



## **CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE**

29-31 Skinner Street

South Grafton 2460

Phone/ Fax: 02 6643 1863

Web site: [www.cec.org.au](http://www.cec.org.au)

E-mail: [admin@cec.org.au](mailto:admin@cec.org.au)

# **Submission**

to

## **Lismore City Council**

[council@lismore.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@lismore.nsw.gov.au)

on

# **Draft Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for South-East Lismore**

Compiled for Clarence Environment Centre  
by John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary  
4<sup>th</sup> January 2012

# **Submission to Lismore City Council's Draft Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for South-East Lismore**

## **Preamble**

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 22 years, and has a proud record of environmental advocacy, particularly in the field of biodiversity conservation. As a result, we applaud Lismore Council's decision to formulate a Plan of Management for the district's Koala population.

## **The current status of Koalas**

While dramatic declines in Koala populations have been reported in New South Wales and Queensland, to the point where the Federal Government is currently giving consideration to listing the species as threatened under the EPBC Act, we understand that those declines have not yet occurred in the Richmond River valley.

Koalas are already listed as a threatened species in NSW, and it is important to be reminded why that listing was made. The simple fact is that the NSW Scientific Committee determined, based on scientifically gathered evidence, that if the declines in Koala populations were not reversed, the species will become extinct in nature.

We believe the fact that historical data suggests that Lismore's Koala population has bucked the trend, can be directly attributed to the dedicated efforts of Koala advocate groups in the district, which have worked tirelessly to educate the community, and protect both the Koalas and their habitat. However, there can be no place for complacency knowing that the present area of Koala occupancy is less than 30%, well below the benchmark figure of 50%.

We have all seen what rampant and inconsiderate development has done to Koala populations on the Tweed and across the border into southeast Queensland, and the Clarence Environment Centre would hate to see that experience, and that of the Clarence Valley, repeated in the Lismore LGA.

A decade or more ago, in our own Clarence Valley, the then Maclean Shire Council prepared a Koala Plan of Management to protect declining Koala populations at Iluka, Woombah, Ashby, and Gulmarrad. That Plan was never adopted as a direct result of the councils' forced amalgamation. However, during the preparation of a local Biodiversity Management Strategy, the need was identified for an LGA wide Koala Plan of Management, which was based on the original Maclean Plan, and finally adopted in 2011.

That Plan identifies the depressing fact that, by 2011: "*The Woombah koala population is in imminent danger of extinction and it is highly likely the Iluka population is already extinct*". The Ashby population has also been placed under extreme pressure during that 10 year interval, with council granting approval to a number of rural residential subdivisions which have all seen koala habitat removed.

Add to that widespread approvals for rural residential subdivisions in Koala habitat at Coutts Crossing, Waterview Heights and Gulmarrad, several hundred hectares of prime forests to be cleared for the Pacific Highway upgrade from Halfway Creek to Tullymorgan Creek, and the Clarence Valley Koalas are in serious trouble.

Another major contributor to Koala habitat loss is Forests NSW through the high intensity logging that has been under way for the past 8 years. Even at Doubleduke in the Lismore LGA, where Koalas are known to occur, more than 50% of the basal volume of trees were logged across several

compartments in 2010, which saw large numbers of Koala feed trees logged.

## **The need for a Plan of Management**

The primary factor in koala decline is loss and fragmentation of habitat, that force these predominantly arboreal animals to spend more time on the ground which leads to mortalities from vehicle strike, dog attack, and drowning in backyard swimming pools. All of these factors cause stress in the animals which leads to stress-related diseases such as highly infectious chlamydia.

The “Friends of the Koala” report that, in the past 12 months alone, that organisation has received 154 koalas into care from across the Lismore LGA. Despite excellent veterinary assistance the 77% loss rate, 119 koalas, is very high. Disease was the biggest killer: 71 koalas (60%), followed by vehicle strike, 18 koalas (15%), with dog attacks accounting for 9 koalas (7%). We have no means of knowing what percentage of Lismore’s Koala population come into care, but clearly a framework for pro-active, responsible management is long overdue.

While the Lismore population may currently be stable, or even increasing slightly, just a 2% increase in mortality rates would tip the population back into decline. With a sound Plan of Management in place, Council should be able to undertake initiatives to mitigate all the above threats.

Priorities therefore need to be given to identifying movement corridors, and encouraging their rehabilitation through a comprehensive feed tree planting program. This should be helped by the fact that we believe the overwhelming majority of residents would like to see this iconic species on the road to recovery. They care about Koalas and their future.

If there is one main criticism that we could level, it is that we believe the Plan of Management should encompass the entire LGA instead of the mere 14% proposed under the southeast Lismore Plan.

It is our experience in the Clarence Valley, and Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Dorrigo Councils would all concur, that logging activities in State forests, that are currently totally unsustainable, are a major driver of Koala decline along the NSW east coast. It is imperative that Councils, through their plans of management, put pressure on Forests NSW, and the State Government Environment and Primary Industry Departments, to rein in the excesses that are currently being allowed.

## **Benefits**

Council has consulted well with its Expert Working Group and Stakeholder Reference Group and now it needs to act in order to capitalise on the benefits. Koalas are already a tourist attraction providing economic benefits for Lismore, but there there is much more that could be done to promote and grow this sector, many of which, like the rehabilitation of movement corridors, have already been mentioned above.

There are other peripheral benefits that will accrue, including:

1. The Draft Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM) doesn’t affect land owners on a daily basis or any activities that are permitted. without development consent. It is only triggered when a Development Application (DA) is lodged.
2. While the CKPoM doesn’t stop landowners from carrying out their normal activities it provides transparent and well-documented requirements to compensate for the loss of preferred koala food trees, and preferred and core koala habitat.
3. The CKPoM makes it easier for landowners who want to lodge a DA, because Council cannot

approve a DA on land that supports core or potential koala habitat unless an approved Comprehensive or Individual Koala Plan of Management is in place.

4. The CKPoM will mean a more strategic and coordinated approach to managing koalas and their habitat, which is better for everyone.
5. The CKPoM removes the need to prepare an Individual Koala Plan of Management and reduces the cost and time taken to process a DA.
6. The CKPoM provides sound guidelines on how to retain and protect koala food trees, how to avoid or minimise any adverse impacts of developments on food trees and koala habitat, and how to mitigate the residual impacts of development activity.
7. If koala food trees and habitat have to be removed, as a last resort developers are understandably required to compensate for this loss and the CKPoM makes those measures explicit and therefore transparent.

We thank Council for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely  
John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary.