

Tweed Coast Koala Plan of Management Annual Report – Year 1 (February 2015 – February 2016)

Background

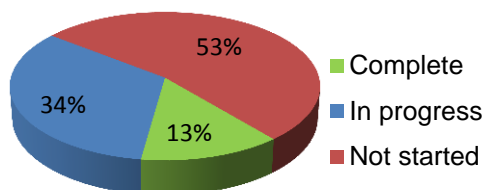
Council adopted the Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management as a strategy of Council in February 2015. The adopted plan includes a five year works program incorporating the 45 actions identified in the plan.

Implementation of the plan has benefited greatly from the Tweed Byron Koala Connections project. Koala Connections is a joint project with Byron Shire Council funded through the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund. Concurrent delivery of this project has resulted in numerous actions with significant progress at time of adoption of the plan. There are also ongoing benefits resulting from preparatory work already completed through the Koala Connections project.

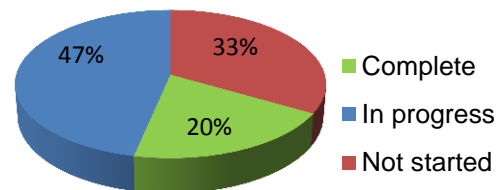
The complete implementation of all plan actions, in particular meeting the targets for the creation of new koala habitat, remain subject to securing relevant external funding support

Overall action implementation status

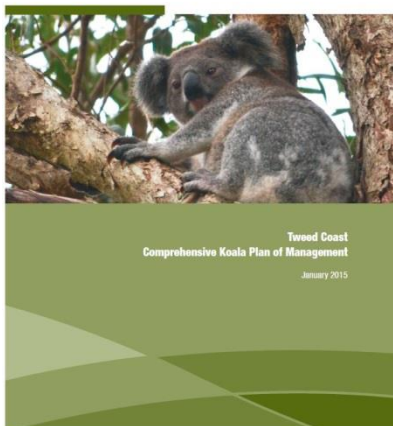
All actions (Years 1 - 5)



Year 1 actions



General plan implementation actions



- A suite of actions associated with commencement of the plan including publishing relevant materials, delivery of two staff training sessions and incorporating mapping to Council's GIS system have been completed.
- Establishment of a Koala Management Committee has been intentionally delayed to align with the term of a new Council as per Council resolution of February 2016.
- Relevant development provisions of the plan are fully integrated to the ecological referral process and used to inform relevant land use decisions. This includes all scales of proposals from individual tree preservation order applications to large scale urban release area master plan development.

Koala habitat rehabilitation



Photo: Tanya Fountain

- Development of a habitat restoration program to prioritise restoration and revegetation works is in progress. Comparable work undertaken to inform investment through Koala Connections provides significant benefit with regard to literature analysis, landholder relationships and cost benefit analysis.
- The Tweed Byron Koala Connections project has resulted in significant habitat restoration within the KPOM area since commencement in July 2013. This includes:
 - 20,573 trees planted including 12,373 koala food trees
 - 12 ha of new habitat (towards 20 year KPOM target of an additional 200 ha)
 - 102 ha existing habitat under active restoration to improve habitat condition
 - Very high (~90%) establishment success as evaluated by standardised monitoring
 - Koalas, including back young, using planted trees at three sites.
- An additional 1,700 trees will be planted prior to June 2016 through additional funding received from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.
- Council has contributed to development of a statewide koala recovery program to inform prioritisation of NSW government investment in threatened species through the *Saving our Species* program.
- Council submitted a NSW Environmental Trust grant application to implement additional koala habitat restoration and community engagement actions at Pottsville Wetland. These grants are due to be announced in March 2016.

Reducing koala road mortality



- Ongoing traffic monitoring and maintenance of Clothiers Creek 'koala road' measures. Monitoring to date indicates an improving trend with regard to the proportion of vehicles travelling at or below the speed limit.
- Ongoing monitoring and reporting of koala use of the Pacific Highway fauna overpass near the Pottsville interchange. Investigation and reporting of koala road death near the overpass in August 2015.

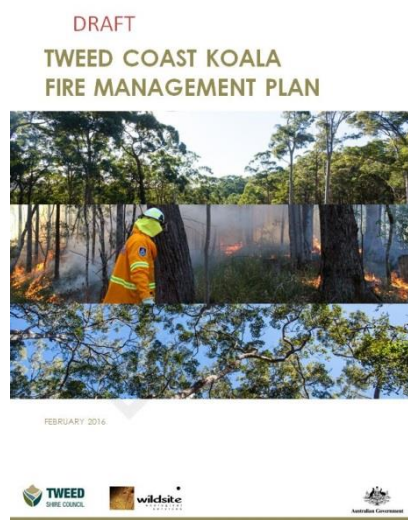
- Development of relevant actions for inclusion in Pottsville Road – Coronation Avenue upgrade. This project is due to commence construction in April 2016.
- Sharing and dissemination of koala road actions and outcomes at a national scale through response to enquiries and presentations at conferences and forums.

Reducing the risk of dog attack



- Remote camera monitoring throughout the Southern Koala Management Area of the KPOM has been continued and used to inform wild dog control efforts.
- Two highly successful wild dog control programs implemented with subsequent monitoring showing low wild dog activity after control.
- Mapping and analysis commenced to identify high risk areas for conflict between domestic dogs and koalas.
- Review of off-leash areas has been initiated through the development of Council's Open Space Strategy.

Fire management



- *Tweed Coast Koala Fire Management Plan, Hazard Reduction Burn Guidelines for Koala Habitat on the Tweed Coast and Wildfire Response Procedure* prepared. Final consultation with stakeholders underway and publication scheduled for April 2016.
- Council is an active stakeholder and contributor to the Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium. This includes the role of key contact for koala and fire related issues and actions.
- Ongoing liaison with NSW RFS Operations Manager, Brigade Captains and Far North Coast Bush Fire Management Committee.
- Staff trained and accredited by NSW RFS as *Bushfire Fighter* to enable participation and support in fire management and incident response.
- Collaboration, technical and operational support for NSW NPWS in planning hazard reduction burn in koala habitat at Hastings Point.

Koala care and welfare



Photo: Friends of the Koala Inc.

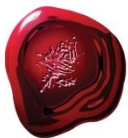
- Annual financial contribution of \$8000 provided to support key koala welfare organisations - Friends of the Koala Inc. and Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers.
- Initial meeting with key stakeholders held to identify and explore options to collaborate on koala population recovery assistance. Further investigation underway to consider options for additional soft release sites, food tree plantations, data management and tracking of released animals.

Community awareness and engagement



Members of the community planting group, established in conjunction with Team Koala, celebrate the planting of the 50,000 tree. Photo: Justin Mallee

- Ongoing facilitation and support for community involvement in tree planting and site maintenance in conjunction with Team Koala.
- The plan was awarded the 2015 Local Government NSW Excellence in the Environment Policies, Planning and Decision Making Award.
- Development and distribution at relevant events of education materials including 'Top 5 things you can do' fridge magnet
- Publication of relevant information and news on Council website www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/koalas
- Council's overall koala recovery initiatives recognised through successful selection as a finalist for implementation of the Koala Connections project in the 2015 UN World Environment Day Awards and 2015 Banksia Awards
- Tweed Byron Koala Connections Forum scheduled for May 2016 to present lessons learned and outcomes. To include presentation on the role of KPOMs as an integrated framework for koala recovery.



BANKSIA
SUSTAINABILITY
AWARDS 2015
CATEGORY FINALIST



**WORLD
ENVIRONMENT
DAY AWARDS**
FINALIST
2015

Monitoring, reporting and review



- Reassessment of koala activity throughout the Southern Koala Management Area complete, report prepared and presented to Council (December 2015)
- Collection, vetting, collation and submission of koala sightings data to NSW BioNet Wildlife Atlas.
- Opportunities to contribute and collaborate on research projects underway including:
 - Qld University of Technology and South East Qld Councils - Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone) Koala Survey
 - University of Queensland, Southern Cross University, Friends of the Koala Inc and Northern Rivers Councils - Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Application

Issues and challenges

The concurrent delivery of the Tweed Byron Koala Connections program has provided significant support to the implementation of the KPOM works program to date. The Koala Connections project will be complete in June 2016 and so available resourcing will revert to the annual Council budget allocation. Whilst many actions of the KPOM can be achieved within this budget, additional funding is required to achieve the habitat restoration targets of the plan. Opportunities to secure this funding through grants programs and other partnerships will continue to be sought.

The year one actions that remain not started are predominantly dependent on other actions (such as the finalisation of the 'E-zone' review) or are multi-year actions that will form part of the year two priorities.

Year 2 priority actions

Many actions in the works program are ongoing such as securing external funding, liaison with key stakeholders, koala care and welfare, community awareness and habitat restoration. These actions will remain in progress and form the bulk of works in year two. In addition, the following specific actions will be completed during this period:

- Finalisation, publication and distribution of the habitat restoration program to prioritise restoration and revegetation of strategic areas within the KPOM area

- Preparation of a community awareness strategy to actively increase awareness of koala management issues
- Reassessment of the koala population in the Tweed Heads Koala Management Area
- Preparation and implementation of a wild dog management strategy in the form of Pest Management Operational Plans for Council managed bushland
- Complete analysis and mapping of high risk areas within the KPOM area for conflict between domestic dogs and koalas
- Improve domestic dog management in high priority areas, including Council bushland reserves such as Pottsville Wetlands through designation as Wildlife Protection Areas under the Companion Animals Act.
- Implementation of the Tweed Coast Koala Fire Management Plan and Hazard Reduction Burn Guidelines
- Qld University of Technology, Tweed Shire Council and South East Qld Councils Research Project - Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone) Koala Survey
- Establish a Koala Management Committee to advise and oversee implementation of the plan

Conclusion

Highly significant progress has been made toward the implementation of the KPOM works program in its first year. This has been assisted to date by the concurrent delivery of Tweed Byron Koala Connections. A major body of work remains to be delivered which will continue to be implemented through Council's annual budget allocation and securing external funding where and when it becomes available. In addition to the scheduled five yearly plan review and reporting on population reassessments, annual updates as per this report will be provided to Council.