

At Tilligerry Habitat in Tanilba Bay on Tilligerry Peninsula Port Stephens we are one of the few places in Australia where visitors can hope to see a koala in the wild.

Our decline around here is much higher than 26%- we have gone from koalas being able to be seen in a dozen places each day across our peninsula to them being far less frequent- visible in one or perhaps two sites but only an odd individual koala. There is a much higher proportion of koalas that need to be euthanized here because of an unknown disease, age or apparent genetic problems. And that is in a protected area of bush Tilligerry Habitat that we have been working on for 20 years and in a small community with limits on future growth due to RAAF and airport noise, protected areas of ground water in Tomago Sandbeds, more protected land than we have ever had in the form of national parks etc, land unsuitable for development due to wetlands etc.

We have been working on an Envirotrust grant since 2012 ( to be completed by 2018) but we have merely scratched the surface of doing anything to help koalas.

We have a planned revegetation project for 2017 ( with the last of the Green Army?) to remove pine trees and whisky grass and plant koala habitat north of the Lemon Tree Passage Waste Station.

We have now started a Tilligerry Wildlife Corridor Project aiming to work with stakeholders ( crown lands, national parks, Hunter Water, Worimi Land Council, Ausgrid, Port Stephens Council, sand miners!!! ) to protect the forested land we now have, get bushland signposted as to its status, get the illegal vehicles off (most fires start from stolen cars being burnt), identify patches that we can revegetate as koala habitat removing exotics like pines and develop a system of corridors that will help all fauna especially koalas.

What would help save koalas here

1. Declare current koala populations as endangered.
2. Provide facilities to care for koalas like the proposed koala hospital at Tomaree.
3. Port Stephens Council up until recently had an effective tree protection order – this has been loosened by our sand miner mayor so that these days the sound of chain saws taking down the large gums is endless. We were told by a councillor at our recent parks forum that the councillors had discussed removing all the large trees and replacing them with a smaller more suitable plant!!!(with a straight face!!) Tree protection regulations need to be reinstated.
4. Port Stephens council has one of the first Koala protection plans in NSW but it has never been properly implemented- just a front for the developers. This needs real teeth.
5. Block the new sand mining applications like the one from Sibelco on the North Dune. The sand miners have clearly demonstrated that they can't control the factors that stop the rehabilitation of sand mined land. We have a lot of sand mined land ( both from extraction of glass sand and deeper mining for rutile) and the forest that results is full of weeds and pine trees. Indeed our sand miners who boasted that they were improving koala habitat have to replant the species that were on the site before sand mining even if the land is now lower and therefore suitable for our major koala food tree Euc robusta.
6. Support the protection of wildlife corridors. Everyone I have spoken to about our project thank it's a great idea. But it is no one's job (although National Parks are coming out for a visit in January to see our issues). It can't be left to the community without labour support (like Green Army) and the availability of grants.
7. About 5 years ago when Robyn Parker was minister she promised action to release koalas in suitable areas. This needs to be investigated. Massive euthanasia like what happened on Kangaroo Island (not NSW!!!) can't happen.
8. I will attend the workshop in February.

Fran Corner

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