

MEETING NOTES

MidCoast Koala Reference Group

Date	17 February 2025	Time	2:00 – 4:00pm
Venue	Barrington Room, Yalawanyi Ganya	Note-taker	Tanya Cross
Present	Cr Dheera Smith (Chair), Cr Thomas O'Keefe, Adrian Panuccio (MCC), Gerard Tuckerman (MCC), Mat Bell (MCC), Caitlin Orr (MCC), Tanya Cross (MCC), Reegan Walker (DCCEEW), Doug Beckers (NPWS), Wade Lancett (TIDE), Daniel Trudgeon (LLS), Ian Morphett, Chris Sheed, Megan Benson, Cheyne Flanagan, Louise Hoade, Deborah Willis, Shaun Tamplin, Jonathon Quaken (Landcare)		
Apologies	Mandy Wispereit (Crown Lands), Justine Thompson (Landcare)		

Meeting Items

Item	Key points/actions
1	Welcome, Apologies & Acknowledgement of Country Cr Smith welcomed the attendees to the meeting, noted the apologies and gave an Acknowledgement of Country.
2	Governance Update Council's General Manager, Adrian Panuccio, briefed members on recent correspondence sent to Koalas in Care.
3	Update on the Koala Safe Spaces Program – Habitat Restoration Grants Caitlin provided an update on the status and the significant outcomes being achieved through the State and Commonwealth grant funded koala habitat restoration projects being delivered through the NSW Koala Strategy in the three priority Areas of Regional Koala Significance (ARKS) of the MidCoast. Focus areas have included Wallingat, Tarbuck Bay, Coomba/Shallow Bay, Wootton, Elands and Wingham. All targets relating to the number of plantings, hectares weeded, and length of fencing erected are currently on track to be either met or exceeded (see presentation attached). Monitoring plots have been established for all properties and both grants are due to be completed by the end of 2025.
4	Update on the implementation of the Koala Conservation Strategy Mat provided an update on the implementation of the Koala Conservation Strategy following its adoption by Council in June last year. The momentum from the preparation of the Strategy has continued through to the first 6 months of the Strategy's implementation. 104 tasks from 61 actions are included in the Strategy with 1 task already completed, 53 underway and 50 not yet commenced. The completed task involved an update of the Offsetting Procedure for Council Activities, which includes koala habitat.

	<p>The Strategy has a substantial focus on the Council capability and frameworks to assist voluntary landholder projects to enhance or create koala habitat.</p> <p>Another focus of activities has been on the development of partnerships with other stakeholders to increase our knowledge of the presence, distribution and density of local koala populations, and on community engagement with 20 events being held over the last 7 months.</p> <p>Upcoming tasks include the development of LGA-wide wildlife (with a focus on koalas) corridor mapping and conducting research to better understand the impacts on koala health such as Chlamydia.</p> <p>A full review of the progress of the implementation will occur in July 2025; 12 months after the commencement of the Strategy.</p>
5	<p>Koala Vehicle Strike Signage - Tinonee</p> <p>Caitlin provided a summary of the recent changes to the various koala warning signs around Tinonee including the challenges in selecting sites and installing the signs such as road safety requirements, sight distances, solar access and issues with the technology. The number of activated (non-static) signs has increased from 3 to 6.</p> <p>The vehicle-activated sign at Deans Creek had to be removed due to ongoing malfunctioning issues and has been replaced by a new LED sign. This has raised some concerns in the community regarding its effectiveness, however Caitlin noted that the new sign had not yet been commissioned to be fully operational. It is hoped that the new signs will help to address sign-fatigue by being able to change the messaging and imagery as required.</p> <p>The moveable trailer sign on Tinonee Road has been in place for several weeks but unfortunately the data from the traffic counter is showing it has had minimal impact on reducing speeds on this road. The rear wheel of the trailer was also stolen while on site so additional security measures have been put in place.</p> <p>It was noted that there is scientific advice and observations from other regions that signage (in isolation) does not significantly alter driver behaviour or reduce koala vehicle strike rates. Signs therefore need to be accompanied by other measures such as public awareness campaigns, improving driver visibility through the removal of roadside weeds and investigating opportunities to enhance fauna underpasses, such as the culvert at Alpine Drive.</p> <p>As Council has no jurisdiction over the setting of speed limits, Council has made representations to Transport for NSW in relation to lowering speed limits on Tinonee Road and The Bucketts Way, but these requests have been unsuccessful so far.</p> <p>Council is deploying traffic counters to monitor speeds within koala vehicle strike hotspots, with the results to be shared with the NSW Police if excessive speeding is identified.</p>

6	<p>NSW Koala Strategy update</p> <p>Reegan advised that a new NSW Koala Conservation Plan was currently in development to replace the current NSW Koala Strategy which is in place until 2026.</p> <p>He also advised that the Department's Saving our Species and the Koala Strategy teams were in the process of aligning to enhance the funding and delivery of projects at a regional level.</p>
7	<p>Workshop session on the content of a koala brochure for landholders</p> <p>Caitlin facilitated a session on the content of a new koala brochure targeted at engaging local landholders in the Koala Safe Spaces program. Various topics were suggested including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-benefits for property management • Co-existing with dogs/cattle & koala escape measures • Habitat linkages & koala safe spaces • Koala friendly fencing designs for properties with stock • Local koala food trees • Revegetation & weed control techniques • Importance of paddock trees • Recording koala sightings • Reporting sick koalas • Carbon & biodiversity offset opportunities <p>Other suggestions were made including taking a property planning approach, the importance of tailoring the information to the target audience and the aims and objectives of the project; using QR codes to provide up to date links to other resources; and the use of local case studies. Other mediums were also suggested including an audio alternative, YouTube video and an App.</p> <p>Daniel from LLS referred to an information guide on koalas that they developed for the region last year which may also be useful. The guide can be accessed at the following link: Koala</p> <p>Detailed notes of the discussion were taken and will be used to inform the development of the brochure.</p>
8	<p>Outcomes of the Koala Hackathon & upcoming community engagement events</p> <p>Caitlin provided an overview of the Koala Hackathon that was held late last year at Taree Universities Campus. The event, which was facilitated by Uncle Will Paulson and TIDE in partnership with Council and Hunter LLS, was aimed at engaging the local youth in koala conservation on Country.</p> <p>Over 60 senior students from across the MidCoast region were given the task of coming up with innovative and creative solutions in order to answer the following question: "How might we increase the koala population in our local area?" The Hackathon was considered a success with lots of great ideas presented by the students. The video of the event can be viewed here: Koala Hackathon 2024 - Australia's first koala hackathon - YouTube</p>

	<p>The following major events are planned for the coming year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koala Art Competition – opens in March, closes 29 August • Wild Koala Day – 3 May • National Tree Day – 27 July • Koala Festival – 20 September • Bootawa Koala Walk – TBC • Water for Wildlife – TBC <p>Ian Morphett advised that he has been involved in organising a local art competition and could provide supporting information or advice.</p>
9	<p>Drone survey plans for 2025</p> <p>Caitlin provided a summary of the results of the 2024 thermal drone surveys which included 56 properties over an area of around 3,670 hectares. Properties included both private and public land. 210 koalas were sighted including 10 with joeys which represents an average density of 1 koala per 17.5 hectares. 10 greater gliders and 2 den trees were also sighted.</p> <p>These surveys have helped to fill knowledge gaps on koala presence by targeting data deficient areas with more surveys planned over the coming months.</p>
10	<p>Proposed research project for Bootawa Dam</p> <p>Mat provided an overview of the research project planned with several research partners for the Bootawa Dam site to help answer the following questions to guide the future management of the local koala population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the prevalence of chlamydia and KoRV in the population? • Is the population genetically diverse? • How does the stress levels of koalas within the dam perimeter lands compare with surrounding areas? • Is the population breeding at a self-sustaining rate? • What is the impact of lantana on movement and habitat use? • How much of their diet is from the plantations versus the remnant vegetation? <p>The third of three 2-yearly song-meter surveys of koalas at Bootawa will also be delivered during late 2025. This is a partnership between Hunter LLS and Dr Brad Law.</p> <p>Council has also completed a song-meter grid survey and population estimate for the Coomba area, with results to be provided to the Group at the next meeting.</p> <p>Shaun Tamplin advised that his koala research project at Bunyah will be continuing with new thermal drone koala surveys and additional research via the Sunshine Coast University.</p>
11	<p>General Business</p> <p>Shaun Tamplin advised that there are concrete jersey kerbs on sections of Wootton Way (Old Pacific Highway) that may also provide a barrier for koala movements. This will be investigated.</p>
12	<p>Next Meeting – May 2025 – Date TBA</p>