

Council Reference:
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Koala Strategy Submissions
NSW Office of Environment and Heritage

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NSW Office of Environment and Heritage proposed NSW Koala Strategy

Tweed Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the development of the proposed NSW Koala Strategy.

Council is actively involved and committed to an integrated approach to koala conservation and recovery. Since adoption of the Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management in February 2015, a works program providing additional habitat in strategic locations and innovative solutions to threats such as fire, development and vehicles has been successfully implemented to the benefit of the endangered Tweed Coast koala population.

Tweed Shire Council is already delivering a recovery program that is consistent with the key recommendations of the Chief Scientist & Engineer in the report released in December 2016. This includes an ongoing annual investment in the order of \$210,000 per year and successful delivery of the \$3 million dollar Tweed Byron Koala Connections project.

In addition, Council continues to provide highly significant technical support and direction to koala recovery and conservation planning and projects. This has included submissions to relevant legislative reviews including SEPP 44 and the proposed Biodiversity Conservation Act, together with significant input to the preparation of Saving our Species Priorities Action Statements and Projects.

The following comments are offered in relation to the relevant materials published on the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) website and as presented at a recent 'Council and State agencies meeting' held as part of the consultation program:

- OEH must wholeheartedly adopt the role of 'lead agency' for koala conservation and recovery. Whilst the requirement for a whole of government approach is supported, koala recovery will not be able to be achieved without OEH taking a strong leadership role, including identifying critical requirements for koala conservation and ensuring that they are met.
- The NSW Koala Strategy must be prepared as the foundation for OEH to take on the role of lead agency for koala conservation and recovery.

- In general, the strategy must recognise and support Comprehensive Koala Plans of Management prepared by Councils, prioritise endangered populations and provide a logical and effective framework that incorporates regional variation in relation to threats, priority recovery actions, resourcing and adaptive management.
- The strategy should include a strong avoid / minimise provision to ensure that the best practice and essential requirement to protect existing habitat is achieved.
- It is recommended that a requirement to prepare master plans in identified high significance areas is integrated to the strategy and/or SEPP 44 to provide a strategic and effective means to address the direct and indirect impacts of development on koalas and their habitat.
- Highly significant koala conservation outcomes can be achieved through the provision of financial support to organisations such as councils who work collaboratively with each other, relevant state agencies, community stakeholders and individual landholders. These outcomes can be most effectively achieved through large scale, multi-year projects as opposed to the current trend for smaller grants programs. Tweed and Byron Shires have recently demonstrated the efficacy of this approach through the Koala Connections project which has delivered more than 50 hectares of new koala habitat over more than 100 sites.
- The strategy should provide a platform to facilitate regional collaboration that is led and supported by OEH. There are numerous models in existence that provide for sharing information, outcomes, reference materials and lesson learned.
- The strategy must acknowledge the threat of disease to koala populations and lead science based, integrated programs, including support to finalise the development and application of a vaccine for Chlamydia.
- Koalas face significant threat from high intensity wildfire and fire exclusion. Tweed Shire Council has worked with the Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium to develop a management response to this threat. Highly significant mutual benefit to koala populations, koala habitat and human life and property can be achieved through application of this management framework including implementing hazard reduction burns in accordance with guidelines prepared that aim to avoid impact to koalas.
- There is no information to date on how the proposed strategy will translate into any meaningful implementation, including with regard to the proposed funding mechanism for actions. This is clearly an essential element of the proposed strategy that must be addressed in order for there to be any confidence in its value.
- It is noted that the timing and logic associated with the numerous relevant legislative and conservation instruments currently underway is highly significant to the viability of the proposed strategy. Ensuring consistency,

complementarity and mutually beneficial outcomes from the strategy, SEPP 44 review and the proposed Biodiversity Conservation Act will be extremely challenging yet essential. Based on review of the relevant materials available to date, it appears that achieving the stated aim of a whole of government response may indeed prove the most difficult step for koala recovery in NSW.

Further detailed information in relation to koala conservation and recovery actions underway in Tweed Shire, including relevant studies, plans and reports are available at www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/koalas.

If you require any further information in relation to this matter, please contact Dr Mark Kingston on (02) 6670 2593 or Mr Scott Hetherington on (02) 6670 2561 or via email: tsc@tweed.nsw.gov.au.

Yours faithfully



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Troy Green
GENERAL MANAGER