

Friends of Cudgen Nature Reserve Concerns re current Kings Forest Revised Koala Plan of Management – (Modification MP08_0194 MOD4)

Speaking Notes – John Mc Donagh President on behalf Friends Of Cudgen Nature Reserve Inc.

Background – Friends of Cudgen Nature Reserve

Friends evolved from two of our founding members being on the Crown Land Reserve Trust prior to the dedication of part of the area that is now Cudgen Nature Reserve (CNR). We are an incorporated association and have been active since 1998.

We have undertaken numerous rehabilitation works as a group and in conjunction with other partners including Tweed Shire Council, NPWS and Conservation Volunteers Australia. We have also facilitated plantings with local school groups and one of our objectives is to create educational opportunities and the advancement of environmental consciousness in the local community. We have currently 26 financial members and work with volunteers on a regular basis from other Landcare groups and members of the community.

For example, last weekend we organised and facilitated a community planting at the Koala Beach section of Cudgen Nature Reserve, planting 500 koala habitat trees with the assistance of 25 volunteers including residents, community, Landcare and Team Koala members.

Experience in planting Koala habitat at several sites in Cudgen Nature Reserve.

We have planted on site in 4 locations within CNR, a site close to the coast north of Bogangar; a section of the reserve east of Slip Rails Road; the northern slope of Round Mountain Clothiers Creek Road; and at the newly added Koala Beach Site Lot 919 – over a period of 18 years approximately 6000 koala primary, secondary and habitat trees.

Friends have been directly involved with other group plantings within CNR by providing labour, publicity, and planting an additional 4000 trees.

Friends have undertaken site maintenance being rubbish removal, hand weeding and herbicide weed control on our original site in CNR for over 18 years.

The group has lobbied for the increase of biodiversity conservation of existing Koala habitat by lodging submissions re development and other impacts on the Tweed Coast Koala population for 20 years.

Submission

Our group acknowledges the modifications to the proponent's Koala Plan of Management (KPOM) made per Modification MP08_0194 MOD4 and the opportunity provided to view the site.

However, we continue to seek additional improvements to ensure that the maximum opportunity is in place to ensure the increase in the Koala population in the Kings Forest site.

We want to see the best outcome possible in the rehabilitation of existing Koala habitat, expansion of habitat through planting on site and adjacent offset areas, and reduction of on site impacts such as unleashed dogs, car strike and barriers to movement of Koalas.

Hence, we put forward the following further considerations:

1. Selection of the 27ha Offset site and the restoration and rehabilitation of 67.88 ha Koala habitat.

Offset Site Plantings 27ha

We have a sound knowledge of CNR and consider it is unlikely that 27ha of cleared land suitable for planting Koala habitat is available in the Reserve even if our current work area at the newly gazetted Lot 919 at Koala Beach was included. It is essential that the offset area if not in CNR is located within the corridor between Kings Forest and CNR or in close proximity. We acknowledge this is difficult as these locations include land in private ownership. A previous project Koala Connections had difficulty finding landholders agreeable to Koala habitat plantings on their properties and this would require acquisition therefore not feasible. We also believe it is unacceptable to transfer funds to the Biodiversity Conservation Trust as they also may not be able to find suitable offset areas.

Any sections of the Offset component not located within CNR need to be in areas that will in time add valuable habitat for the current and future populations of the Koalas in the Tweed Coast so that these plantings will assist in meeting the objectives Tweed Shire Councils' 2015 Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management i.e. *"to create new koala habitat and improve existing habitat"* & hence as noted in this plan *"help the Tweed Coast koala population recover to more sustainable levels over the next two decades"*.

Cudgen Paddock

The importance of the Cudgen Paddock was clearly referenced in the TSC Tweed Coast Koala Study 2015 page15 re the Kings Forest KPoM *"The southern cell (of Koalas) is associated with a large area of swamp sclerophyll forest between the Cudgen Paddock and Cudgen Lake. Active low use sites occur to the north, west and southwest of this cell."*

We submit that the compensatory land should be the revegetation of the **previously cleared banana land in Cudgen Nature Reserve, estimated approximately 8ha**, with the remainder being on Kings Forest, specifically the **southern portion of the Cudgen Paddock**.

The confirmation of the location of the 27 Ha offset MUST be resolved in this modification.

1A. Off Site Planting Timing The timing of the provision of the 27 Ha must be resolved so that the 27 ha is planted out within an appropriate time frame (as per DOP assessment) within 3 years of commencement of the project.

The confirmation of the timing of the 27 Ha offset MUST be resolved in this modification.

1B. On Site Koala Habitat Primary and Secondary Habitat Planting 68.77ha

The group ask why pre clearing PCTs are used to determine the species selection for the proposed Koala Habitat plantings. The site has had various degrees of disturbance such as clearing, grazing and draining. The preferred Koala food trees for this location are Swamp Mahogany and Forest Red Gum, as they are the primary browse trees of the Koala in this area and should be dominant in the plantings. (*Note these two species were also supported by TSC in their submission & Forest Gum was specifically commented upon as suitable for sandy soils see appendix below*) These two species have been successfully planted in a range of conditions in CNR by our group, Council and through grant funding. Plantings to also include species that grow in association with the two primary species, e.g. Pink Bloodwood, Swamp Turpentine, Swamp Oak and Paperbark, dependant on whether a dry or

wet location. It is acknowledged that there will be failures as we have experienced in our plantings over time. This should be factored into the plantings. Generally, plantings have a performance provision to address survival.

We support the plantings to consist of trees and exclude shrubs and groundcovers. Our experience has shown that groundcovers will establish naturally if the site is well maintained to control weeds and allow for natural native species recruitment.

1C. Timing of Onsite plantings – As per the Dept of Planning reports assessment (p 26) it is imperative that the koala offset be delivered including plantings ahead of further site clearing. There is no point in providing compensatory habitat after the existing Koala Habitat is removed. The plantings need to have reached suitable size before clearing commences.
e.g. the establishment of the east west corridor – TSC and OEH recommendations.

2. Golf Course fencing and wider issues re the corridor linkages

We support Team Koala concerns in relation to fencing of the Golf Course. The Golf Course should not be fenced off, instead the residential precincts adjoining the golf course should be fenced to allow the koalas to move through the golf course. The current version of the KPOM has fencing around the gold course this will prevent koala movements through this area, See Figure 40B

Note the Ecological Report (p 7) notes that Fig 22 omits the previous connection that was in the previous versions of the KPOM.

3. Underpasses and/ or other traffic calming devices need to be in place prior to construction of temporary and permanent roads. Without the underpasses the koala fences will result in the koalas being cut off from their natural corridors. This is an important sequencing issue. – we note that this matter has been included in the proposed amendments to section 64.

4. Although the matter of the grids is now deemed closed by EMM (item 11 in their report) consultants, our group is not privy to the reasons that they will adequately prevent dogs crossing them. In addition there has been no dog off leash area provided.

5. The Bond referred to in the Contingency & Offset Strategy, should be of adequate amount and only be released 5 years after completion of the successful completion of the on site and off-site Koala revegetation and rehabilitation works and completion of all other proposed wildlife protection measures. The successful outcome needs to include successful ongoing maintenance of the revegetated and rehabilitated areas.

We thank you for the opportunity to appear at the Public Meeting and undertake a site inspection.

I also thank all the volunteers who have helped in our landcare work over the years and NPWS & TSC who have assisted us in that work.

John McDonagh. President of Cudgen Nature Reserve 12th of March 2019

Appendix (From TSC submission page 16)

This is commendable however, the draft revised KPoM (October 2018) incorrectly states that "Sandy soils generally do not support forest red gum communities and groundwater modelling also suggests the area may not be suitable for this species." (see p68 and p183). Forest red gum is found extensively on sand substrates on the Tweed Coast and elsewhere in the bioregion. Examples occur at West Tweed, South

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