

MEETING NOTES

MidCoast Koala Reference Group

Date	31 July 2023	Time	2 - 4pm
Venue	Barrington Room, Yalawanyi Ganya	Note-taker	Tanya Cross
Present	Cr Claire Pontin, Cr Dheera Smith, Gerard Tuckerman (MCC), Mat Bell (MCC), Tanya Cross (MCC), Caitlin Orr (MCC), Nicholas Colman (MCC), Rye Gollan (LLS), Doug Beckers (NPWS), Reegan Walker (DPE), Jessica Leck, Ian Morphett, Chris Sheed, Megan Benson, Paul McLeod, Shaun Tamplin, Deborah Willis, Phil Lidbury, Rebecca Montague-Drake (DPE)		
Apologies	Cr Peter Epov, Many Wisperreit (Crown Lands), Paul De Szell, John Turbill		

Meeting Items

Item	Key points/actions
1	<p>Acknowledgement of Country</p> <p>Mayor Pontin read the Acknowledgement of Country.</p>
2	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>Mayor Pontin welcomed everyone and introduced Rebecca Montague-Drake from DPE who has recently commenced in the role of Team Lead for the MidCoast region in the Koala Strategy Team.</p>
3	<p>Overview of the process of developing the MidCoast Koala Strategy & the role of the Reference Group</p> <p>Tanya Cross provided a presentation (attached) to reaffirm the purpose of the Reference Group and the role of the Group in the preparation of the MidCoast Koala Strategy. Tanya provided a timeline of key milestones in the development process and identified when the Reference Group would be consulted. The Strategy is anticipated to be completed by May and adopted by the current Council in June/July.</p> <p>Tanya also advised that Council had recently resolved to write to the Minister of Planning & Public Spaces to seek the resolution of issues associated with two Koala SEPPs which will have implications for the preparation of the Koala Strategy.</p>
4	<p>Update – Koala Surveys & Habitat Mapping</p> <p>Mat Bell presented an update on the koala surveys and habitat mapping currently being undertaken by botanists and the dog detection team in partnership with DPE (presentation attached). Mat highlighted some key points including low uptake by private landholders in targeted areas to conduct the surveys, low koala activity levels recorded in targeted areas but high activity levels in non-target areas including Belbora and Barrington. Surveys and mapping are planned to be completed by October if no further delays are encountered.</p>

5	<p>Update – Koala Strategy Preparation</p> <p>Caitlin Orr provided an update on the engagement of consultants (NGH) to prepare the Koala Strategy and run the community consultation sessions. They have experience in preparing similar strategies for other councils including Armidale, which we are planning to model the MidCoast strategy on. Consultation with the Reference Group is planned to be undertaken in October, once the draft mapping is completed.</p>
6	<p>Annual Work Plan - Koala Project Officer</p> <p>Caitlin Orr provided an overview of the annual work program (attached - not for distribution) for the Regional Partnership which has been badged as the Koala Safe Spaces Program (KSS). The Program is based on the four key pillars of the NSW Koala Strategy and includes habitat conservation, improving the safety and health of koalas, community engagement and building knowledge. Information on the Partnership and the Program is available on Council's website.</p>
7	<p>Presentation from Koalas in Care</p> <p>Paul McLeod, who has significant knowledge of the local koala population gained from over 30-years of hands-on experience with Koalas in Care (KIC), raised a number of issues associated with the Regional Partnership including the identification and naming of priority koala habitat areas, which is misleading e.g., Forster actually refers to the Wallingat area, and Comboyne includes the northern area of Taree (Tanya Cross advised that these maps were prepared by the NSW Government to prioritise investment under the NSW Koala Strategy), the inclusion of ineffective actions/pillars that have been proven locally not to work, and issues concerning koala rescue operations following the 2019/20 bushfires.</p> <p>Paul is willing to share with Council data on KIC's habitat restoration sites and asked if the KSS signage could be provided for these properties. He also noted that KIC were currently in the process of establishing a conservation agreement over their Koala Sanctuary at Mondrook.</p> <p>It was agreed that a one-on-one meeting between Council and KIC be held to discuss the above issues further. Doug Beckers (NPWS) will contact Paul to discuss the issues surrounding koala rescue.</p>
8	<p>General Business</p> <p>a) Ian Morphett questioned whether we could share information discussed at the Reference Group meetings with our groups – Tanya Cross advised that this was permissible except for sensitive or confidential items.</p> <p>b) Ian Morphett suggested we provide quarterly updates on the activities of the Reference Group – Claire Pontin advised that the Meeting Notes were reported to Council and placed on the website and that Council's Communications Team were already providing regular updates to the community on the Koala Safe Spaces Program which the Reference Group forms part of.</p> <p>c) Shaun Tamplin raised his concern about the lack of recognition of the threat wild dogs pose to koalas. He advised there is a large body of</p>

	<p>scientific evidence that supports the listing of wild dogs as a key threatening process by the NSW Government.</p> <p>All agreed that we should discuss this issue further during the preparation of the Koala Strategy. (Following the meeting Shaun shared a number of scientific studies on this issue with the Group via email.)</p>
9	<p>Close meeting</p> <p>The Chair closed meeting at 4pm.</p>

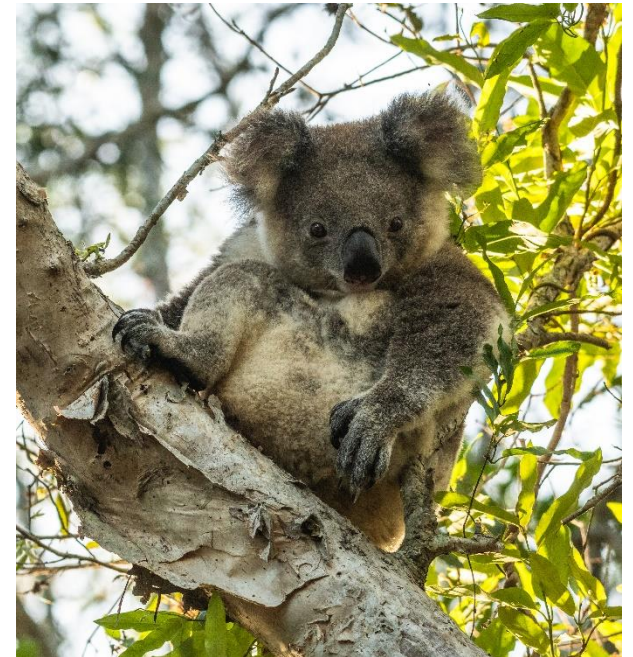
Next meeting

Date	TBC	Time	2 - 4pm
Venue	Barrington Room, Yalawanyi Ganya	Note-taker	Tanya Cross



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MidCoast Koala Strategy & the role of the Reference Group



Role of the Reference Group

Main aims:

1. Provide a forum for Council to engage with key stakeholders involved in the protection and management of koalas in the MidCoast
2. Provide input into the development and successful delivery of a Koala Strategy (or Plan of Management) for the MidCoast including the identification of priority koala habitat areas
3. Offer guidance on communicating the project and gaining the support of affected landholders and the wider community for the Koala Strategy




Role of the Reference Group

1. Important to note that the Reference Group is not a decision-making body but a forum for discussion and provision of advice to successfully deliver the Koala Strategy
2. Term of Reference Group is for the duration of the Regional Partnership (4 years)
3. Once the Koala Strategy is adopted the Reference Group will guide the implementation and review the effectiveness of the Koala Strategy



Scope of the Koala Strategy

1. Prepared under the Biodiversity & Conservation State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) which currently contains two Koala Habitat Protection Chapters – one for rural zones (old SEPP 44) and one for urban zones (new Koala SEPP), which have two different methodologies for identifying core koala habitat and assessing the impacts of development
 2. Current planning framework makes it difficult to prepare a singular Koala Plan of Management so until such time the two chapters are consolidated, it is proposed to prepare a Koala Strategy not endorsed under the SEPP
 3. NSW Government made a commitment over 2 years ago to consolidate the two chapters which has not yet occurred – Council resolved at July meeting to write to Minister to expedite this process
- 

Scope of the Koala Strategy

- Needs to be prepared in accordance with the NSW Koala Habitat Protection Guidelines (2019) & the following 7 key planning principles:
 1. Understand and identify koala habitat values including landscape connectivity (such as habitat extent and habitat linking areas).
 2. Avoid inappropriate land uses or intensifying land uses in koala habitat areas through appropriate landscape planning and site selection.
 3. Encourage the proper conservation and management of areas of natural vegetation that provide habitat for koalas.

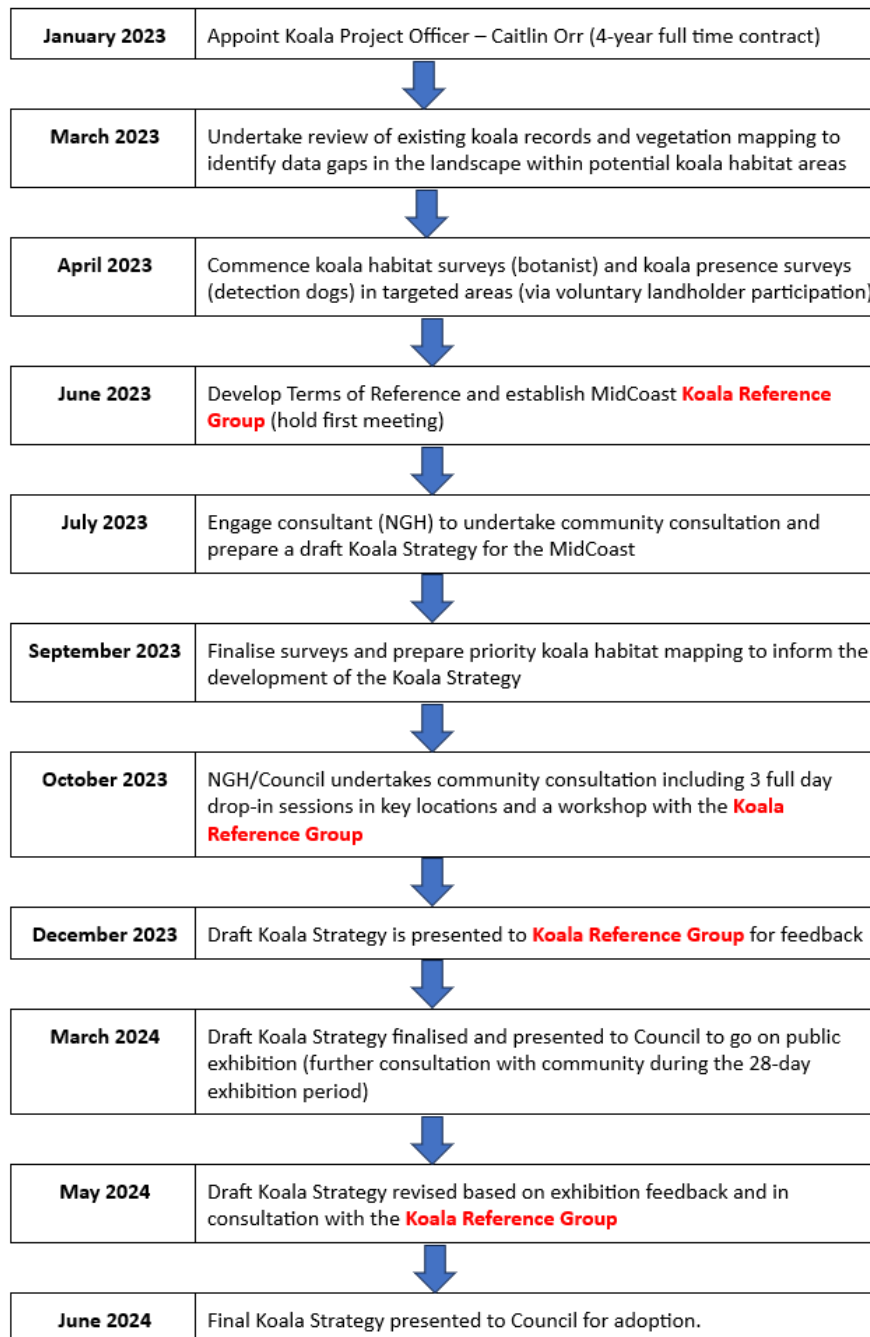


Scope of the Koala Strategy

4. Minimise potential impacts to koalas and their habitat through design that avoids fragmentation or direct loss of koala habitat and maintains the function of the koala habitat.
5. Implement best practice measures to manage identified threats to koalas and their habitat.
6. Use compensatory (i.e. offsetting) measures only where they can be shown to meet the aim of the SEPP .
7. Use adaptive management strategies to monitor, evaluate and deliver appropriate planning outcomes for koalas in their local setting.



MidCoast Regional Partnership - Koala Strategy Development Process



Koala Habitat Mapping for the Koala Management Strategy –

PROGRESS

Presentation to the:

**MidCoast Koala
Reference Group**

31 July 2023



The methodology

1. Analysis of koala records as held on BioNet
2. Grid-based generational persistence analysis
3. MidCoast preferred koala food tree species list
4. State Plant Community Type (PCT) mapping
5. **Suitable koala habitat mapping** based on tree species composition of different PCTs
6. Priority survey points in highly suitable koala habitat
7. Negotiate access to survey points
8. Standard detection dog survey + vegetation information

→ **Occupied habitat**



Strategic koala conservation and recovery relies on a satisfactory knowledge base



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Koala vegetation mapping and detection



Koala presence / occupancy surveys in identified highly suitable koala habitat

Koala Habitat Mapping in the MidCoast Council Priority Area

MidCoast Council

Project Brief
22 November 2022

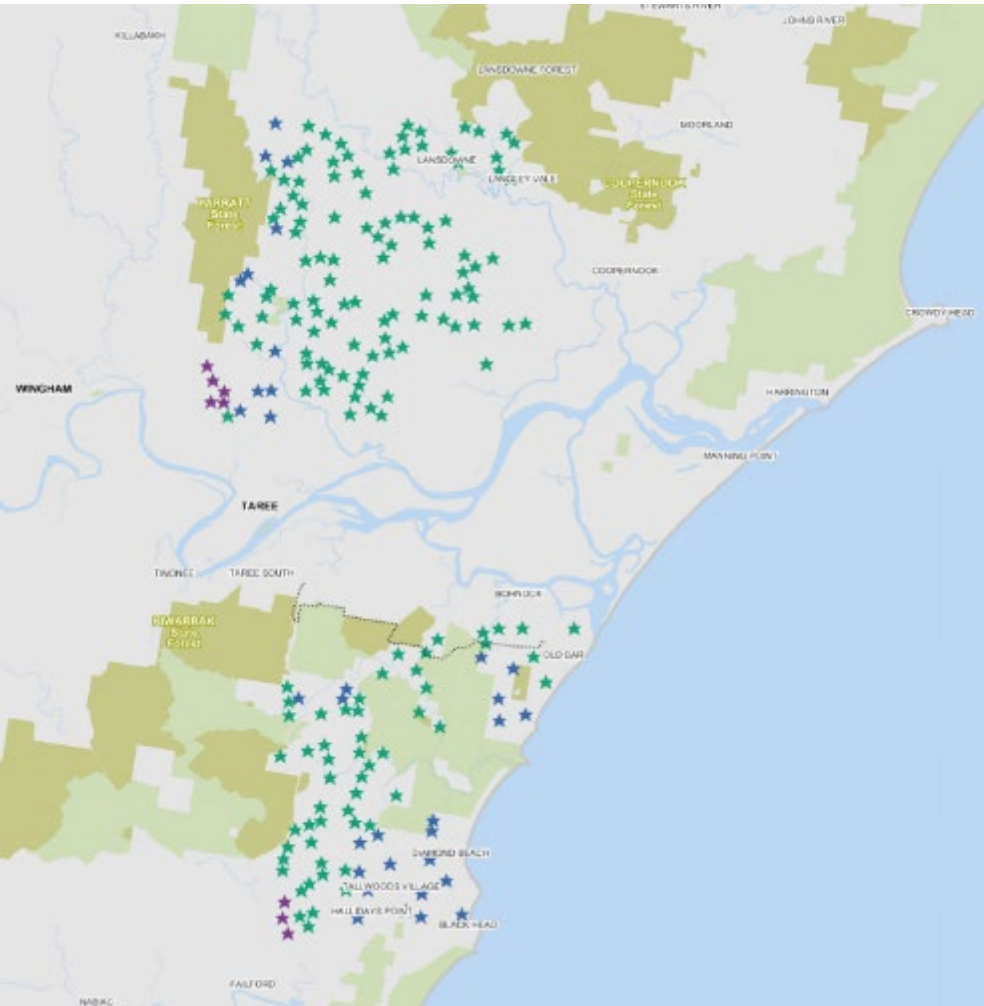
BACKGROUND

MidCoast Council has received funding support from the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) to develop a koala habitat map for a portion of the MidCoast Council area. The funding is provided under the NSW Koala Strategy. The koala habitat map is to be developed using the Koala Habitat Information Use and on ground surveys in priority areas.

Within the MidCoast LGA, there are residual populations of koalas that are of state and regional significance. The priority for koala management planning is in the eastern portion of the LGA.

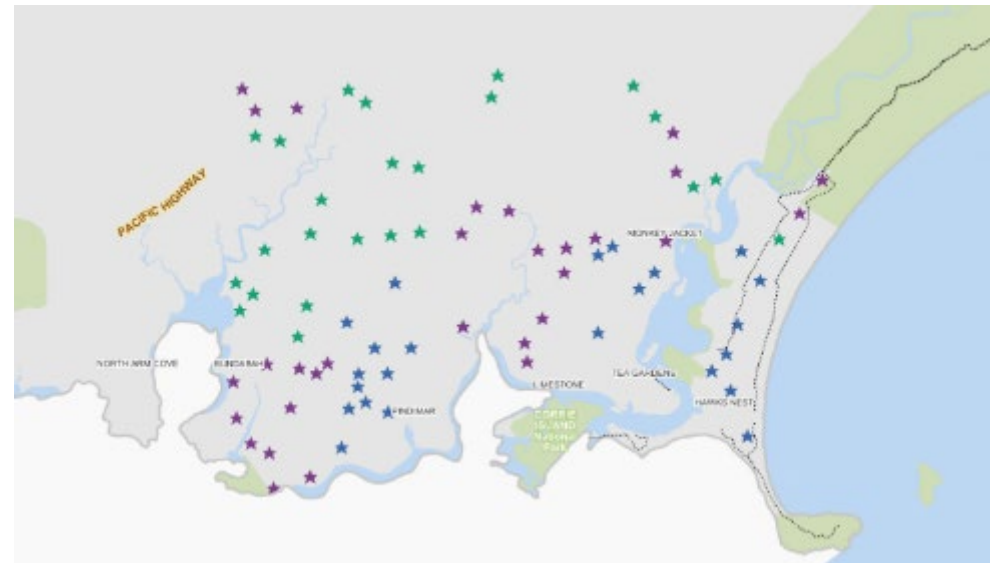


Kundle



Site Overview

Hawks Nest / Tea Gardens




Khappingghat

- ★ Site Priority - May 2023
- ★ 1
- ★ 2
- ★ 3



Landholder engagement

 MIDCOAST council

Dear Landholder,

Useful information for you to participate in koala distribution surveys

Koalas are a highly visible species occupying a broad range of habitats across NSW, including coastal areas of the MidCoast. The natural habitat of koalas is eucalypt forest, and koalas are found in many parts of NSW and Queensland. However, in areas of koala distribution and management, such as the coastal hinterlands, koalas can be found in other types of many environments, including urban, rural and forested areas.

To help Council manage our local koala population we are seeking to seek your help to gain current data on the distribution of koalas within the MidCoast area. This requires your property to be included in our data collection as part of the koala distribution survey. We will be conducting a survey of your property to collect data on the distribution of koalas on your property.

While participating in this survey is a voluntary activity, Council is encouraging landholders to participate in the survey to help us better understand the koala population and a better informed part of your property to conduct a koala habitat survey. The ecological value of your property will be assessed and a koala habitat survey will be conducted on your property. The survey will be conducted by a qualified ecologist and a koala expert. The survey will be conducted on your property. The survey will be conducted on your property. The survey will be conducted on your property.


There is no obligation for you to participate, but if you are interested, we request and encourage you to participate in the survey. We will be conducting a survey of your property to collect data on the distribution of koalas on your property. The survey will be conducted on your property. The survey will be conducted on your property. The survey will be conducted on your property.


If you would like to participate in the survey, please contact us for more information or to view the details below. We may follow up to the letter with a phone call, to discuss further information and your survey details.

The project is being funded by the NSW Koala Strategy with a grant provided to us by the NSW Government.

Also, if you are interested in participating in the survey, please contact us for more information or to view the details below. We may follow up to the letter with a phone call, to discuss further information and your survey details.

Yours sincerely,
 Michaela Galloway, Project Officer
 Phone: 7532 7751 | Email: michaela.galloway@midcoast.nsw.gov.au


 Koala on a tree branch - photo: John Gorman

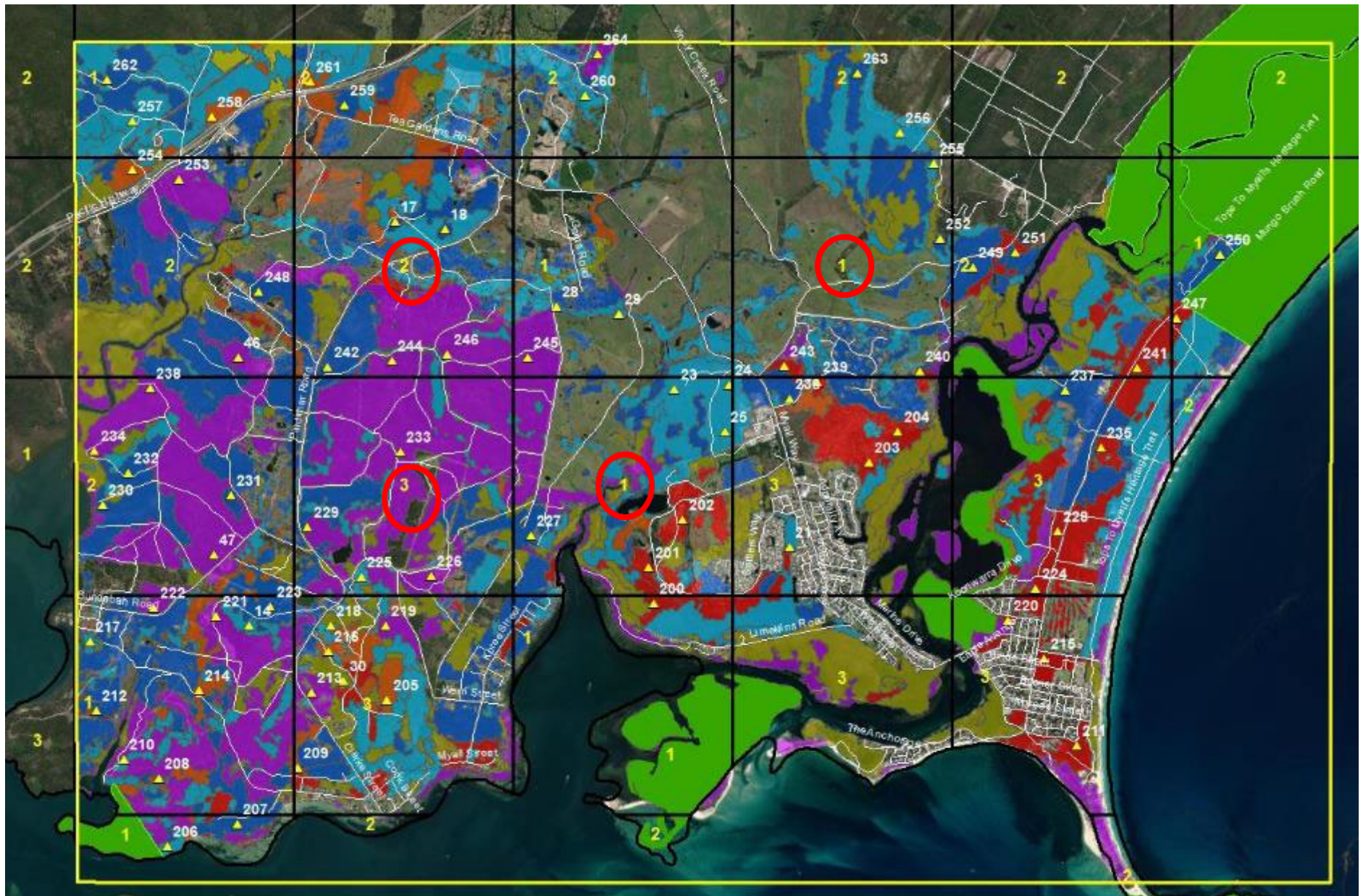

 Working Koala breeder dog, Taylor, with a koala pup on the side of the road with the dog's owner, John Gorman, in the background. Photo: John Gorman

More information about the survey and the koala distribution survey is available at www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/koala/survey

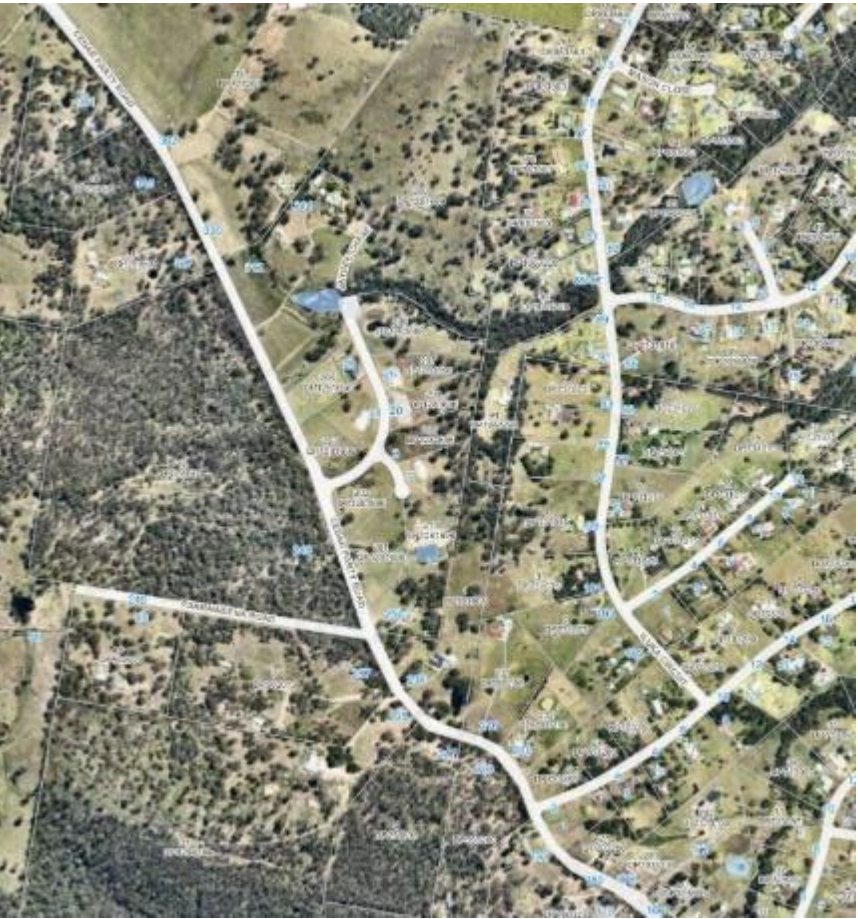
© 2014 MidCoast Council. All rights reserved. This document is the property of MidCoast Council. It is to be used for the purposes of the survey only. It is not to be distributed, copied, or otherwise used without the written permission of MidCoast Council. If you have any queries, please contact us on 7532 7751.

- Purpose of the letter and response rate

- Follow-up phone calls and approach

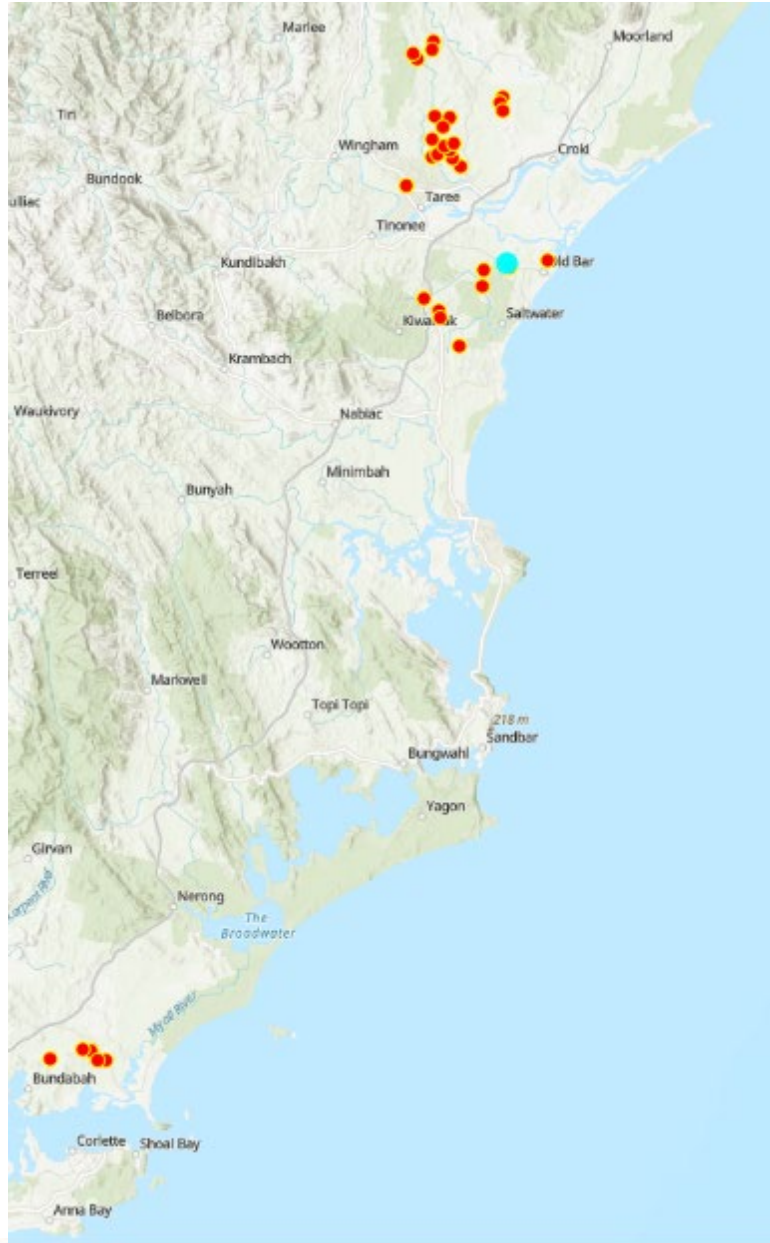


Possible ideas to expand the survey to include roadsides in priority 1 grids.

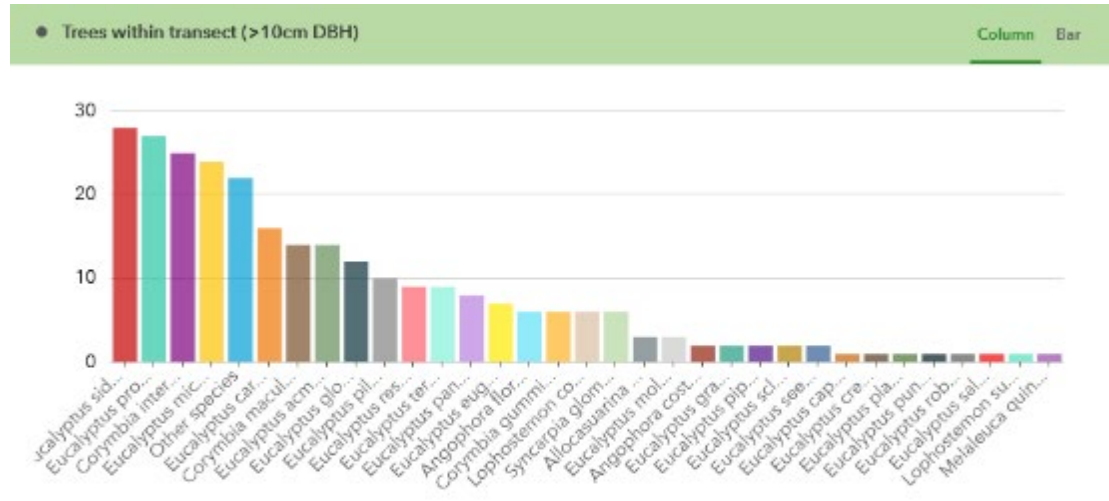
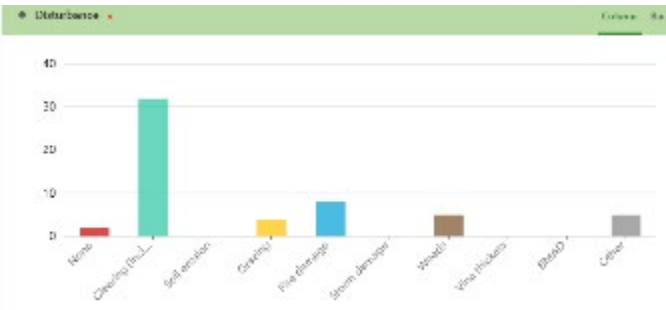
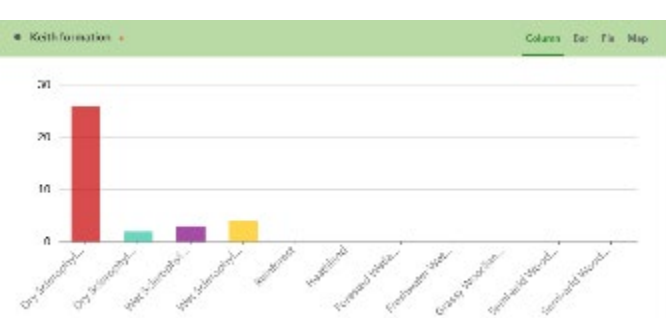
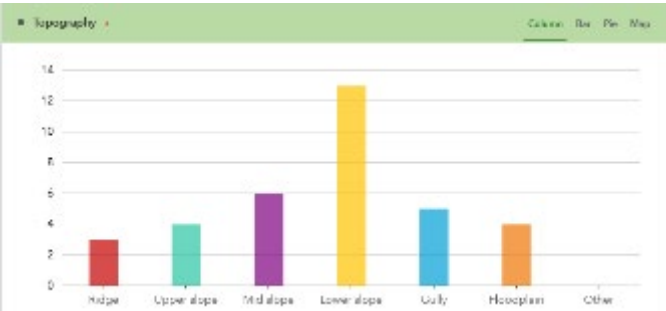
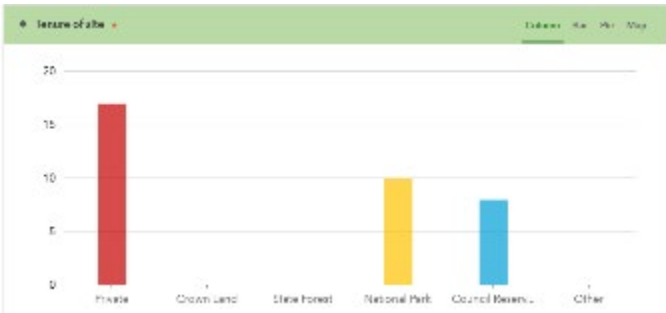


Summary of surveys completed July 2023

- Number of sites completed / Timings
- Landholder communication
- Injuries



Example of data recorded for Koala Habitat Mapping for MidCoast LGA



[Hide table](#)

Empty categories Sort

Answers	Count	Percentage
Eucalyptus siderophloia	28	80%
Eucalyptus propinqua	27	77.14%
Corymbia intermedia	25	71.43%
Eucalyptus microcorys	24	68.57%
Other species	22	62.86%
Eucalyptus carnea	16	45.71%
Corymbia maculeta	14	40%
Eucalyptus acmenoides	14	40%
Eucalyptus globoides	12	34.29%
Eucalyptus pilularis	10	28.57%
Eucalyptus resinifera	9	25.71%


Other details recorded for Koala habitat mapping

● Other site details

Word cloud



[Hide table](#)

 Show responses



Detection Dog Surveys – July 2023



Total records



Total participants



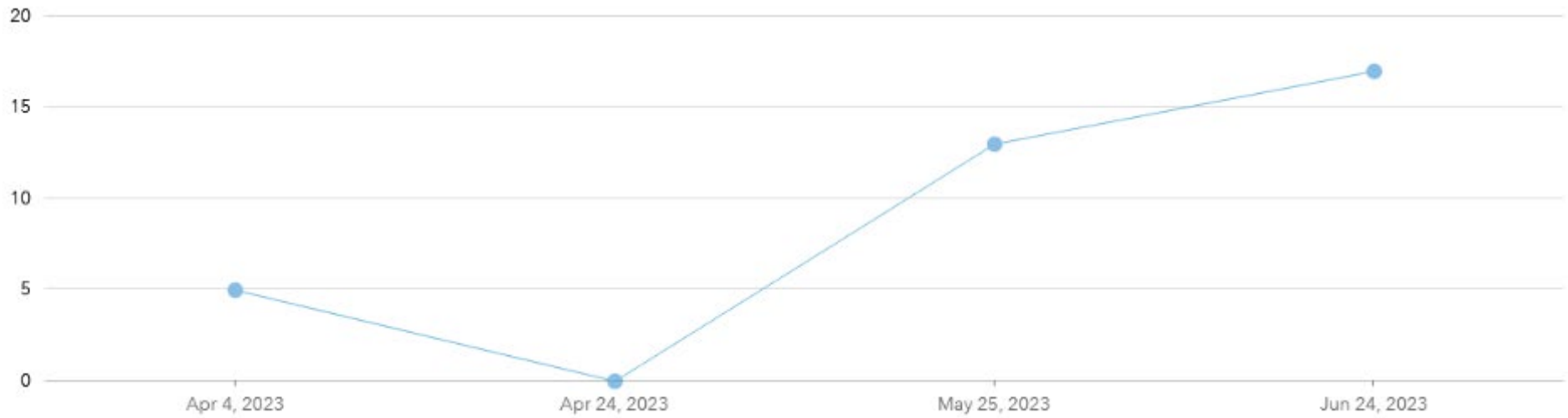
First submitted On



Last submitted On ⓘ

Surveys count: 35 (total: 35)

📅 4/4/23 - 7/25/23



Was a koala or scat found?

Column Bar Pie Map



[Hide table](#)

Empty categories [Sort](#)

Answers	Count	Percentage
No	32	91.43%
Yes	3	8.57%

Tree species where koala/scat found

Column Bar Pie Map



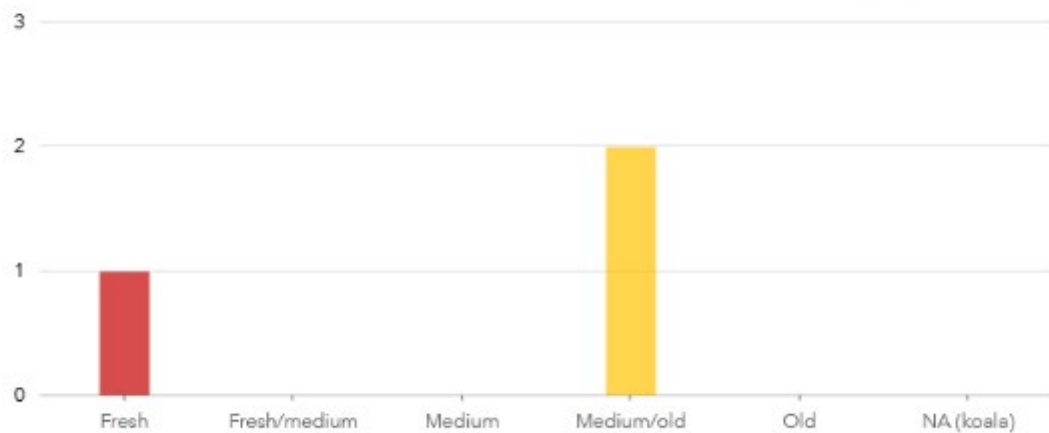
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Empty categories [Sort](#)

Answers	Count	Percentage
Eucalyptus microcorys	2	5.71%
Eucalyptus punctata	1	2.86%

● Age of koala scat

Column Bar Pie Map



● Was the scat collected?

Column Bar Pie Map



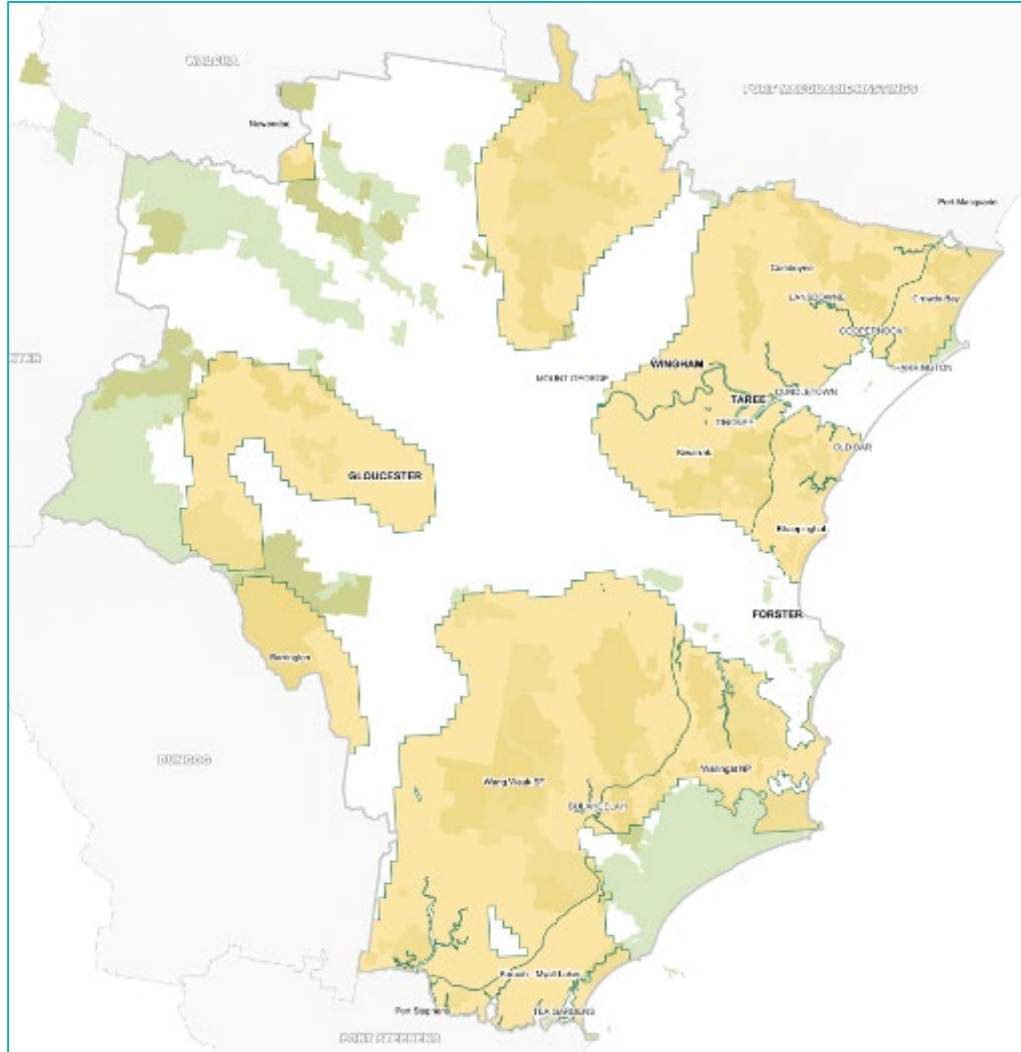
- Yes
- No
- NA (koala)

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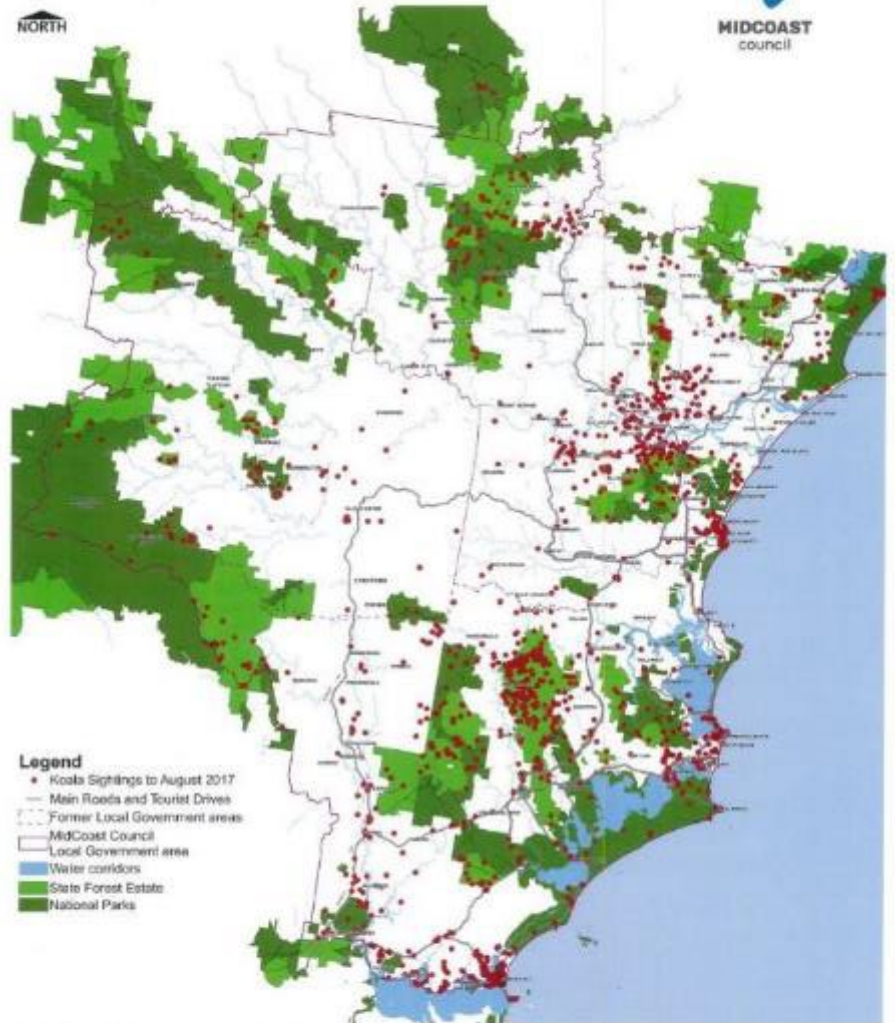
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Koala Sightings - BioNet Atlas of NSW Wildlife



- Legend**
- Koala Sightings to August 2017
 - Main Roads and Tourist Drives
 - Former Local Government areas
 - MidCoast Council
 - Local Government area
 - Water corridors
 - Slate Forest Estate
 - National Parks

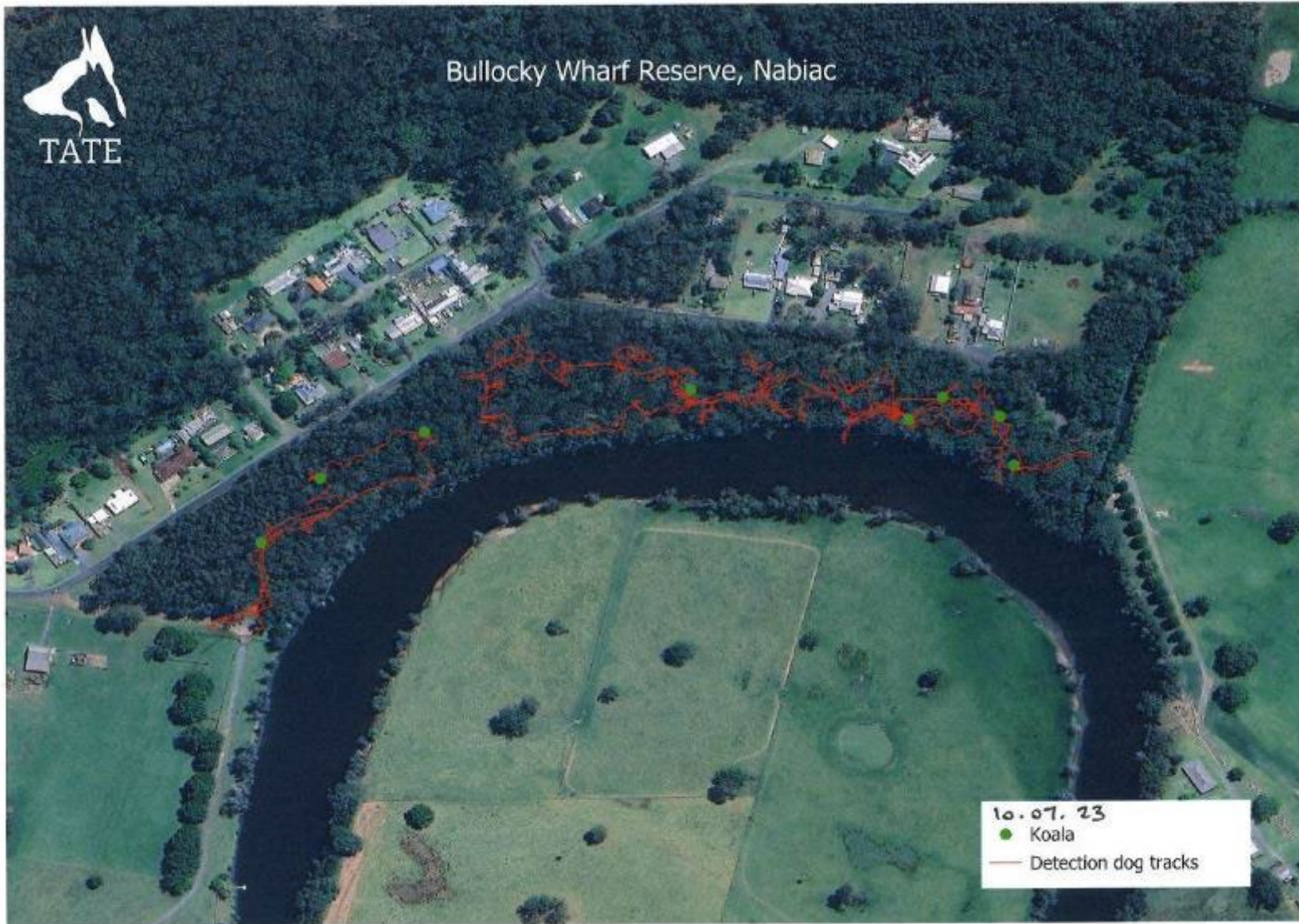
10 0 10 20 30
Kilometers

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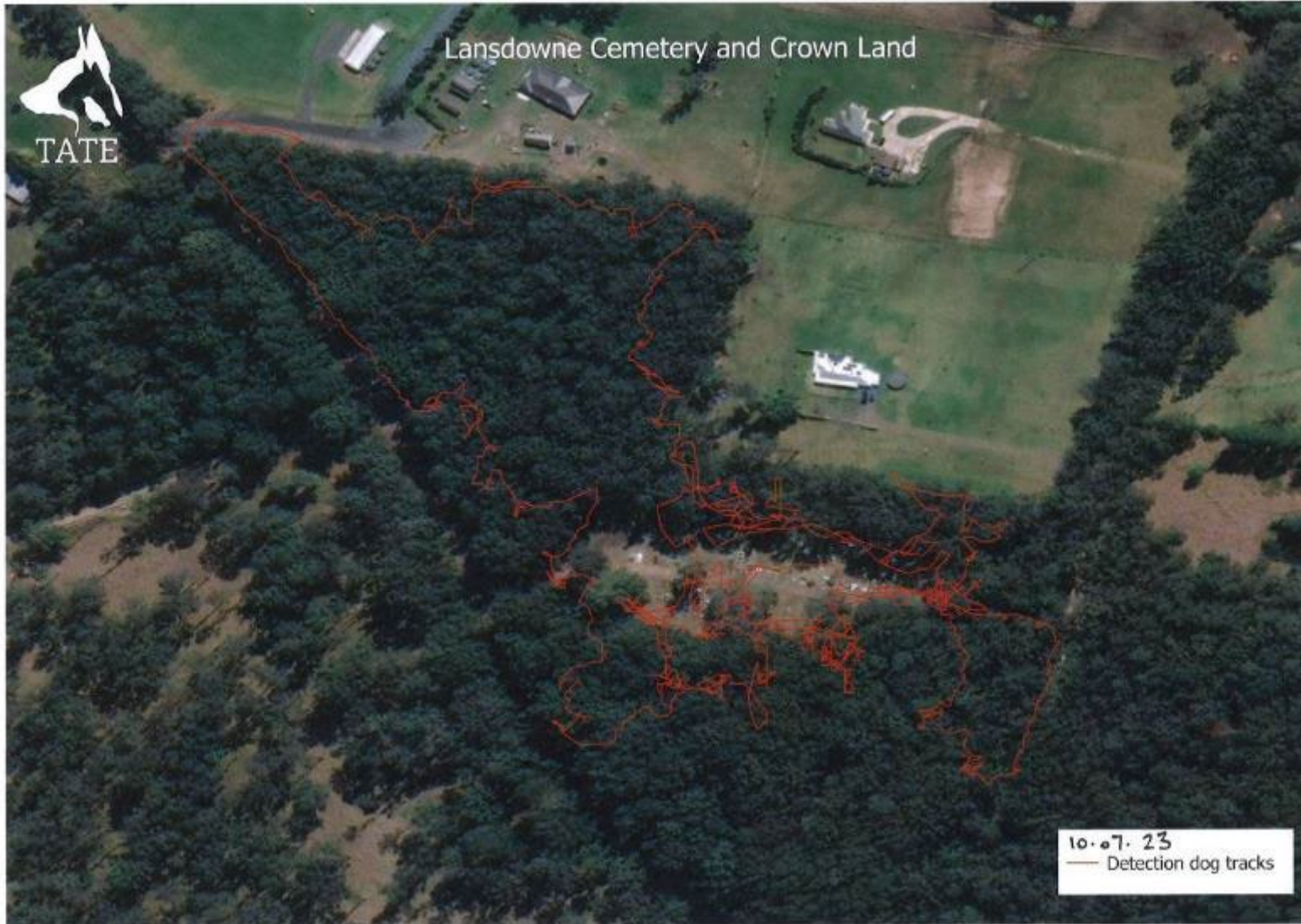
Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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Detection dog surveys at interest sites



10.07.23
— Detection dog tracks



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Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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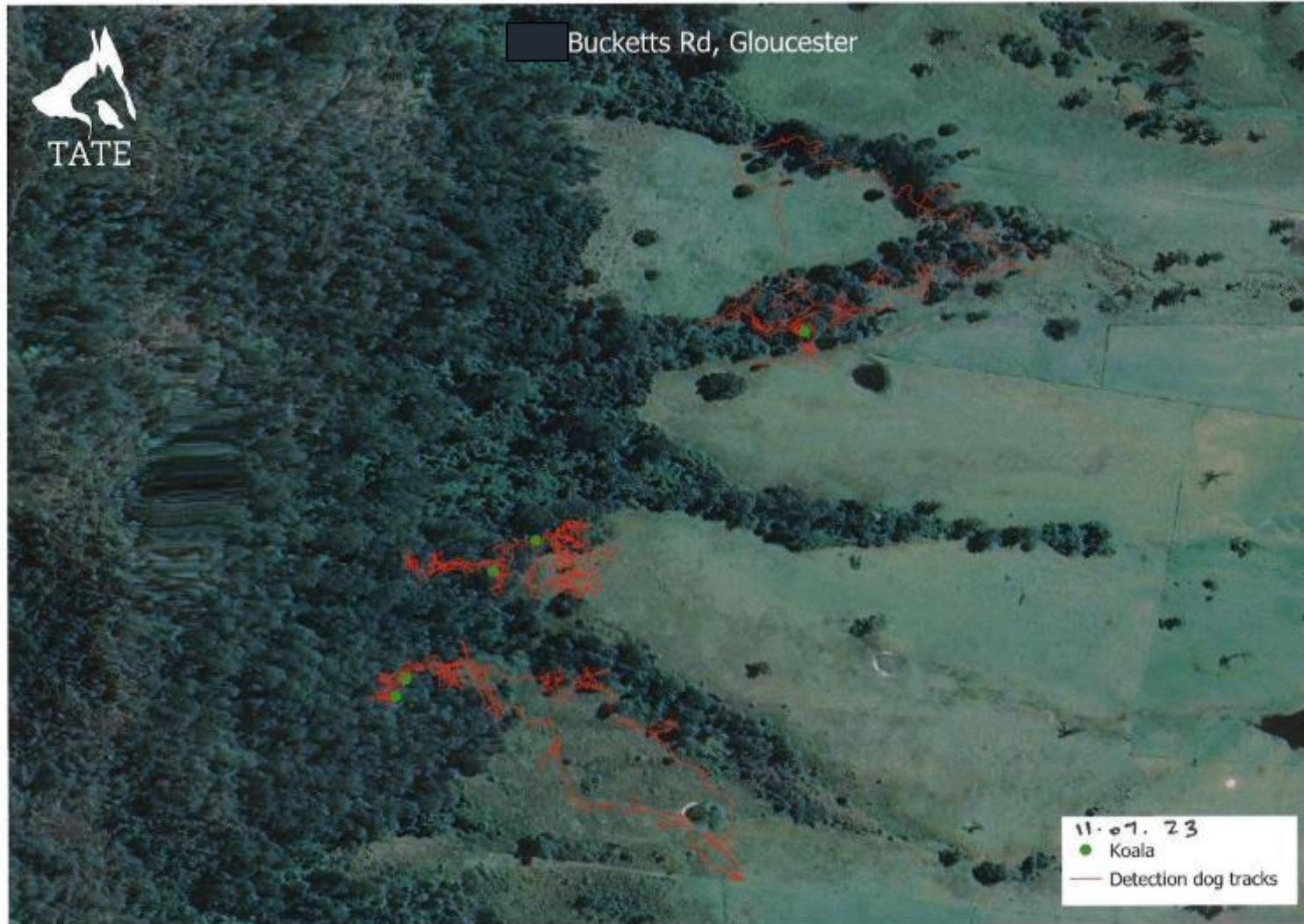
Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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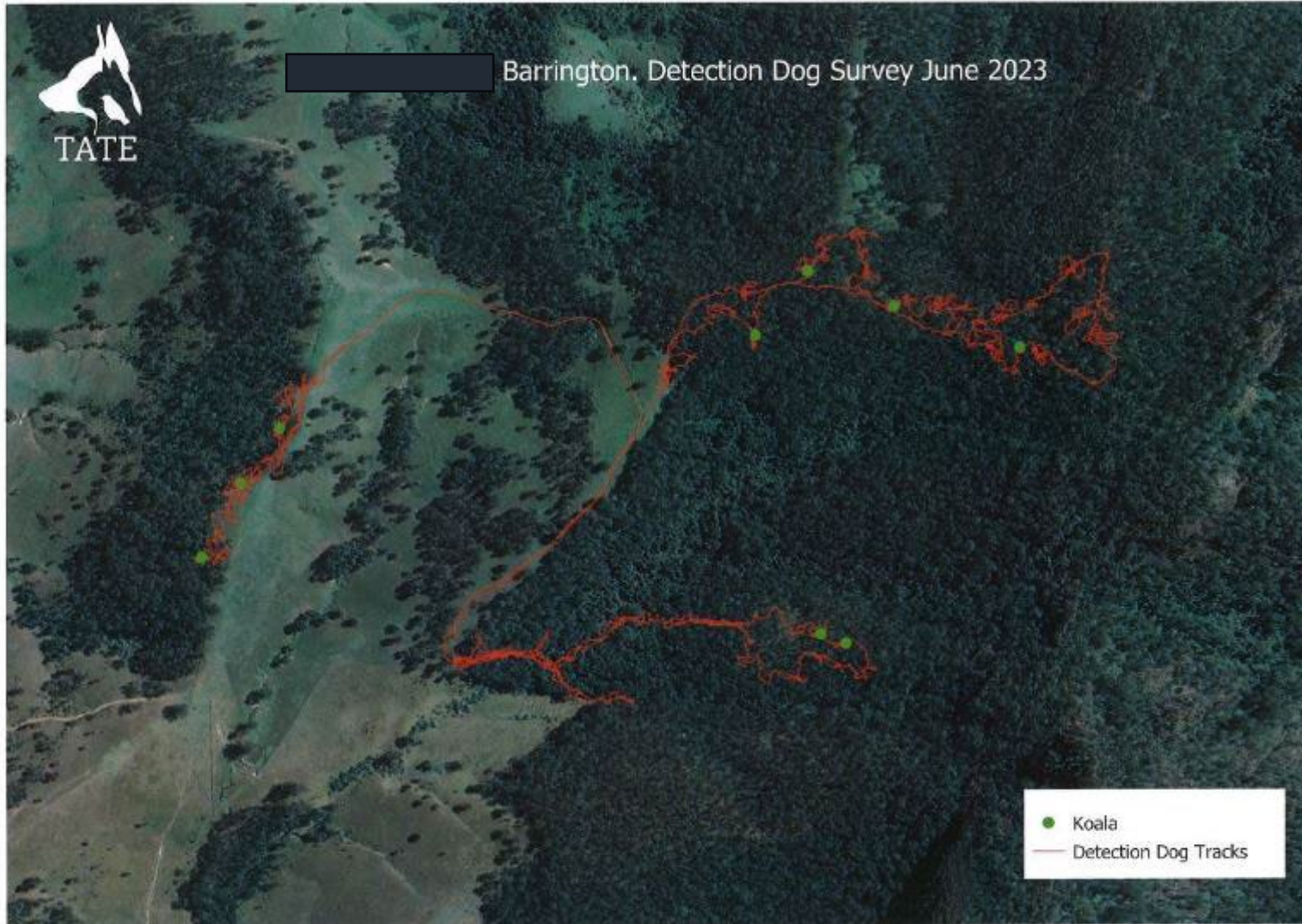
Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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Detection dog surveys at interest sites



Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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Detection dog surveys at interest sites

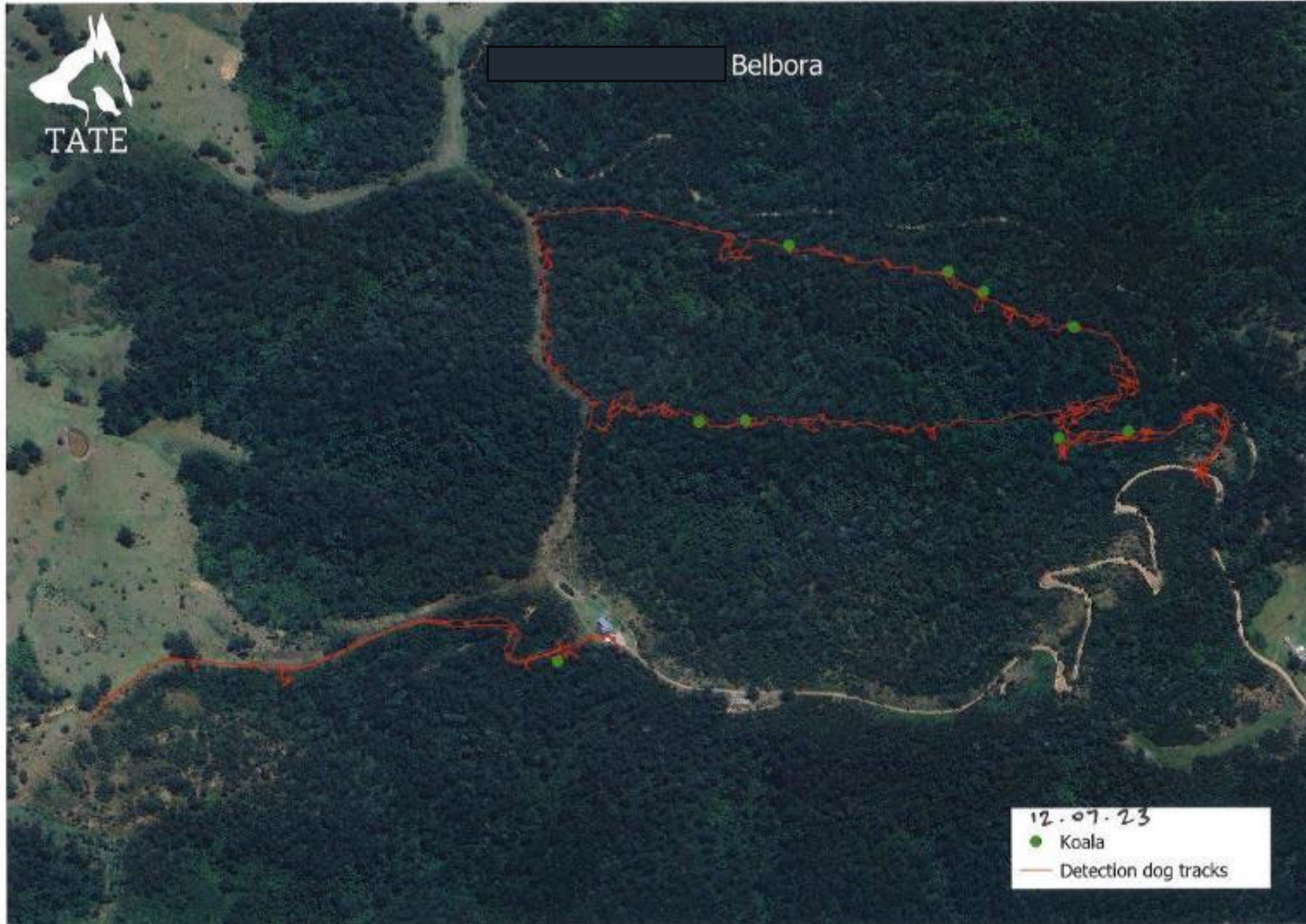


— Detection dog tracks



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Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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Detection dog surveys at interest sites





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Detection dog surveys at interest sites



Detection dog surveys at interest sites

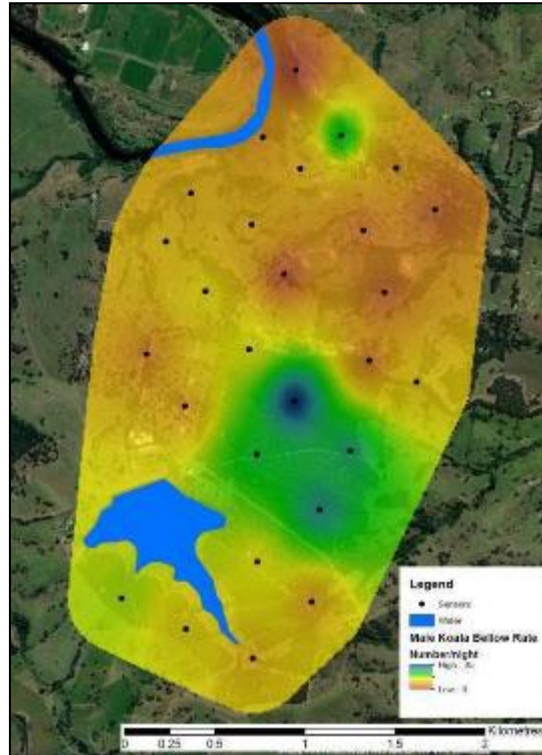


MidCoast 2 Tops Landcare Connection

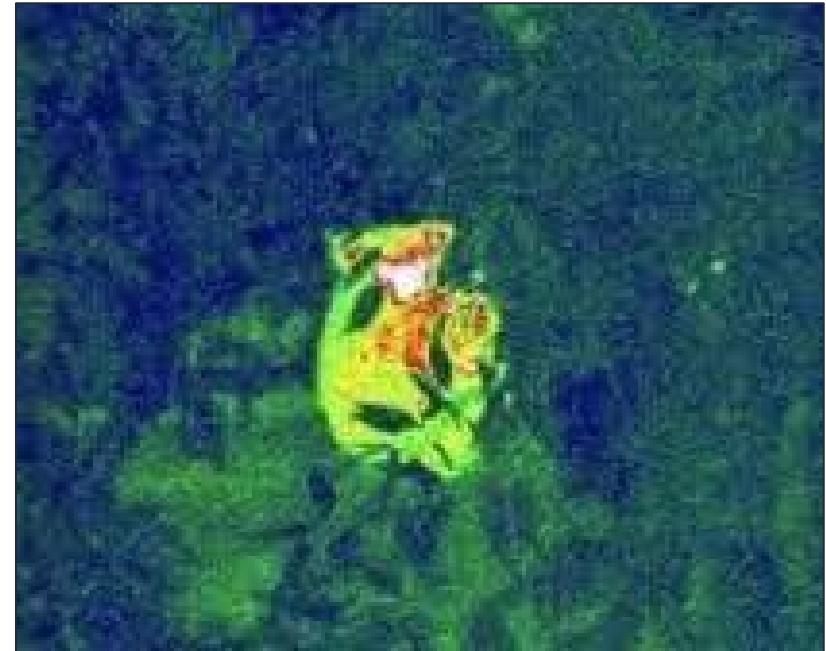
Wild Seek – drones with thermal camera project

Song meter projects

Community sightings



Other projects





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Questions?



KOALA SAFE SPACES PROGRAM



For more information on the Koala Safe Spaces Program, visit our website at midcoast.nsw.gov.au/koala-safe-spaces-program



Planning &
Environment





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Regional Partnership update

Annual work plan - 2023



Project goals

NSW Koala Strategy pillars

1. Habitat conservation
2. Supporting communities to conserve koalas
3. Improving the safety and health of koalas
4. Building knowledge



Communication and engagement plan

Objectives:

- Raise awareness of the NSW Koala Strategy and MidCoast Regional Koala Partnership
- Increase landholder involvement in koala habitat restoration and conservation across the region
- Raise general community awareness of koalas, their needs and threats
- Gain landholder participation in field surveys to determine baseline populations levels and key threats
- Encourage community input and support for the development of a strategy for the MidCoast
- Increase engagement of the general public in citizen science including logging koala sightings



Community engagement



- Community and landholder engagement / education events
- Koala feed tree giveaways
- Koala Day festival
- Koala SMART
- Development of resources and videos
- Art / science collaborations

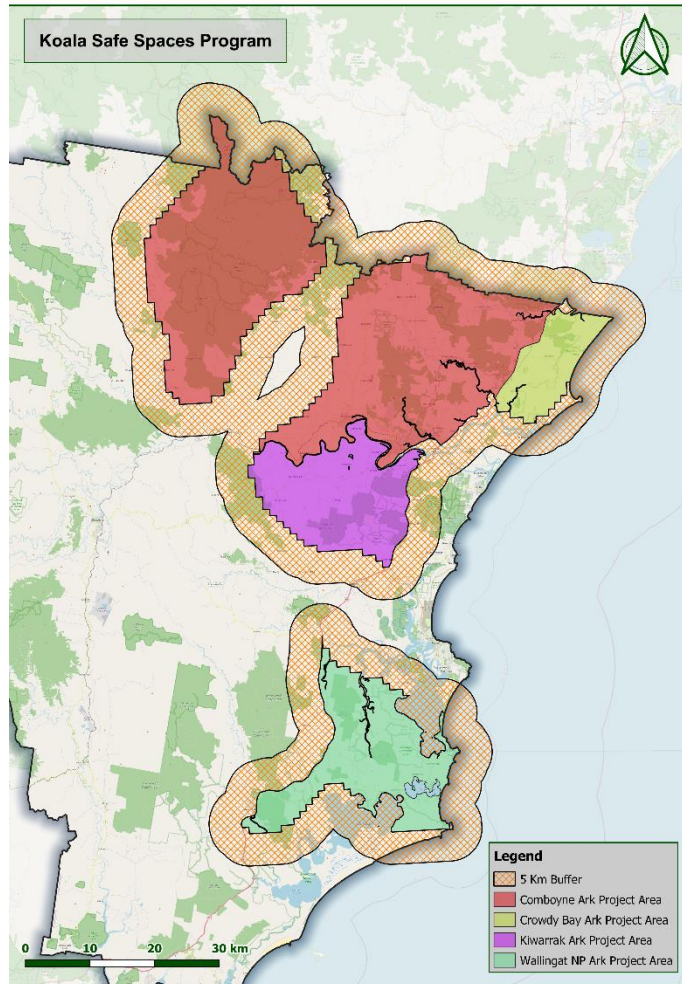
Habitat conservation



Increase the area of koala habitat

- Creating safe spaces on council land
- Deliver habitat improvement and creation of safe spaces on private land within priority ARKS
- Supported by tree giveaways
- Referrals to NPWS and BCT

Habitat improvement funding



Confidential

ARKS	Planting (ha)	Weeds (ha)	Fencing (km)
Comboyne	40	50	3
Crowdy	NA	NA	-
Kiwarrak	75	75	3
Wallingat	25	150	2
Not allocated (NA)	100	100	-

Improving safety and health

Koala vehicle strike (KVS)

- KVS audit of 6 priority road segments
- Field work completed
- Investigating VAS / VMS signs for priority locations

Disease

Domestic dog attacks

Natural disasters response plan (NDRP)

- Focus on council managed land
- Response and recovery from flood, fire, drought etc.



Building knowledge

Increasing knowledge on populations, distribution and trends

- MidCoast koala habitat mapping project (2023-24)
- Yearly summer acoustic monitoring
- Support Landcare drone program
- Encourage community to report koala sightings
- Support DPE science team in state survey delivery
- Monitoring impact / success of habitat interventions



