

Endangered Tweed Coast Koalas in Kings Forest

Addressing the Koala Plan of Management: Jan Tennant

Firstly, it is essential that the offset planting of 27Ha of Koala food trees be secured through binding or legal arrangement before any construction commences.

Forests and bushlands along our coastal lowlands are being cleared at an unprecedented rate for urban development whether it be residential, commercial or industrial. Our coastal lowlands are a very desirable place to live, work and play but humans are not the only ones living here – there is great biodiversity living in fragile ecosystems such as Wallum Sedge Frog.

When urban development takes place, the natural environment including all or most trees and bushes are destroyed and replaced by concrete slabs, fences and roads. In residential developments, the modern trend is to build McMansions that occupy most of the block leaving little room for grass and shrubs and definitely no room for tall food trees. Not only do koalas and other fauna and flora lose their habitat, but rain water that used to soak into soil and the water table now runs into gutters and sewerage systems thus creating a hotter, drier environment.

All sensible 21st century urban development should retain or plant rings of native forests and bushlands that absorb air and noise pollution, protect ecosystems and be more aesthetic than the 2 metre high boundary fences that are usually erected. It is important that we, government, developers and residents rectify past planning and development that destroyed ecosystems for the convenience and comfort of humans by planning and developing for the future preservation of all species. It is paramount that the proponent of the urban development at Kings Forest lead the way by abiding by the 2018 Modification of Project Approval for Koala Offsets by planting 27Ha of Koala Food trees in the Cudgen Nature reserve, or if there is insufficient room the balance of koala food trees must be planted on other lands in the Koala Activity Precinct or Koala Linkage Precinct in the Tweed Shire Council Local Government area and the creation of compensatory koala habitat in the East west corridor, and on residual lands on site. Has the proponent approached the Tweed Shire Council or Office of Environment & Heritage to establish alternative sites for the offset planting? This must be done before any construction and bull dozers etc move in.

1. While holding my son's mastiff behind a screen door, I once watched an adult koala that had wandered into the townhouse complex looking for food trees, try to walk along a gate and then reach bushes that grew along the fence line. Koalas were designed to scale trees not climb fences and other man made structures. It is important that any development does not fence the koala from their food trees. It is no good providing food trees if it is too difficult or physically impossible for the koala population to access them.

Therefore, entrance roads through the Environmental Protection Zones must have fauna underpasses as set down in the 2018 Modification Project Approval.

Similarly, it is more logical to fence off the urban areas of the Kings Forest Development and leave the golf course planned in the Cudgen Paddock unfenced as a wildlife corridor. Food trees have been approved to be planted in the golf course area. The trees and well maintained grass in the golf course will enable koalas and other wildlife easy access. Fences around the residential areas will protect the wildlife from dogs and cats found in residential areas.

At a high school in the Redlands area in south east Queensland, koalas regularly wandered the grounds and accessed the many gum trees. Their antics, especially during the mating season provided an educational distraction for students and teachers. The koalas had easy access to the trees. This is important not only for koalas but for other wildlife in order to survive.

The developers of Kings Forest and government planning authorities have the opportunity to correct past planning mistakes in urban development that eradicated or radically reduced native fauna and flora and thereby our biodiversity by doing offset planting of food trees and ensuring that fauna underpasses and unfenced corridors are provided so that koalas and other wildlife can access their food sources. Preservation of natural vegetation within urban developments is very important for the health of present generations of all species as well as for future generations. Sensible planning for the koalas is sensible planning for all. It is too late once the damage has been done.

