00 – 1:00pm |
| Venue | Barrington Room, Yalawanyi Ganya | Note-taker | Tanya Cross |
| Present | Gerard Tuckerman (MCC), Mat Bell (MCC), Tanya Cross (MCC), Reegan Walker (DCCEEW), Rebecca Montague-Drake (DCCEEW), Mandy Wisperreit (Crown Lands), Doug Beckers (NPWS), Wade Lancett (TIDE), Daniel Trudgeon (LLS), Ian Morphett, Chris Sheed, Megan Benson, Paul McLeod, Cheyne Flanagan, Deborah Willis | | |
| Apologies | Cr Claire Pontin, Cr Dheera Smith, Cr Peter Epov, Paul De Szell (MCC), Caitlin Orr (MCC), Phil Lidbury, Henrietta Mooney (Landcare), Shaun Tamplin | | |

Meeting Items

| Item | Key points/actions |
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| 1 | <p>Welcome, Apologies & Acknowledgement of Country</p> <p>As Cr Pontin was ill, Gerard Tuckerman chaired the meeting. Gerard noted the apologies to the meeting and read the Acknowledgement of Country.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Draft Local Environmental Plan (LEP) Briefing</p> <p>Michael Griffith (Manager Land Use Planning) provided an overview of the draft LEP for the MidCoast which consolidates the three existing LEPs for Greater Taree, Gloucester and Great Lakes. He described the main changes to the land use zonings with a focus on the rural and environmental zones.</p> <p>A number of questions were raised following Michael's presentation including the dual consent process for Private Native Forestry (development consent is proposed to be required for all rural zones and prohibited in the environmental zones); whether the Koala Strategy can influence the LEP (yes, via a planning proposal for various initiatives such as identification and protection of wildlife corridors but needs to be evidence based); and the proposed Conservation Incentive Clause which seeks to conserve ecologically significant areas in exchange for bonus development rights i.e. higher lot yield.</p> <p>Members were encouraged to review the draft LEP on Council's website, attend a consultation session and make a submission – details in the attached presentation.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Koala Conservation Strategy – Review of Submissions</p> <p>Mat provided a presentation (attached) and a summary of the 38 submissions (36 from the community and 2 from government agencies) received during the public exhibition period, the staff's response to the issues raised and the</p> |

changes made to the draft Strategy as a result. The issues were categorised under ten themes and largely related to action planning, habitat loss as a result of development and forestry, habitat protection and the management of threats.

Just over 20% of the 169 comments made were positive and supportive of Council developing the Strategy and NPWS agreed to have their Estate included in the habitat mapping (which will be incorporated as soon as the mapping data becomes available).

Only minor changes proposed to the Strategy including the addition of actions to address feral deer impacts; local conservation area planning and nominating priority koala populations as Assets of Intergenerational Significance.

The finalised Strategy and the summary of the submissions will be presented to Council for adoption in June 2024.

The Koala Reference Group will continue to meet to oversee the implementation of the Strategy for the duration of the Regional Partnership (2 years remaining).

Mat advised that the Strategy would be reviewed annually against the adopted targets and reported to Council. Any significant changes to the Strategy would require re-exhibition and adoption by Council.

The MidCoast Strategy would also likely be reviewed after the release of the new NSW Koala Strategy, because the MidCoast Strategy seeks (partly) to align Council's efforts with the pillars and actions of the State's strategy.

The members of the Reference Group thanked the consultants and Council staff for producing the strategy and the effort made in responding so thoroughly to the public submissions on the draft Strategy.

4 Koala Vehicle Strike (KVS) Audit Report

Mat provided a summary of the report which was sent out to members with the agenda. Inspections of several priority sites identified in the report have been undertaken to identify on-ground measures to reduce vehicle strike. Static signs have been considered however locations are still to be determined. A trailer mounted (mobile) sign is being purchased.

Mat advised that a 900mm failing pipe under the road at Alpine Drive had recently been replaced with a large box culvert to enhance its function as a fauna underpass. Koala scats have already been recorded on the floor of the culvert and motion cameras are being installed to monitor usage.

In response to a question, Mat advised that the erection of fauna exclusion fencing at this location was not considered feasible due to the number of driveways and road intersections.

Mat also noted that in conjunction with the development at Alpine Drive, scats had been collected from the site and sent to the University of Qld for a comparative analysis of cortisol levels with koalas in Tinonee. The research revealed that while the cortisol levels were elevated, they were not at chronic levels. The research also detected higher than normal cortisol levels in some members of the control group.

Cheyne pointed out that as it may take 5-10 days for cortisol to coat the scat it may not be a current measure of stress. Paul noted that the stress levels will

continue as the Alpine subdivision is built due to the impacts of dogs, traffic, etc, which will lead to disease.

Paul questioned what data the KVS audit was based on as the KIC records provided to Bionet do not contain accurate locations, i.e. GPS coordinates. Paul advised that it was not a requirement of the conditions of their carer's licence (they are only required to provide the postcode), and that they didn't have time to record the data.

Rebecca advised that there are a number of collection tools available including the I Spy Koala App which make it quick and easy to record the GPS coordinates of a site; and that accurate data is highly beneficial for various reasons such as providing a case to obtain government funding to address koala vehicle strike for example.

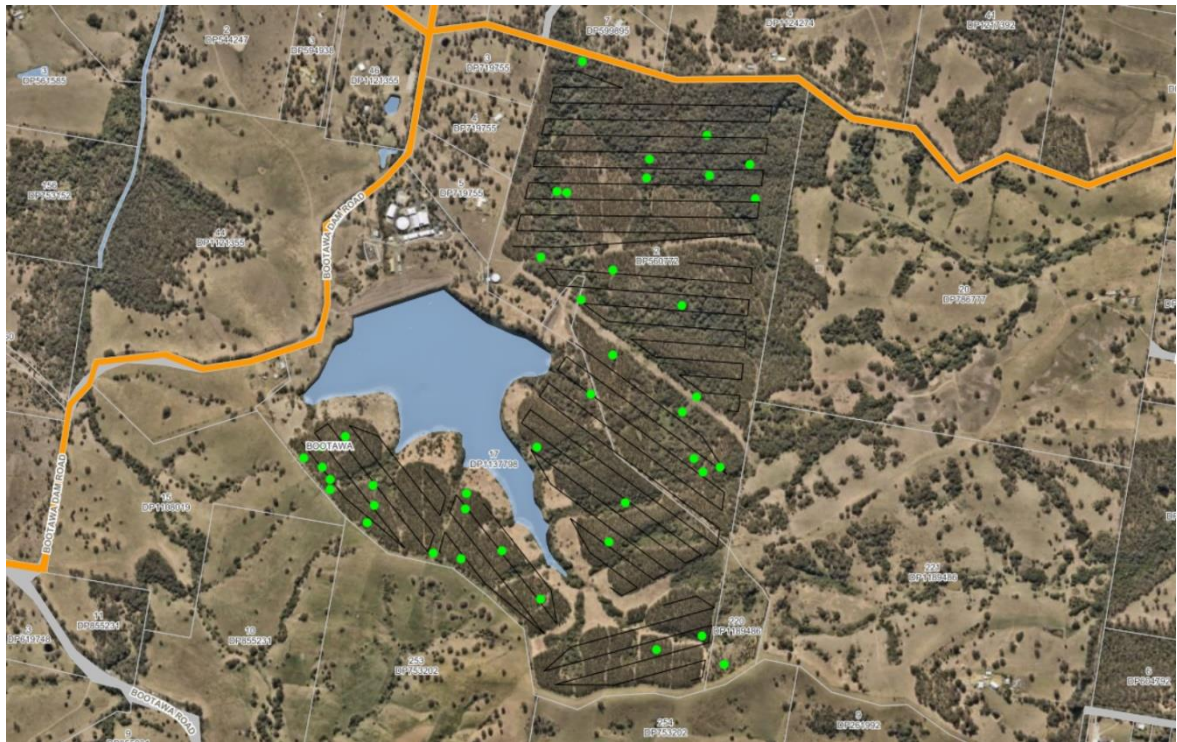
5 Koala Safe Spaces (KSS) Program Update

Tanya and Mat provided an update on the achievements of the program in Caitlin's absence:

- 207 EOIs received with 90 landholders engaged to date.
- 500 hectares of weed control planned – 116.5 hectares completed so far
- 118 hectares of planting planned – 21 hectares completed so far.
- Property visits continue, particularly in the Kiwarrak and Wallingat ARKS.
- Collection of seed and propagation of koala feed trees ongoing.
- Successful in obtaining \$30k in funding from the NSW Government for community engagement including the Speaking 4 the Planet events, the development of a KSS booklet for the region, a seed collection/plant propagation workshop, and a KSS BBQ to be held later in the year for participating landholders.
- Mat provided an overview of the highly successful Speaking 4 the Planet events that were held over the last 2 weeks and the Tree Give Away held at Mondrook to celebrate Wild Koala Day. Another tree give away is planned to be held at Gloucester in July. The Envirofair has been postponed.
- 3 weeks of thermal imagery drone surveys have been conducted on public land, as well as additional dog detection surveys to inform updates to the koala habitat mapping. A further 2 weeks of drone surveys are planned for July-August.
- Mat shared the results of the recent drone survey conducted at Bootawa Dam – 40 individual koalas were recorded over the 90 hectare site in one night which equates to a density of 1 koala per 2.5 hectares (see following map). This is similar to the results of the Bootawa song meter project conducted by DPI. The koalas were found in both the native forest and some areas of the plantation. In comparison only 2 koalas were detected in Council's Kore Kore Creek Reserve at Tea Gardens (see map below). The koala population density at Bootawa is considered one of the highest in the state.

Paul noted that the rates of Chlamydia in koalas at Bootawa were also some of the highest in the area and could be due to the presence of non-local species in the plantation (which is considered to be an adequate food

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| | source) and an over population of koalas on this site. It was agreed that further research to confirm this link would be valuable. |
| 6 | <p>General Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Chris advised that the Flora Reserve proposal for some of the logging compartments at Kiwarrak State Forest was not supported by Parliament, but that logging had been delayed due to wet weather and the requirement to review the survey prescriptions for the greater glider. b) Paul advised that another 2,500 trees are soon to be planted at KIC's Koala Conservation Area which will see 50% of the property revegetated. c) Wade advised that TIDE will soon be undertaking a cultural burn within the Kiwarrak State Forest. d) Reegan advised that the new NSW Koala Strategy will be released soon following a review of the outcomes of the Koala Summit. A government response to the review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act is also imminent. e) Reegan advised that the new and improved I Spy Koala App will be released in the next few weeks. f) Rebecca advised that NPWS Discovery Rangers have been engaged to help deliver the Koala Smart Program to schools in the MidCoast. Eight schools currently engaged. Ian suggested contacting the Tea Gardens Public School. g) Rebecca advised the Port Macquarie and Port Stephens are both preparing new koala habitat mapping for their LGAs using a similar methodology as the MidCoast. h) Daniel noted that LLS had recently produced a new fact sheet on koalas in the region which can be downloaded from their website: Koala - Local Land Services (nsw.gov.au) Daniel advised that he had taken Rye Gollan's position at LLS and is their new representative on the Reference Group. i) Mandy from Crown Lands said she is available if anyone has any questions related to koala habitat on Crown Lands. j) Due to the upcoming Council election the next meeting is unlikely to be held until the new councillor representatives are appointed to the Reference Group – Tanya to confirm with Governance if meetings can be held without councillor representation, if required. |
| 7 | Next Meeting - TBA |



Above: Bootawa Dam drone survey results



Above: Kore Kore Creek Reserve drone survey results