

1 March 2017

Amendment to the Priorities Action Statement
Office of Environment and Heritage
PO Box A290
Sydney South NSW 1232

SUBMISSION: SAVING OUR SPECIES ICONIC KOALA PROJECT

The Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils represents the Lismore, Tweed, Kyogle, Richmond Valley, Ballina and Byron Local Government Areas (LGA). This submission reflects the broad views of the NOROC councils in reference to the Saving Our Species Iconic Koala Project.

The Northern Rivers region of NSW has significant populations of koalas, with the population in the south of the Ballina Shire regarded as nationally significant. For many years Northern Rivers councils have been aware of the ecological importance of koalas and our communities have high expectations that councils are committed to ensuring the long-term survival of the marsupials.

NOROC supports the actions outlined in *Saving Our Species: securing the koala in the wild in NSW for 100 years* but notes our councils and the Lismore-based Friends of the Koala organisation, have been trying to address the critical threats to, and decline of, our koala populations for many years. Councils report that there is sometimes a “disconnect” between the decisions and policy interpretations of NSW Government agencies and departments and councils.

Northern Rivers councils have invested in and developed a range of comprehensive Koala Plans of Management and associated strategies that contain a wide range of information including estimates of koala numbers, the distribution of koalas across the LGAs and changes in the size of koala populations in recent years which inform predictions of future numbers and causes of koala mortality. This information is available to the Office of Environment and Heritage.

The Tweed and Byron Shires have also worked together on the Tweed Byron Koala Connections project. This \$3.5 million project ran from November 2013 to June 2016 with the Federal Government contributing \$2 million from the Clean Energy Future Biodiversity Fund. The aim of the project was to address threats and improve the future of koalas on the north coast with particular emphasis on increasing the area, quality and connectivity of koala habitat in the Tweed and Byron shires.

This resulted in the planting of 73,000 koala food trees and other trees and shrubs to improve koala habitat and enhance the diversity of endangered ecological communities. In total more than 55 hectares of new koala habitat was created over more than 100 sites.

Councils work closely with the Friends of the Koala (FoK) group, which is recognised as one of the nation’s peak koala conservation organisations. Councils have worked with FoK on a number of initiatives including the development of a regional communication

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strategy to increase community understanding and capacity in relation to koala conservation.

Currently the University of Queensland is leading a study that aims to develop an integrated socio-ecological approach for connecting landscapes and communities for the recovery of threatened koala populations across the Lismore, Byron, Ballina and Tweed shires to inform the priority of ongoing works. This study also involves Southern Cross University and is funded by the Australian Research Council. We are anticipating this will provide valuable information to councils, and to OEH, which will help to guide our continued efforts to protect koalas in the Northern Rivers.

NOROC councils are looking forward to working with OEH on achieving its aim of securing the koala in the wild for 100 years.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ann Lewis', with a large circular flourish at the beginning and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Ann Lewis
Executive Officer