

## **PROPOSAL FOR RELOCATION OF BLACK ROCKS SPORTS FIELD TO DUNLOE PARK**

Dear Dr Phillips

I would like to run an idea by you whereby there might be a better outcome for the koalas, the community, council and developers of the Dunloe urban release at Pottsville.

Some members of the community strongly oppose revegetation because they believe that a community asset would be taken away from them.

I am also concerned that there may be a rescission motion on the tennis court application at the Black Rocks sports field (as has been suggested by a Councillor and confirmed by another recently). Another Councillor wants leashed dogs to be allowed at the sports field site. As long as it remains a sports field, there is a danger it will become a high order facility (as recommended for consideration in the Pottsville Development Control Plan).

According to Council's Developer Contributions Policy, the proposed Dunloe Park urban development is to provide sporting infrastructure within its footprint. I have reason to believe that the developer also may have plans for the Black Rocks sports field to service Dunloe Park.

Kellehers Road is earmarked as the link road from Dunloe Park to the coast (another tragedy in the making).

I believe it will be an absolute disaster for the koalas if the Black Rocks sports field becomes a high order facility (including night sport) and the Dunloe Park urban development (6000 people) and Kellehers Road link to the coast are approved.

The Threatened Species Conservation Society will campaign strongly for no link road to the coast and to stop or at least wind back the Dunloe Park urban development. However, we know the chances of achieving this are very slim.

In light of future development pressures and likely adverse outcomes, could you please provide your opinion as to whether you think the following possible scenario has any merit in terms of getting the best outcome for the koalas.

### **My proposal:**

I have estimated that about 40 to 44 hectares of the 169 hectares of land in the proposed Dunloe urban development west of the Black Rocks sports field is within a Koala Activity Precinct (KAP). The remainder is in a Koala Linkage Precinct (KLP) [refer attached map, Appendix 1].

Under the Tweed Coast Koala Plan of Management 2015 10% of land in a KAP is to be set aside (possibly revegetated) as koala habitat. If I am correct in my estimate that equates to 4ha to be set aside for koala habitat within the Dunloe Park urban development. The Black Rocks sports field is 4ha.

[NOTE: A thin line of vegetation to connect corridors is the minimum requirement for a KLP.]

**My idea is to investigate the merits of relocating the Black Rocks sports field to Dunloe Park so that the Black Rocks sports field can be revegetated, and whether this relocation would benefit the koalas.**

If the 4ha of land that is to be set aside for koala habitat (possibly revegetated) in Dunloe Park could be instead used as a sports field in a location that would have minimal impact on the koala corridor, there would be no loss of sporting infrastructure, just a relocation of it from Black Rocks to Dunloe Park.

There would be no need to buy land for relocation of the sports field, and the developer could put the costs he would need to outlay to revegetate the 4ha in Dunloe Park into revegetation of the Black Rocks sports field instead.

A win for the koalas and the developer would gain another sports field. The Black Rocks community would not lose their sports field and could access the relocated sports field via Kellehers Road.

If its relocation in Dunloe has no impact on koalas, it could be a high order facility including night sport. Much better option than Black Rocks, which at this point in time does not permit night sports. A win for the community.

The relocation of the Black Rocks sports field to Dunloe Park would be in addition to other sporting infrastructure required of the developer to service the new population.

The current Black Rocks sports field cost \$1 million to build, so it would probably cost about the same to build at the the relocated field. There was/is still \$746,000 available which council was to use for embellishment of the Black Rocks sports field. This \$746,000 could be spent on the relocated field at Dunloe. A win for the developer.

Revegetation of the Black Rocks sports field would create a massive habitat block (approximately 850m wide with 4 ha of primary food trees planted in the middle to strengthen up the existing corridor in all directions, especially to the south). A win for koalas.

A deed of agreement was reached between the developer of the Black Rocks estate to relocate the Black Rocks sports field from within the estate to its current location within koala habitat. I wonder if a similar agreement may be possible to allow relocation from Black Rocks to Dunloe Park.

### **Possible problems with proposal:**

- It can only work if the Black Rocks residents have easy access to the relocated sports field via Kellehers Road.
- Dunloe Park urban development could be 10 years away. I wonder if the developer and Council would agree to establishing the relocated sports field at Dunloe Park before the majority of the development is under way.
- Impacts on the koalas and their corridor at the relocated site at Dunloe Park.

It would be much appreciated if you could look at the big picture and consider which would achieve the best outcome for the koalas in the circumstances, ie revegetation of the Black Rocks sports field or revegetation of 4ha at Dunloe Park. I have attached a map [Appendix 2] which shows a layout of the area and indicates a possible relocation site. However, there may be more suitable locations further north within the Dunloe Park development. Also attached are photos (A-D) which were taken at the south-east corner of the relocation site indicated on the map [in consecutive order clockwise from west to north].

My idea is based on what I think we can realistically expect to achieve. I will not progress this idea until I get your expert opinion as to whether it has any merit and is worth pursuing.

### **DR PHILLIP'S REPLY 21/3/2016:**

As you are aware – one of the strong arguments for revegetation the Black Rocks Sports Field goes to issues of habitat fragmentation, patch size and the associated edge to area ratio. More specifically, the current location of the sports field puts it within a regenerating habitat block, the importance of which is readily apparent as a connectivity hub through which koala recruitment/dispersal to the south-east, southwest and north can theoretically occur. Yet despite its importance the sports field (including the road reserve) offers an edge of approximately 1600 m that is exposed to ongoing disturbance events and the depredations of domestic dogs. The small koala population that now survives in the habitat surrounding the sports field certainly does not need more disturbance, it needs to be left in peace, nurtured and allowed (or even assisted) to recover to more sustainable levels. Revegetating the sports field will remove that 1600m edge and create an ecologically important habitat block that will make a meaningful contribution to the recovery needs of the Tweed Coast koala population.

For the preceding reasons I can do no more than wholeheartedly support your idea. I encourage you to pursue your envisaged scenario because it appears to provide one of those win-win scenarios so often missing in terms of demonstrable, long-term sustainable planning outcomes.

Kind Regards

Steve