Proposed Priorities Action Statement amendment

A Saving our Species conservation project for the koala is now in draft (Saving our Species Iconic Koala Project). The draft project includes a list of actions that is proposed as an amendment to the existing Priorities Action Statement (PAS) for the koala (Table 1).

The existing PAS for the koala (*Phascolarctus cinereus*) (Table 2) was advertised for public exhibition between 13 December 2013 and 13 February 2014, and adopted by the Chief Executive of the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) on 25 July 2014.

NOTE: Many of the actions in the 2014 PAS (Table 2) are now likely to be addressed by the whole-of-government NSW koala strategy (http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/animals/nsw-koala-strategy.htm) and have not been included in the proposed amendments to the PAS (Table 1).

Table 1: Proposed amendment to the Priorities Action Statement for the koala (*Phascolarctus cinereus*).

Action (Proposed Priorities Action Statement for the koala, November 2016)
Loss, modification and fragmentation of habitat
In areas where a koala population is present, undertake planting to restore and increase the area of koala habitat. Restoration and augmentation planting and/or direct seeding should use appropriate feed and shelter tree species in areas of degraded and/or potentially suitable habitat. Revegetation should focus on expanding existing smaller areas of known occupied habitat, including private land, and connecting areas of suitable habitat to create corridors for movement. Resources for long-term monitoring and management of revegetated areas should be included.
In areas where a koala population is present, negotiate agreements with landholders, particularly in-perpetuity covenants or stewardship agreements that promote the protection and retention of high quality koala habitat or habitat that contributes significantly to connectivity in the landscape.
In areas where a koala population is present, undertake koala habitat studies and mapping using standardised methods and terminology to identify key koala populations and rank and map koala habitat. Centralised mapping and database to include details of works, methods, costs, sources of funding and outcomes of monitoring.
Vehicle strike
Identify blackspots where koala road mortalities are greatest and target proven mitigation techniques such as fencing and wildlife crossings, in discussion with council and Roads and Maritime Services. Mitigation may also involve the development, testing and deployment of new technologies that can reduce vehicle strike.
Liaise with Roads and Maritime Services and local councils in the development of new/existing roads to plan koala barrier fencing and crossings as part of road construction projects.
Predation by roaming or domestic dogs
Conduct local community awareness campaigns in areas where attacks by domestic dogs on koalas are prevalent to raise awareness of the impacts and the importance of responsible dog ownership, including keeping dogs restrained on leads and in properly fenced enclosures.
Intense prescribed burns or wildfires that scorch or burn the tree canopy
Liaise with relevant authorities or land managers to ensure that identified koala habitat areas are defined as assets for protection in fire planning tools when managing wildfires and prior to any hazard reduction burns. Promote best practice fire management protocols in areas of significant koala populations.
Liaise with authorities or land managers to ensure that any unavoidable prescribed burns within koala habitat are conducted in a way that minimises impacts on koala habitat and individual koalas, based on best practice guidelines.
Koala disease
Improve understanding of the role of chlamydia in koala population dynamics and mortality, including baseline genetic information and links between habitat disturbance and disease-related morbidity, by conducting research in collaboration with universities, vets and ecologists.

Table 1 continued

Action (Proposed Priorities Action Statement for the koala, November 2016)
Heat stress through drought and heatwaves
Support carer and vet networks in their response to the management of koala health and welfare during extreme weather conditions.
Research and trial adaptation management actions such as installation of artificial water sources and the establishment of refuge habitat and promote connectivity through habitat restoration.
Human-induced climate change
Use predicted climate change data and modelling techniques to predict the possible impacts on koalas from climate change. This should include how koala habitat is likely to change under different climate changes scenarios, such as temperature rise impacts on habitat, drought and wildfires. Use this information to prioritise adaptation actions and investment in habitat and corridor protection and restoration.
Inadequate support for fauna rehabilitation
Support koala rehabilitation groups and vets to rehabilitate sick and injured koalas through training, provision of materials, and promotion of state-wide protocols including for rehabilitation, genetic profiling, record-keeping and release to the wild.
Lack of knowledge (poor understanding of sources of trauma and mortality)
Engage with koala rehabilitation groups and other information sources to better understand the causes of koala trauma and mortality. Collate and map the results.
Lack of knowledge (poor understanding of population distribution and trend)
Develop standardised method and reporting for monitoring change in koala populations and distribution through time and contribute survey data to centralised database. Include genetic information where possible.
Support the collation of koala survey records and monitoring information through a centralised database for state-wide reporting and analysis, contributing sighting records to NSW BioNet.
Lack of knowledge (poor understanding of animal movements and use of habitat)
Improve understanding of koala movements and use of their habitat in the landscape by conducting targeted research on individuals using GPS collars and mark-recapture techniques.
Getting the community engaged in koala conservation
Use multiple channels to engage the community in koala conservation and recovery actions across the state. This includes communication strategies, citizen science, volunteers, on-ground conservation actions, awareness programs, and landholder engagement.

Table 2: Priorities Action Statement for the koala (*Phascolarctus cinereus*), adopted by the Chief Executive of OEH, 25 July 2014.

Action (Priorities Action Statement for the koala, 25 July 2014)
Implement the objectives of State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 44 and the National Koala Conservation Strategy for the conservation of koalas and their habitat in NSW.
The NSW government will participate in the preparation of a revised National Koala Conservation Strategy to replace the 1998 Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council (ANZECC) Strategy.
Consideration will be given to amending Schedule 2 (Feed Tree Species) of SEPP 44 to include additional food tree species of koalas.
The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) will determine the distribution of koalas across NSW by conducting a community-based survey.
OEH will analyse patterns of koala road deaths to enable recommendations to road managers on appropriate management measures which limit the risk to koalas on existing roads.
OEH will analyse the impact of dogs to identify whether dogs pose a significant threat to koala populations, and alert land managers to the problem.
OEH will undertake and encourage other researchers to undertake population studies of koalas in a range of habitats in relation to a range of issues such as fire, drought, dogs, cars, habitat fragmentation, and climate change.
Analyse community-based survey data on koala distribution in NSW in relation to features such as habitat, tenures, catchment management authority and bioregional boundaries, and compare 2006 survey results with those of the 1986 survey.
Disseminate the results of the community-based survey on koala distribution in NSW, including in a standard scientific publication.
Define the factors that determine koala habitat including soils, elevation, climate and tree species (food and shelter).
Undertake local and/or regional surveys in selected koala populations with particular emphasis on repeating earlier surveys to search for trends and causes of changes in koala distribution.
OEH will identify important koala populations in NSW for active management, monitoring and conservation.
A translocation proposal consistent with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Policy for the Translocation of Threatened Fauna in NSW will be prepared for any proposed movement of koalas. OEH will disseminate info regarding translocation of koalas.
OEH will undertake research on koala ecology to better understand the primary issues affecting their conservation, and coordinate/contribute to the disparate interests and activities relevant to understanding and managing koalas in NSW.
OEH will make available/disseminate the information gathered during the implementation of the 2008 recovery plan for the koala.
Accredited and licensed wildlife rehabilitation groups will continue to rescue and rehabilitate injured, orphaned and/or diseased koalas according to the NPWS policy "Koala Care in NSW: Guidelines and Conditions", including an upgraded recording system.
OEH will assist wildlife rehabilitation groups to interpret the ecological relevance and application of rescue work and rescue records for koala conservation.

Table 2 continued

Action (Priorities Action Statement for the koala, 25 July 2014)
OEH will analyse NSW koala care records, assist in developing improved protocols to record data to ensure consistency among rehab groups and to provide useful information for koala conservation.
OEH, through collaboration with a wide range of researchers and conservation partners, will coordinate and promote implementation of the recovery plan, using the Priorities Action Statement as the primary information and coordination tool.
Conduct research on the relative impacts of different levels of habitat loss and fragmentation on koala populations, and on the ability of koalas to move between patches, relating to both daily movements and long-term dispersal.
OEH, in partnership with planning research groups, will prepare a generic approach to planning guidelines as an application of the research done on the impacts of habitat loss, fragmentation and the impediments to koala movement between fragments.
OEH will work with councils to assist in the preparation of Comprehensive Koala Plans of Management (CKPoM) under SEPP 44.
OEH will encourage the revision and/or production of a regional list of koala food and shelter trees for catchment management authorities, local government areas and other local/regional koala plans that deal with specific issues and/or locations.
Consideration will be given to having a single definition of koala habitat, instead of 'core' and 'potential' habitat and to expanding the list of koala foods.
OEH will revise the local government area list on the basis of the 2006 map of koala distribution (from the community survey) and consider whether to recommend its incorporation into SEPP 44.
Consideration will be given to amending SEPP 44 to: allow for other koala plans to be developed by councils on a regional or local government basis; and allow for Schedule 2 (Feed Tree Species) of SEPP 44 to include additional koala food tree species.
OEH, together with Department of Planning, will work with councils and CMAs to assist them in developing koala habitat protection measures for incorporation in relevant local environmental plans, and regional natural resource and vegetation management plans.
OEH will provide specific advice arising from the koala recovery plan, as required, to consent and determining authorities regarding their decision-making responsibilities under SEPP 44, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and the Native Vegetation Act.
OEH will prepare environmental impact assessment guidelines for the koala.
OEH will approach key stakeholders to negotiate conservation outcomes for important koala populations in NSW.
OEH will contribute to koala habitat rehabilitation and revegetation activities undertaken by individuals, community groups and government agencies by identifying priority areas for work in each koala management area and providing technical advice and support.
OEH will encourage groups to undertake research on any aspect of koala biology and to communicate with OEH when research is being undertaken and when results are published, so officers managing the recovery plan have access to the best available info.
Undertake coordinated surveys of koalas across a range of scales, using appropriate methods and focusing on different issues at the site, landscape/regional, and state scale, including a mechanism for identifying endangered populations.
Compare and assess the reliability of different koala survey and analytical techniques.
Assess koala population dynamics and habitat use across the NSW range.

Table 2 continued

Action (Priorities Action Statement for the koala, 25 July 2014)
Investigate the relative importance of different threats to koalas, how to ameliorate them and the effectiveness of mitigation measures.
Undertake studies of the history of koala management as part of an adaptive management strategy.
Assess the significance and extent of over-browsing which is likely to emerge in NSW.
In areas where over-browsing becomes a significant issue, develop management strategies based on the National Koala Conservation Strategy.
OEH will design and implement a program to monitor changes in the status of koalas and koala habitat and evaluate the success of recovery actions in improving the conservation status of koalas in NSW.
Examine the population of koalas in Bongil Bongil National Park to assist in the implementation of the Koala Recovery Plan in this icon forest.
OEH will approach the Department of Planning to jointly develop and provide specific advice to local government about the incorporation of koala protection into their new local environmental plans, currently under development.
Management of all OEH estate will specifically provide for the protection of koalas.
OEH will approach Forests NSW to collaborate in developing policy and practice consistent with the NSW Koala Recovery Plan; exchange information, given koalas move across tenure boundaries; and work within the context of agreed regional forest agreements.
OEH will approach Road and Maritime Services (RMS) to align its policy and practice with the koala recovery plan; exchange info and produce plans; ensure RMS has an active program to implement engineering solutions and other measures to reduce adverse impacts of vehicles on koalas.
OEH will advise consent and determining authorities on the appropriate measures which should be included in the design and construction of new roads which may have the potential to impact on koala habitat.
Information regarding koalas and koala habitat, including maps of koala habitat, will be prepared by OEH and disseminated, following discussions, to relevant bush fire management committees.
OEH will provide appropriate regional koala food tree species lists to catchment management authorities.
OEH will investigate with stakeholders the value of holding another koala summit (state conference).
OEH will prepare and make available/disseminate information to drivers in areas where koala populations occur regarding the threat posed to koalas by vehicles.
OEH will provide information in relation to the management of dogs and their threat to koalas.
Assess the economic and non-biological values of koalas to the whole community.
Investigations into the cultural significance of koalas to Indigenous Australians will be encouraged.