

# MEETING NOTES

## MidCoast Koala Reference Group

Date	26 February 2024	Time	2 - 4pm
Venue	Barrington Room, Yalawanyi Ganya	Note-taker	Tanya Cross
Present	Cr Claire Pontin, Cr Dheera Smith, Mat Bell (MCC), Tanya Cross (MCC), Caitlin Orr (MCC), Reegan Walker (DPE), Rebecca Montague-Drake (DPE), Charlie Low (Crown Lands), Doug Beckers (NPWS), Wade Lancett (TIDE), Henrietta Mooney (Landcare), Ian Morphett, Chris Sheed, Megan Benson, Paul McLeod, Shaun Tamplin, Cheyne Flanagan, Deborah Willis		
Apologies	Cr Peter Epov, Paul De Szell (MCC), Gerard Tuckerman (MCC), Whitney Ridgeway (LLS), Phil Lidbury, John Turbill		

### Meeting Items

Item	Key points/actions
1	<p><b>Welcome, Apologies &amp; Acknowledgement of Country</b></p> <p>Mayor Pontin noted apologies to the meeting and read the Acknowledgement of Country. She also welcomed everyone and introduced the new representatives Charlie Low - Crown Lands, Henrietta Mooney - Regional Landcare Coordinator from MidCoast 2 Tops Landcare, and Wade Lancett - newly appointed Koala Project Officer from TIDE (funded through the NSW Koala Strategy) who will be coordinating cultural burning projects in koala habitat areas on the MidCoast.</p>
2	<p><b>Koala Safe Spaces Program Update</b></p> <p>Caitlin Orr provided an update on the following projects/events:</p> <p>Koala Habitat Restoration Program: project planning for sites is progressing well with a high level of interest from landholders to host on-ground works. Works include tree planting, weed control and fencing in the priority ARKS of Comboyne, Kiwarrak and Wallingat. The program is generally on track to meet the established targets. The processes around ensuring that landholders maintain the gains associated with the on-ground works was discussed – landholder agreements, monitoring, participatory action, etc.</p> <p>Speaking 4 the Planet: please see the attached flyer and information pack for competition details. Meeting attendees were asked to help promote this event. It was suggested that <i>the S4P event should be promoted to the home-schooling community.</i></p> <p>Seniors Week: please see the attached flyer for dates of koala engagement events associated with Seniors Week. Again, meeting attendees were asked to assist with promotion.</p>

	<p>Wild Koala Day: This is on 3 May 2024 and a koala food tree give-away is planned to be held in Tinonee and Gloucester.</p> <p>Koala Vehicle Strike Mitigation Measures: static signs have arrived and are being booked in for deployment. There have been delays in ordering and installing activated signage because discussions with respect to moving the locations of speed zones haven't been resolved. Activated signs and trailers will be obtained / deployed within the next 2 months. It was suggested that <i>the MidCoast Traffic Committee should be engaged in this issue.</i></p>
3	<p><b>Draft MidCoast Koala Conservation Strategy</b></p> <p>Mat Bell presented an overview of the draft Koala Conservation Strategy – he advised that the draft had been further revised since it was initially sent out to the Group, based on the outcomes of an internal review. It now incorporates more local knowledge, localised targets, discussions as to its application, and changes because of the submission received from the Myall Koala and Environment Group. Break-out boxes have been removed.</p> <p>Rebecca Montague-Drake from DCCEEW congratulated Council on the significant body of work that has been undertaken to date and said MCC were front runners in this space.</p> <p>The attached table summarises the feedback received from the Reference Group members on the draft Strategy during the discussion on this item and how it has been reflected in a revised Strategy.</p> <p>Mat advised that once the Strategy is adopted it will be reviewed annually including the habitat mapping which will be continually refined using the results from ongoing koala habitat surveys and records from Bionet.</p> <p>The final version of the draft Koala Strategy which is being presented to Council on 20 March (for approval for public exhibition) is attached. All members were reminded that they have further opportunity to provide commentary to the Strategy as part of the public exhibition.</p>
4	<p><b>General Business</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) It was noted that the Koala Reference Group was formed for the term of the funded MidCoast Koala Regional Partnership. Efforts to date have focussed on the draft Koala Conservation Strategy, but when this Strategy is adopted, the Group will focus on strategy implementation and adaptive feedback. A revised meeting schedule will be defined at that time.</li> <li>b) A request was made for any Reference Group members to volunteer as judges for the Speaking 4 the Planet event.</li> <li>c) Charlie Low from Crown Lands advised that they were in the process of preparing their bids for funding and enquired if there were any projects that might be suitable for funding on Crown Land.</li> <li>d) Wade Lancett, the Koala Project Officer from TIDE, advised that the main aim of his role is to coordinate cultural burns over 50 hectares of koala habitat by April 2025.</li> </ol>

	<p>e) Rebecca advised that NPWS Discovery Rangers have been engaged to help deliver the Koala Smart Program to local schools.</p> <p>f) Henrietta Mooney advised that she is the Regional Landcare Coordinator for the Hunter, which has been recently extended to include the MidCoast. She noted that the adopted Koala Strategy will help to guide investment in conservation action on private land.</p> <p>g) The NSW Koala Summit is being held on 22 March to revisit the NSW Koala Strategy. Attendance is by invitation only. Caitlin Orr is attending on behalf of MidCoast Council. Wade and Chris are also attending from TIDE.</p> <p>The 'Reviewing the NSW Koala Strategy' discussion paper has now been released and is available at <a href="https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/programs-legislation-and-framework/nsw-koala-strategy/reviewing-the-nsw-koala-strategy">https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/programs-legislation-and-framework/nsw-koala-strategy/reviewing-the-nsw-koala-strategy</a>. The discussion paper will supplement advice from the NSW Koala Summit to review how actions, targets and delivery approaches are working to save koalas around the State. Submissions close on 26 April 2024.</p>
5	<b>Next Meeting - TBA</b>

## Matters raised by the Koala Reference Group discussion on the Draft MidCoast Koala Conservation Strategy

The table below outlines the matters raised, and the response (including amendments or additions to the Draft Report)

Matter raised	Response
Should the Strategy be called a Koala Strategy, Koala Management Strategy or Koala Conservation Strategy	Resolved to call it the Koala Conservation Strategy
MKEG has provided a written submission containing several discussion points and suggestions	Addressed below
The report would benefit from including the mapping of koala habitat in National Park and State Forest estates	New Action (4.3) added seeking permission to develop and publish koala habitat mapping for the lands of these tenures.
There was discussion on public and private native forestry, with different opinions presented. The meeting agreed that the Strategy needs to be objectively scientific and accurate.	Discussion of forestry (public and private) has been revised in the draft report on pp. 22 – 23.  Data on the area of PNF in the MidCoast has been added.
The perspective of local Aboriginal people on the Strategy is very important	Targeted consultation with relevant people is proposed during the formal exhibition period.
The Strategy needs to be clearer on what we are going to do, when, where and how much?	The revised Strategy includes more actions and greater detail on targets (see s3.2 and the Action Tables in s4).
Will the Strategy affect the development assessment process?	No. Action 2.12.1 is a general action about considering koalas and their habitat in DAs and rezoning proposals, which is in line with the current legislative processes. The Strategy is not a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management and doesn't change the legislative processes for developments.
The maps are hard to read; could we break down the data into graphs and tables?	The readability of the maps is still being looked at; including what tables and graphs might be valuable. How we can host the maps for public viewing during the exhibition is being investigated.
The Companion Animals Act regarding the prosecution of dog owners for dogs attacking koalas is impossible to enforce due to the "trespass" defence. This needs amendment.	Action 2.16 calls for Council to advocate for changes to the Companion Animals Act. The text in s2.6.6 has been altered to reflect this issue.
Forestry Corporation compartment mapping is a good source of koala sightings information, including high use areas	Noted
The infographic on carbon farming needs to be amended	Agreed; the information graphic has been removed. Council cannot provide business advice to farmers on the carbon market.
Cattle, horses and sheep attack koalas	s2.6.7 has been amended to reflect this.
KIC only collect about 7 Eucalypt species for their in-care koalas (and PMKH about 4) but koala feed tree lists are very extensive	The lists are more about koala habitat trees rather than food trees. The name of Appendix D has been altered to reflect this. Action 4.16 is proposed to link koala habitat tree species with

	the landscape they occur in – eg coastal sites, high elevation sites.
Climate change affects koalas' kidneys not their livers	Changed.
The National Park mapping is not correct	The NP mapping looked incorrect because of over-sized boundary lines. They have been removed.

**Note:**

Doug Beckers advised that the review of the draft by NPWS will involve several people and will take some time to compile. The comments are likely to be provided during the proposed formal public exhibition.

**Matters raised by Myall Koala and Environment Group**

Matter raised	Response
BCT revolving fund program is a good opportunity	This has now been reflected in Action 1.6
The 10:50 code should be amended to include registration of its use	This is now reflected in Action 2.4
A pre-burn koala check should be mandatory for all hazard reduction and prescribed burns	This is now reflected in Action 2.12
Reference to dogs should differentiate between feral dogs and dingoes	Done; text in the threats section has been amended. See pg. 27. An action has been added to research the impact of dingoes / wild dogs on koalas (Action 4.10)
Primary school education sessions are of high value	Agreed; the text in various places has been amended to reflect this
Create a severe weather crisis team to enter lands following natural disasters and provide care and assessments	This is covered at a State wide level in Recommendation 53 of the Bushfire Inquiry. Action 2.11 discusses this.
Add Dwarf Parramatta Red Gum (Drooping Red Gum), Bangalay and Broad-leaved Paperbark to the lists in Appendix D	Bangalay and Drooping Red Gum have been added. Broad-leaved Paperbark was already listed in the secondary / supplementary species list.
Comments to strategy action prioritisation	A prioritisation section has been removed. Actions are listed according to their timeframes (ongoing, short, medium or long).