

2 March 2017

Koala Strategy Submissions
PO Box A290
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Australia

Submission regarding development of the NSW Koala Strategy

Council welcomes the opportunity to provide input on the information to be contained in a whole-of-government koala strategy for NSW.

Lismore City Council has an approved Comprehensive Plan of Management for south-east Lismore (CKPoM) since 2013, prepared under SEPP44. The CKPoM aims to protect the koala population found in the southeast of the LGA, which is considered one of the most significant on the NSW North Coast. The plan gives clear direction on how to manage threats to koalas and their habitat. It contains policies and planning provisions which guide how development applications are assessed, incorporating koala conservation principles which aim to ensure koalas have viable natural habitat and food trees in the southeast of the LGA. The CKPoM also details a range of management activities that address threats to koala health and welfare including the clearing of habitat, disease, road accidents and dog attacks.

Over the last 5 years Council has received over \$500 000 of funding focused on improving outcomes for Koalas by undertaking habitat restoration in various locations across the LGA. In addition to this funding Council has allocated \$85 000 from Biodiversity Management Strategy special rate variation that was introduced in 2016 to koala specific projects. These were informed by the actions in the CKPoM. Council has a strong commitment to koala recovery and continues to work with landholders, community, industry groups and other stakeholders to increase Lismore's koala population and their habitat.

Lismore City Council offers the following comments on the development of the whole-of-government koala strategy for NSW:

- The whole of government approach is strongly supported but there is a need for the Office of Environment and Heritage to provide strong leadership. The NSW Koala Strategy must provide the framework to enable this leadership to take place.
- The development of the Koala Strategy is occurring concurrently with the review of SEPP44 and the introduction of the Biodiversity Conservation Act, and associated regulations. It is essential that there is consistency between these policies and legislation to ensure effective conservation of koalas and to enable Council's to have a clearly defined development assessment process that is consistent across government departments.
- SEPP44 is the main policy used by Councils to regulate development impacts on koala habitat, however, as can be seen by the ongoing decline in koala populations it has proved ineffective in achieving its stated aims. This SEPP must provide stronger protection for

koala habitat and the Department of Planning and Environment must ensure consistency in the application of this policy.

- The Strategy needs to identify areas of significant koala habitat and restrict development in these areas to ensure the ongoing survival of resident koala populations. These areas should include both occupied and unoccupied habitat areas to allow for the natural dynamics of koala occupancy changes to occur over multiple koala generations. There is a need for strong policy by the NSW government to support Councils to restrict development in these areas. These areas should also be the focus for conservation projects and ongoing funding should be provided to support landholders to manage this land.
- In the Lismore LGA many koala populations persist in modified agricultural landscapes, and are highly dependent on koala food trees which occur scattered through rural lands. These areas provide essential habitat for Lismore's koalas, however, they are potentially threatened by changes to legislation as a result of the Biodiversity Conservation Act. These areas can be difficult to map through current methodologies, particularly at a large scale, as they occur as open woodlands with a low canopy cover. The Strategy should provide a mechanism for protecting these important habitat trees and their clearing should be regulated through the Biodiversity Conservation Act and Local Land Service Act.
- Many Councils in the Far North Coast have existing fine scale vegetation mapping and associated koala habitat maps, many of which have been developed using the categories identified in the NSW Koala Recovery Plan. These maps are developed at a scale which provides a higher level of certainty compared with many regional or state wide mapping data. These maps are available to other government departments and should be incorporated into any state wide mapping datasets.

It is important to note, however, that there are areas of some LGAs where vegetation and koala habitat maps have not been developed, including areas which have known koala populations. These areas should be prioritised for new mapping projects to fill gaps in current knowledge. In Lismore LGA vegetation mapping for the north-west portion of the shire is limited, however, Council will be undertaking fine scale vegetation mapping in this area in the second half of 2017.

- Additional resources from the NSW government should be focused on mapping areas not currently mapped. Standards and guidelines for assessing and comparing koala habitat should also be developed to provide a coordinated approach across the state. Additionally, standards are required for assessing koala populations to determine meaningful population and occupancy estimates that are comparable across the state.
- In many areas on the North Coast, historical clearing of vegetated areas dominated by primary koala food tree species has forced koalas to occupy areas of less suitable and even marginal habitat where there are few (if any) primary koala food trees and where secondary koala food tree species and tree species which are not koala food trees predominate. These need to be accounted for in any mapping project.
- Koala conservation status varies across local government areas as do threats, priority actions, and resourcing. It is important that any framework developed makes allowance for these differences and to address local issues.

In Lismore the main threats to koala populations include habitat loss, disease, car strikes and dog attack. Friends of the Koala (FoK) provide koala rescue and rehabilitation services in Lismore LGA and keep statistics on koala in their care. In 2015/16 FOK admitted 169 koalas into care, of which there were 134 mortalities, 26 released and 9 kept in care. The cause of mortalities was attributed to disease (73), car strike (20), dogs (16), geriatric (5) and other (20). Mortalities within the Lismore LGA were also significantly higher compared with neighbouring LGA's, however, this may be attributed in part to the high level of community awareness to FoK in the Lismore LGA. Disease is obviously the most significant threat to koalas, however, this is not considered to be isolated, instead it is evidence of a population in stress as a result of historic and ongoing threats.

- Lismore Council works collaboratively with surrounding Councils and community groups on a range of issues including koala conservation. The Strategy should capitalise on the role of local government and the close working relationship with the community to fund large scale, long term projects which protect and restore koala habitat and populations. An example project is the Tweed Byron Koala Connections project which was a landscape scale, multidisciplinary project which addressed a range of management issues on the Tweed and Byron coastal areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the development of the NSW Koala Strategy. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Angie Brace Environmental Strategies Officer NRM on 02 6625 0491.

Yours faithfully



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