

MidCoast Koala Reference Group

Date	23 October 2023	Time	2 - 4pm
Venue	Council Chambers, Yalawanyi Ganya	Note-taker	Tanya Cross
Present	Cr Claire Pontin, Cr Dheera Smith, Cr Peter Epov, Paul De Szell (MCC), Gerard Tuckerman (MCC), Mat Bell (MCC), Tanya Cross (MCC), Caitlin Orr (MCC), Rye Gollan (LLS), Whitney Ridgeway (LLS), Reegan Walker (DPE), Rebecca Montague-Drake (DPE), Sharon Bennett (Crown Lands), Ian Morphett, Chris Sheed, Megan Benson, Paul McLeod, Shaun Tamplin, Phil Lidbury, Cheyne Flanagan, Isabelle Strachan		
Apologies	Doug Beckers (NPWS), Deborah Willis		

Meeting Items

Item	Key points/actions
1	<p>Welcome, Apologies & Acknowledgement of Country</p> <p>Mayor Pontin noted apologies to the meeting and read the Acknowledgement of Country. She also welcomed everyone and introduced the new representative for Crown Lands Sharon Bennett, Isabelle Strachan from MidCoast 2 Tops Landcare standing in for Jess Leck and new members Whitney Ridgeway from LLS and Cheyne Flanagan from the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital as guests pending endorsement of their membership by Council.</p>
2	<p>Amendment to Terms of Reference & Code of Conduct</p> <p>Donna Hudson advised the group that a report is going to the next Council meeting recommending the adoption of a revised Terms of Reference (ToR) to increase the number of community representatives so that additional care groups can participate on the group (in response to the expanded scope of the project area to now cover the whole LGA) and to include an indigenous representative from Local Land Services. The report and revised ToR can be accessed on Council's website via the following link: Agendas and minutes - MidCoast Council (nsw.gov.au)</p> <p>Donna also reminded the Group of their obligation to comply with the Code of Conduct particularly around confidentiality and fostering respectful relationships. Breaches of the Code will be investigated. The Code of Conduct is available on Council's website: Reference Group Induction - MidCoast Council (nsw.gov.au)</p>

3	<p>Update – Koala Habitat Mapping & development of the Koala Strategy</p> <p>Mat Bell presented an update on the revised approach to the preparation of the koala habitat mapping and the development of the Koala Strategy (presentation attached). Due to the issues with the current SEPP (see letter from Council to the Minister attached) it is now proposed to not to prepare a Koala Plan of Management under the SEPP or koala habitat mapping solely for the priority koala habitat area (under the most development pressure in the east of the LGA) and instead prepare an LGA-wide Koala Strategy and associated koala habitat mapping. This would enable the mapping to be completed much more efficiently by avoiding the complications of applying the dual mapping approaches under the SEPP. The mapping would be undertaken in such a way that if Council decided in the future to convert the Strategy to a Koala Plan of Management that this could be easily achieved e.g. occupied koala habitat would represent core koala habitat under the SEPP.</p> <p>As the Strategy won't be prepared under the SEPP it will have no regulatory power in terms of imposing development and planning controls but the current provisions under the SEPP will continue to apply to individual developments.</p>
4	<p>Workshop – Brainstorming koala conservation & recovery in the Kiwarrak ARKS</p> <p>See results of workshop in the attached notes.</p>
5	<p>Overview of the recommendations of the Koala Vehicle Strike Priority Roads Audit & Mitigation Report</p> <p>Caitlin Orr provided an overview of the methodology and results of the draft KVS Audit and Report which provides recommendations for investment in mitigation measures. The Report will be circulated to the Group once it has been reviewed by staff and finalised.</p> <p>Cheyne Flangan from the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital provided some feedback on their experiences in addressing koala vehicle strike suggesting that the variable messaging signage using emojis has been more effective than the stationary signage.</p>
6	<p>General Business</p> <p>a) In response to a question form Koalas in Care, Reegan Walker advised that the backlog in the upload of data from wildlife carer groups to Bionet had been resolved and is now up to date.</p> <p>b) Matt Bell tabled a number of questions (see attached) to the Group from the community advocacy group 'Friends of Kiwarrak' in relation to the proposed harvesting of the hardwood timber forest in the Kiwarrak State Forest. It was agreed that Council staff would develop responses for consideration by the Group at the next meeting.</p>
7	<p>Next Meeting</p>

Date	Monday 4 December	Time	3 - 5pm
Venue	Barrington Room, Yalawanyi Ganya	Note-taker	Tanya Cross

Koala Management Strategy - update

Presentation by:

Mat Bell - MidCoast Council

To the:

MidCoast Koala Reference Group

23 October 2023



DPE has provided funding to MidCoast Council for:

- Koala habitat surveys & mapping
- Koala Management Strategy

Substantial habitat and koala surveys undertaken to date

Original idea was to try to prepare a “Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management” under the Koala SEPP

CKPOM – restricted area with both regulatory powers + management actions

Management Strategy – whole MCC area; but restricted to management actions



Why not prepare a CKPOM?

A CKPOM is not a favoured end-point right now because:

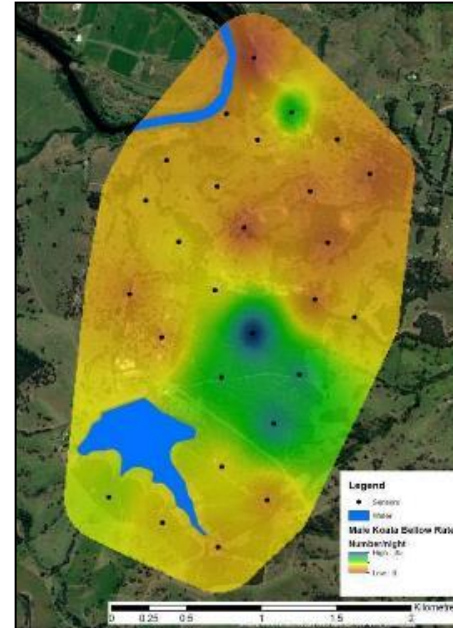
- **The NSW Government has not resolved the problems with the Koala SEPP**
- Koalas need to be considered in development applications via the Biodiversity Assessment Method
- We do not have sufficient resources to prepare a CKPOM over the entire Council area

We can prepare the Strategy in a way that enables an efficient conversion to a CKPOM depending on what the NSW Government decides



Proposed next steps:

1. Agree on a list of **Preferentially Selected Koala Food Trees** for the MidCoast
2. Identify and map the Plant Community Types (PCTs) across the entire MidCoast that are **Likely Suitable Koala Habitat**
3. Produce a map of **Occupied Koala Habitats** based on the updated BioNet records and recent / current survey work
4. Produce a **Koala Habitat Linkages** Map based on connectivity analysis
5. Support the contractor in preparing the **MidCoast Koala Strategy**



Conserving MidCoast koalas - compelling vision and coordinated action

Conserving MidCoast koalas



KOALA SAFE SPACES PROGRAM



SCIENCE-BASED RESEARCH
INFORMS THE SAFE SPACES PROGRAM TO
IDENTIFY AND PROTECT KOALA HABITAT



Planning &
Environment





MIDCOAST
council

Comments + feedback



4 August 2023

The Hon. Paul Scully, MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001
Email: office@scully.minister.nsw.gov.au

Dear Minister Scully,

Consolidation of the Koala Habitat Protection Chapters of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021

I seek your assistance to remedy a problem we are having in developing a Koala Plan of Management (PoM) for priority Koala habitat areas within the MidCoast Council area.

The State Environmental Planning Policy - Biodiversity and Conservation (SEPP) has a different rule set, different feed tree lists and requires different methodology for the preparation of Koala plans of management depending on the land use zones as described in Chapters 3 and 4. MidCoast Council has recently entered into a Regional Partnership with the Department of Planning & Environment to implement the priority actions of the NSW Koala Strategy across the MidCoast, including development of Koala PoMs.

The current arrangement in the SEPP will require MidCoast Council to prepare two separate Koala PoMs – one under each of the chapters of the SEPP. This will result in different methodologies being applied across contiguous land areas depending on the zoning of the land. This will not only complicate an already complicated process but result in inconsistencies in the identification and protection of high priority Koala habitat areas.

Council has recently secured significant funding through the MidCoast Regional Partnership to undertake extensive Koala habitat mapping and Koala use surveys to inform the development of a Koala PoM. The preparation of the PoM will commence shortly and will be finalised by the end of June 2024.

The consolidation of the two Koala habitat protection chapters would enable Council to produce a single PoM for the MidCoast and to facilitate a better planning outcome for the protection of the local Koala population. Having a single State-wide planning approach to protect Koala habitat would also help the NSW Government to achieve its target set out in the NSW Koala Strategy to double the State's Koala population by 2050.

I understand the difficulties encountered by the previous Government in addressing the urgent need for Koala protection and I would appreciate your urgent consideration of this matter.

Should you require further information your staff should contact Gerard Tuckerman – Council's Manager Natural Systems on 7795 7268.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Claire Pontin".

Cr Claire Pontin
Mayor

cc: The Hon. Penny Sharpe, MLC Minister for the Environment office@sharpe.minister.nsw.gov.au

October 2023 - Koala Reference Group Kiwarrak ARKS Workshop

Summary

Question 1a: Are there any barriers to koala conservation in Kiwarrak?

The highest rated ideas in this section were:

1. Conservation is often seen as 'negative' for a rural landholder, limit of rights
2. Fire
3. Rural residential properties – high lack of knowledge
4. Domestic dogs - attacks

The other ideas put forward were:

- Climate change
- Roads - vehicle strike
- Logging - both private native forestry and state
- Cattle – attacks
- Policy and legislation
- Funding restrictions and duration
- Lack of indigenous perspective
- Lack of knowledge – landholder and community
- Too many humans
- Lack of worth - \$\$
- Lack of priorities
- Lack of territory
- Lack of compliance
- Private ownership
- Lack of links / corridors
- Time – sense of urgency
- Habitat loss is continuing – death by a thousand chops

Question 1b: What could be done better?

The highest rated ideas in this section were:

1. Paid conservation agreements
2. Education and engagement - competitions
3. Better consultation with indigenous members
4. Commercial sponsorship – koala warrior
5. Creating habitat
6. Corridor creation incentives
7. Overpasses / tunnels for movement
8. Species list of what to / not to plant for rural residential areas – landholder info packs
9. Working with federal / state gov to change legislation
10. SEPP changes
11. Community koala trails
12. Virtual fencing trial

13. Better data collection
14. Physical restraints

Question 2: Do you see any opportunities for koala conservation in Kiwarrak? Bold ideas

The highest rated ideas in this section were:

1. Large projects – e.g. investment for offsets
2. Develop and implement long term fire and mitigation management plan (traditional owner)
3. Habitat restoration
4. Voluntary conservation agreements
5. \$\$ incentives – rate relief, grants etc.
6. Community engagement and education awareness
7. Dedicated program – volunteer resources ‘ koala warriors’, potentially attract sponsorship
8. Bootawa – fast track plantation replacement with native plantings
9. Investigate ‘nature repair bill’
10. Standardise approach to addressing road kill
11. Increase and encourage ecotourism
12. Determine intrinsic value
13. Key strategic corridors
14. Travelling stock reserves (TSR)
15. Lantana Crossing / Peg Leg Creek – sanctuary / reserve creation
16. Lobby for elevation of status for Kiwarrak State Forest

The other ideas put forward were:

- Identify what a viable population in Kiwarrak looks like
- Encourage community pride around the local koala population
- Online reporting of koala sightings
- The flow on effects / benefits for other threatened species
- Consolidate BCT in perpetuity
- Inter-agency collaboration
- Policy for tree harvesting / retention

Question 3: What’s working well?

The highest rated ideas in this section were:

1. Direct engagement with landholders – pre-emptive
2. Private land focus – initiatives for funding
3. Habitat restoration funding and on-ground works
4. Local action groups with council support – e.g. ‘Friends of Kiwarrak’
5. Koala strategy – restoration, not just planting. Incorporate cultural burning
6. Pre-planning for natural disasters – how the public can help
7. Inter-agency collaborations – RFS, Council, Koala Partnership, steering committee, encouraging young people etc.
8. BAM / BDAR methods – koalas intensively scrutinised, pre-clearing surveys
9. Firesticks program – cultural burning program
10. Koala strategy well underway – better than delaying for a KPOM
11. Raised profile of koalas – listed as endangered
12. Citizen science – community outreach

13. Umbrella species – ‘old fella at the top of the tree’, when we benefit koalas we benefit other species as well
14. Lots of research – filling knowledge gaps / improving knowledge
15. Schools are engaged in the space – Tinonee Public School
16. BCT stewardships and conservation partners program
17. Community awareness about fire and koalas

The other ideas put forward were:

- Lots of interest in Kiwarrak
- Dedicated and engaged NRM group
- Tinonee Koala Festival – community engagement
- Leadership team providing clear directions and messaging
- NSW Koala Strategy investigating translocation / breeding programs

Questions from “Friends of Kiwarrak” to the Koala Reference Group:

1. How significant is Kiwarrak State Forest as habitat for koalas, as identified by the NSW Koala Strategy?
2. Evidence supports the importance of habitat connectivity for koalas. Given the proximity of Kiwarrak State Forest to protected areas such as Talawahl State Conservation Area and Khappinghat National Park, should Kiwarrak State Forest be considered for long term protection, to ensure that koalas have safe passage between habitat areas?
3. What difference will the results from the current song meter surveys have on the harvesting plan or the logging?
4. Will these results change the number of Preferred Koala Feed Trees that get left?