



If you see a sick, injured or dead
koala, call the rescue hotline:
6622 1233

Treetops

The Newsletter of Friends of the Koala Inc.

March 2015

Patron: Margot Sweeney (CEO, Summerland Credit Union)



A Bundle of Joy Named Dot

Have you ever got exactly what you want for Christmas?

I was working the morning shift on Christmas Day with Simon Lamont and holding the FoK hotline when a call came through that would deliver that gift.

Kay Sherring (a past Care Centre Co-Ordinator) was walking through the Lismore Golf Course, when she saw a joey alone in a Forest Red Gum. Kay had been watching this joey and her mother for over a month, moving around the area. However, for the previous three days, the joey had been on its own (and in the same tree), with the mother moving further away each day.

On Christmas Day, the mother was nowhere to be found. I drove to the Golf Course where I met Kay and her family. We decided to wait until early afternoon before trying to get the joey down.

Following our Christmas lunches, we regrouped back at the Golf Course. Simon and I were in the van and Paul O'Donnell and his sons came to lend a hand too. Thanks to Simon's excellent flagging technique, we had the little girl in no time. Once we were able to see her up close, we could see she had mild conjunctivitis (which she would have caught from her Mum). She was big enough that she would weigh more than a kilo.

After interrupting Pat's Christmas lunch, it was confirmed – I was taking home my first joey.

I named her Dot (after my Aunt) and in no time she was displaying her cheeky, strong willed and mischievous behaviour. Luckily, Cheryl Cochran (of Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers) was able to furnish me with an excellent indoor tree and some milk. Dot immediately ran up the tree when it was offered to her and once perched, started eating the leaf I had picked.

I have spent a good couple of years observing home carers and asking endless questions but I was not prepared for the reality of rearing a joey at home. The cleaning, sanitising, washing and leaf picking that all needs to be done before you even think of your own needs – it seems endless.

In addition, koalas are quite active at night, so at best your sleep is interrupted, at worst non-existent. But I can honestly say that I've never been happier to be woken, than to the sounds and smells of little Dot. Once she had learnt how to climb my bed frame, I was visited many, many times each night.

The most fun thing in the world

(according to Dot) was to run full speed from her tree to my bed, climb the bed frame, jump on my face (preferably while I'm sleeping) then climb back down and run full speed back to the tree and climb the tree like someone was chasing her.

The first dozen times she did this, I thought it was extremely cute (apart from the facial attack). But there were a few nights when she did it non-stop between 10pm and 4am. She had a lovely sleep during the day and was ready to go again by the time I was turning off the light the following evening.

It took three weeks to get her to feed properly. Thankfully, she ate heaps of leaf and continued to gain weight but I was continuously worried until the day she decided she quite liked milk.



Dot and Susannah

Vet Bec at Keen Street saw Dot for all her check-ups and she behaved beautifully (so all my stories of her late night shenanigans were hard to believe). She recovered perfectly after her 21 days of antibiotics and we got into a routine. We would spend some time outside most days (weather permitting) walking the property or sitting in the sun and she was always wide eyed – taking in the sights, smells and sounds. At night, when our local male koala would bellow, she would run to my bed and sit on my tummy while looking out the window. I explained to her about boys but I don't think she was listening.

She had a brief moment of fame, with her gorgeous face on the local TV news as well as making the cover of the *Northern Star*. She was very fussy about her leaf - "I know I loved that Tallow yesterday but today it's

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President's Message

There's certainly a lot happening but I'm still in two minds whether 2015 is off to a good start.

Just before Christmas the NSW Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review Panel released its final report (read more p. 10) and then, near enough to Christmas Eve, the Federal Government finalised the *EPBC Act referral guidelines for the vulnerable koala*. The timing suggested to me a hope that both would be ignored over the Summer break and perhaps forgotten altogether.

Besides the seasonal mayhem of high numbers of koalas getting into trouble just when volunteer numbers are at their lowest, Christmas Day saw a wildfire deliberately lit in the Pottsville Wetlands threaten koalas, koala habitat and surrounding properties (read more, p. 11).

Immediately into the New Year Luke Foley stepped up as Leader of the Opposition. In his capacity as Shadow Minister for the Environment, Luke had taken a close interest in our work and had visited the Koala Care Centre on a couple of occasions. In mid-January we were proud to host his election pledge to create a Great Koala National Park should Labor be elected.

The Save Ballina's Koala Campaign was cranking up as well, and then, seemingly out of the blue, resurgence of the Black Rocks Sports Field "Koala Gate" issue got tangled up with organising a second public meeting to update supporters. Emails out of control!

The point I'm trying to make is that it's been difficult to get a run on anything much and from what I'm hearing, that's been the case for all of us - forever on the back foot; chasing our tails.

Fortunately though, good things are never far away. Take, for example, the recent engagement of Aliison Kelly. Aliison had flagged interest in taking an active role in FOK during a conversation

at the Lismore Car Boot Market through last year. The possibility of filling the vacant position of Secretary was mentioned. Aliison liked that idea but she was fully committed until the end of the year. We were more than happy to wait.

Since coming on board to take the minutes of the January Committee meeting, Aliison has helped to put together a grant application and organised the roster for Friends of the Koala's push in the Lismore CBD to gather signatures for the Save Ballina's Koalas Campaign's petition. Like most organisers she's taken on quite a few shifts herself.

Another high spot was my Lismore City Council Australia Day Award. It was surprise enough to learn that Fiona Dawson had nominated me on behalf of the Management Committee. Actually receiving the award for the Sustainable Environment category was something else. I was particularly chuffed that Mark Wilson, Rick Stewart and my Rick were there to enjoy it with me.

Only a few weeks later I was invited by Sydney University's Koala Health Hub Director, Damien Higgins, to join the Hub's Advisory Committee. I was happy to accept.

Care Co-ordinator Pat Barnidge, assisted by Susannah Keogh put a lot of work into the Koala Education Workshop held at the beginning of March. Unlike the Basic Training Days

we've run in recent years, Pat's purpose was to attract a general audience interested in learning more about koalas than actually signing up to become carers. About 40 attendees from all over the region took part, many living on properties already supporting koalas and a few doing their best to attract koalas. My impression was that few would ever be interested in becoming koala carers but there may have been one or two potential advocates or campaigners.

This issue of *Treetops* is unashamedly late. More than likely, by the time you are reading it the election hoo-ha will be behind us and Friends of the Koala will be getting on with our 29th year of koala conservation. Let's hope the rest of the year is fun as well as productive for all our members and supporters.

—Lorraine Vass

One Step at a Time

A quarter of a century is a very long time to devote to any endeavour. That's how long Mark Wilson has served the Region's koalas.

Towards the end of January Mark surprised all of us (and perhaps himself) by flagging his intention to retire, the first step being his resignation from the Management Committee.

Mark's membership of Friends of the Koala goes back to its incorporation in February 1990. He has been Trees Officer since 1992. Previously he was a foundation member of the Lower Richmond Friends of the Koala and its Secretary until the group disbanded.

The plant nursery which has served Friends of the Koala so well is very much Mark's creation. As well as facilitating the core business of propagating and distributing koala food trees in known koala areas free of charge or at very nominal prices, sales of ornamental native shrubs provided an important income source for the group, particularly in the early years. More recently sales have extended with a monthly stall at the Lismore Car Boot Market. In the current strategic plan however, a key objective is re-focusing the nursery solely on koala food trees.

I've worked with Mark longer than anyone in my pre-retirement career. Over the past 15 years we've seen Friends of the Koala develop into one of NSW's lead koala conservation groups and I'll miss his wise counsel as his involvement recedes over time. While he's happy to continue his education activities and other project work (not to mention assisting the Committee in resolving the nursery's transition) we'll continue to make the most of him.

—Lorraine Vass



Lorraine Vass



Luke Foley admiring Dot, Susannah's joey in care



Receiving my Sustainable Environment Award with Australia Day Ambassador Clyde Campbell and Lismore Mayor Jenny Dowell

Care Coordinator's Report

Koala activity is slowing down and the last few weeks has been particularly joyful for us as many of our koalas in care for so long, have finally been released.



Pat Barnidge

For this reporting period we had 16 koalas in care and 14 animals have been released. Two females, *Rosie* and *Donna* are especially significant because they received the anti-chlamydia vaccine.

For at least five years they should remain immune to this disease.

While we are still waiting for the complete data from the trial to be analysed and conveyed to us I'll just a few words about our involvement in the program.

First, the sampling process associated with the four vaccinated males and the four males in the control group was long with monthly vet visits taking up to one hour for each animal.



Perry

Of the vaccinated animals, *Knox* and *Perry* were successfully released. *Cato* and *Elmo* regrettably were not so fortunate. *Cato* was doing well until Christmas Eve when he started to lose weight rapidly. According to the testing, all was well but in reality he was a very sick boy. By New Year's Day, our efforts to stabilise him were failing and he was transported to Currumbin. Following a full work-up, his bone marrow tests showed his immune system had all but shut down and sadly he was euthanased.

Elmo unfortunately developed cataracts across both his eyes during his time in care causing him to become completely blind. During his last few weeks he also became very depressed. Euthanasia was his fate as well.

A few other stand-out releases were *Caramello*, a very vocal boy, who had all his carers bluffed with his growling whenever anyone entered his

enclosure, until he realised he quite liked his morning feeds of paste – then he mellowed, becoming quite a softie.

Lucky *Pele* was hit by a car. We released him well away from the Bruxner Highway but still in his home range. Lovely *Beau's* release was contingent on finding safe habitat in the Dunoon area. *Beau* had been hit by a car and his retinas slightly displaced so his vision was blurred. Happily, after two hours of searching a beautiful release property was found.

Sheridan had spent five months at AZWH being treated for severe cystitis and an injury to his forelimb. A digit had to be amputated. *Sheridan* amazed Marg Russell, who released him by shooting up a tree in spectacular fashion.



Mikee

Not such good news with some tagged koalas that had come back in.

Rama, who was only released five months earlier after a second bout of conjunctivitis was found in a poor state with a severe ear infection that had spread into his brain and was euthanased. He was quite old at 12 years.

Also *Tank* who had been released a year earlier after being in care for heat stress was found with severe puncture wounds from a dog and was also euthanased. He was 11 years.

Goldie, whose story was featured in the December issue of *Treetops* was sadly found three weeks after being released, on the Tugun Motorway having been hit by a car.

Lastly the low point for all of us was *Desley*, who after only four months of freedom was attacked by dogs and died on arrival at Keen St Vet Clinic. Sadder still was the fact she had a 44gr male pouch-young that had

to be euthanased because he was too small to hand rear. After *Desley's* seven months in care, it was devastating to all of us.



Pele

At present we have only two koalas at the Care Centre so carers and leafers alike can have some respite. Eight joeys in home care are all doing well. Susannah Keogh did a fine job of treating her first home care joey for

conjunctivitis and has now been able to pass her on to join two other joeys for the next stage of home care (see lead story)

With Barb Dobner's departure several months ago I reluctantly made the decision to take on home-caring, my intention being to fill emergencies. The first emergency arrived two months ago in the form of a 640gr female orphan (her mum was killed by a dog.) At present this little fur-ball (who now weighs 1.5kg) is living in her indoor tree in my bathroom. An outdoor enclosure is being built in my backyard and will hopefully be completed soon so I can have my bathroom back!!!!

I extend a huge vote of thanks to Michael Chapus our gardener at the Care Centre who cleared the area of a myriad of weeds; also Simon Lamont and Bill Sheaffe who took a trailer load of green waste to the tip and last but not least Mark Wilson for providing advice on planning and some suggestions for plants to enhance the enclosure.

Before closing I must acknowledge the enormous help being offered by Sydney University's Koala Health Hub in the form of PCR testing for our koalas once they have completed their treatment for chlamydia. This test replaces the Clearviews which have not always been 100% accurate. To receive this rather expensive testing free of charge is a wonderful contribution to our ongoing improvement in the treatment of our koalas.

Finally my on-going thanks to our phone hotliners who field an amazing number of calls and to all of our carers, rescuers and leafers and our wonderful Lismore vets Ray and Bec. Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital and Currumbin Wildlife Hospital continue to support us with taking on our trauma cases. We could not do what we do without you.

Until next time happy koala spotting

—Pat Barnidge



Simon Lamont releasing Caramello

Koala Care Statistics 25 November 2014 – 27 February 2015

Friends of the Koala attended to or provided advice on a total of 149 koalas

	In Care	Released	Died	Dead on Arrival	Euth.	Unable to find/capt.	Transfer	Advice
Injured (3)		1			2			
HBC– Road strike (13)	1	3		5	2	1		
Dog attack (8)			1	3	4			
Diseased/Sick (55)	5	9	2		24	12		3
Health status un- known / unrecorded (12)				2		3		7
Healthy/Assumed Healthy (45)		1						44
Orphans/joeys (12)	8		1	1	2			
Permanent Care (1)	1							
Totals (149)	15	14	4	12	34	16		54

Koala Health Hub

This year has got off to a busy start for the Koala Health Hub.

In early February a Regional Koala Stakeholder Workshop was hosted for the first time, organized by David Phalen, Andrea Casteriano and Damien Higgins.

This meeting was a fantastic opportunity for bringing together in the one room people with significant impact in the Koala world from NSW and especially the greater Sydney area; for them to get to know each other and to inform about the ongoing work of each group.

The main objective was to identify areas for new research and collaboration, especially in regards to regional needs and opportunities. Great ideas for setting some directions for the year ahead and beyond were generated about optimising communication and standardization of sampling and secure storage and how to facilitate scientific and ethics permitting.

There was also active discussion on opportunities to collaborate on solving some important issues in the health of free-ranging, hospitalised and captive koalas.

Guest speakers participating were leaders of research groups from the University of Sydney and Western Sydney, such as Merran Govendir, Kathy Belov,



Kathy Belov, Professor of Comparative Genomics and Assoc. Dean of Research, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Sydney

David Phalen, Mathew Crowther and Ben Moore, who all presented their groups' past and ongoing research activities.

Fascinating presentations outlining issues faced by koala managers were given from the representatives of the following organizations:

- Rebecca Johnson - Australian Museum
- Kellie Leigh - Science for Wildlife
- Vickii Lett - WIRES
- Kylie Madden, Dan Lunney and Chris Allen - Office of Environment and Heritage
- Peter Ridgeway - Greater Sydney Local Land Services
- Joe Stammers - Wingecarribee Shire Council
- Andrea Reiss - Zoo and Aquarium Association



Vickii Lett, Mammal Co-ordinator WIRES and Pres. Lorraine

In addition to the speakers, the audience included a representative of Campbelltown Council; koala ecologist, Rob Close; Taronga Zoo Senior Veterinarian Larry Vogelneust; representatives of two specialist koala care groups, Lorraine Vass (FOK) and Simone Aurino (HKPS); representatives of Wildlife Health Australia and the Australian Registry of Wildlife Health, Tiggy Grillo, Sam Gilchrist and Jane Hall, and research students from the University of Sydney.

KIDREG News

We are happy to announce a new student: Laura Schwertmann. Laura completed a Veterinary Science degree at the University of Sydney in 2012. During her studies she completed a research project on Australian sea lion health, which led to her interest in wildlife diseases really taking off.

After working in clinical practice in the Port Macquarie region for two years, Laura has now returned to Sydney Uni to begin a PhD with Associate Professor Mark Krockenberger. She will be studying the epidemiology and pathogenesis of cryptosporidiosis in koalas and cats to help improve the understanding of how animals develop cryptosporidiosis, which could aid in prevention, management of populations and potentially even the treatment of the disease.



This Tuckurimba koala can't wait for the food trees being planted for him and his mates. Tree guards are no deterrent!



Read more about the Tuckurimba Koala Habitat Regen. Project in 'Bulletin Board' page 13.

Care Centre Co-ordinator's Report

Summer was long and hot for the koalas and the volunteers. With up to 16 koalas to look after, the work was arduous, falling on the shoulders of a few over Christmas and January when so many regulars were on holidays.



Lola Whitney

It's unusual to have such a high number of koalas at the Care Centre. This year the prolonged admittance of those animals which

were part of the anti-chlamydia vaccine trial pushed us to the limit. We had prepared as best we could with the construction of additional enclosures and installation of a sprinkler system in the enclosures to help cool the koalas and their leaf in the summer heat. We even replaced the admittance board with a larger one to accommodate the influx of animals.

Thanks to Mark Wilson for organising the sprinklers and Bill Shaeffe for the admittance

board. Bill also fitted metal stoppers to the gates of the new enclosures to stop them from opening in and out. Koalas don't miss a trick and soon work out that any chance of freedom lies with an open gate. I also thank Blake Dobbs and leafer John Stock who both saved the day for so many shifts. The load lightened considerably with the spate of releases towards the end of January and into February.

Visitors to the Koala Care Centre are always welcome but the request from the office of the Opposition Leader, Luke Foley to announce his plan to establish a Koala National Park on the north coast, was a first for us. With so many people, his entourage of advisors, the four candidates, Ron Goodwin (Tweed), Paul Spooner (Ballina), Isaac Smith (Lismore) and Trent Gilbert (Clarence), plus the media, we were wondering what we'd let ourselves in for. We needn't have worried; advanced planning ensured that all went smoothly.



Greens candidate for Lismore, Adam Guise also visited a couple of weeks ago. It was lovely to see him because Adam volunteered with us back in the mid-2000s. He was a leafer for nearly two years before going overseas. Long-time koala advocate, MLC Jan Barham accompanied him and we enjoyed showing both of them around. The more politicians understand our work and why we have to do it, the better equipped they'll be to help the cause.

Now that the new academic year is underway and the overseas students are signing-up, the number of koalas in care at the Centre has dropped back to two. I expect the respite to be temporary but you have to laugh - we never can get the balance quite right. Each year we ask ourselves what it is about March that sees the sudden drop in phone reports and in admittances.

Whatever the reason, the leafers are enjoying the lull and so am I, taking a few days holiday while I can.

—Lola Whitney

Looking Ahead

Redevelopment is back on the drawing board.

For some years members of successive FOK Committees have been concerned that, whilst our current building has served us well over the past 20 years, it has a number of limitations that need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Our modest premises contain three rooms for koalas in need of intensive care, and it's where the carers receive rescued animals, prepare their treatments and weigh them on a regular basis.

However, the building is also the administrative, public and social hub of FOK, containing our telephony and electronic equipment, where some of our clerical work is undertaken and files are maintained, volunteers have their tea breaks, stores are kept and our koala linen is laundered. It's also here that tours of the Centre start and enquiries about the tree nursery are received. These functions don't necessarily provide the optimal quiet that's best for koalas in the treatment rooms, as they are often nervous and definitely out of their element.

Some years ago, a plan for a new building and enclosures, incorporating separate spaces for the different functions, was designed and considered, but the estimated cost of well over \$1 million was simply unaffordable. FOK has been saving funds for redevelopment purposes but it's clear that building was, and is, out of reach (unless we find an amazing benefactor).

One of the limitations of our capacity to source external funds for a new building is that we lease the land from Lismore Council for a peppercorn rent. Whilst FOK has very much appreciated Council's contribution to koalas, funding bodies for capital projects generally require the organisation to own the land.

Last year the Committee agreed to pursue the idea of a separate, low-cost building to house the administrative, public, social and educational functions as well as the Koala Rescue van. Mark Wilson and Bill Shaeffe were appointed as project managers to oversight exploring potential designs and costs.

We're also exploring with Lismore Council the possibility of them transferring ownership of the land to FOK, with the caveat that if FOK ceases to exist, the land and any buildings on it would revert to the Council.

Our initial meetings with Council staff have been positive, however any decision will be made by the Council, and it certainly won't be a quick process. If it does happen, our potential to seek external funding will be much stronger and will result in a dedicated treatment centre for koalas, which can only be a good outcome for them.

More of this later.

—Ros Irwin

Save Ballina's Koalas Campaign Steams Ahead

2015 started off well for campaigners with good media coverage through January prompted by Labor leader, Luke Foley's visit to the region in mid-month and a well-attended but curtailed public meeting held at the end.

Media was also generated by visitors, IFAW's (International Fund for Animal Welfare) Native Wildlife Campaigner, Josey Sharrad, and the Nature Conservation Council of NSW's CEO, Kate Smolski.



Koala gazers, (l-r) Dailan Pugh, Kate Smolski, Ashley Love, Lorraine Vass and (hidden) James Tremaine

The Campaign has been running 15 months. We have over 1,750 "likes" on Facebook and we are still attracting excellent support from the regional media.

As mentioned in the December issue, the priority right now is collecting a minimum of 10,000 signatures on an old-fashioned paper petition to present to the new NSW Parliament in May. It's slow going but we have people all over the region and elsewhere in NSW as well as interstate collecting for us, so we are confident the number will be reached.

If you would like to help, the petition can be downloaded at:

<http://www.ifaw.org/australia/news/where-do-your-candidates-stand-koalas-nsw-election>

and at:

http://www.nature.org.au/media/2109/ballina_petition_national.pdf



Alison Kelly collecting petition signatures in Lismore's CBD

Get your friends to sign (okay to be outside NSW but every signatory needs to provide their residential address) and post to us. We'll be collecting them into April.

The Campaign Strategy workshop that was to be held at the conclusion of the public meeting has yet to occur. IFAW is keen to capitalise on the opportunity that such a workshop presents for community capacity building. We will be ascertaining interest very soon.

Meanwhile RMS is continuing work on the koala capture project which will provide the base-line data for the 50-year timeframe population viability analysis (PVA), required by Minister Hunt. The analysis must demonstrate "the long-term viability of the Ballina koala population, taking into account the impacts resulting from the road upgrade in Section 10."

If the PVA is unsatisfactory then construction of Section 10, stretching from Broadwater and finishing at Coolgardie, south of Ballina, will not proceed.

The capture project is being undertaken by scientific consultants EcoSure and BioLink, including Dr Steve Phillips. So far, about a third of the koalas required have been sampled. The genetic analysis will be carried out by Drs. Ross Goldingay and Les Christidis of Southern Cross University.



Koala Ecologist, Dr Steve Phillips (l) and Campaign Co-ordinator, Jeff Johnson

Dr. Rod Kavanagh of Niche Environmental & Heritage, the consultants responsible for preparing the Ballina Koala Plan will analyse the data collected and complete the PVA. He will report the findings to the Expert Panel which is independent to the Woolgoolga to Ballina project team. The Panel will establish the long term viability of the Ballina koala population. The outcomes are expected to be announced towards the end of the year.

We understand that the Expert Panel held its first meeting in February.

The Panel's chair is NSW's Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane. Other

er members include RMS CEO Peter Duncan, RMS Environmental Officer, Julie Ravallion, Associate Professor Jonathan Rhodes, a member of the Landscape Ecology and Conservation Group and the Environmental Decisions Group at The University of Queensland and The University of Sydney's Kathy Belov, Professor of Comparative Genomics and Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Veterinary Science.

RMS has committed to sharing information with key stakeholders including Ballina Shire Council and the Ballina Shire Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management Project Reference Group, of which I am a member, as well as Friends of the Koala. Arrangements for the meeting with FOK are in discussion.

Needless to say, work is progressing on the other 142 kilometres of the Woolgoolga to Ballina Upgrade.

—Lorraine Vass

Got one of these?

Download one of these

Save one of these!

Ballina's last 200 koalas are threatened with extinction by bulldozers. Help us save the Ballina 200. Download the petition at www.ifaw.org

Dates for your Diary

19 April 2015: Friends of the Koala Stall, Lismore Car Boot Market, Lismore Square

22 April 2015: Earth Day

23 April 2015: Local Land Services Native Vegetation Information Session, 9.30am-Noon Casino Community Centre

30 April 2015: Return Protect Ballina's Koalas from Highway Upgrade Petitions

03 May 2015: North Coast Koala Habitat Restoration Workshop (Coffs Harbour)

16-17 May 2015: NCC Regional Conference (Bellingen)

17 May 2015: Friends of the Koala Stall, Lismore Car Boot Market, Lismore Square

22 May 2015: International Day for Biological Diversity

23 May 2015: Friends of the Koala Management Committee Meeting, 2pm. SCU.

26 May 2015: NSW Wildlife Council 36th General Meeting, OEH Hurstville Contributions due for *Treetops* (June issue)

05 June 2015: World Environment Day

Advocacy and Policy Reform Report

I'm probably having more bites at the cherry than I'm entitled, given the pieces on the Save Ballina's Koalas Campaign, (p. 6) and the Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review (p. 10) but here goes.

Friday 13 February 2015 marked the 20th anniversary of the gazettal and commencement of State Environmental Planning Policy No 44 - Koala Habitat Protection (SEPP 44) in NSW.

The SEPP, introduced by the Fahey Government in 1995, operates within the legislative framework of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979*.



mental Planning & Assessment Act 1979.

Its purpose is "to encourage the proper conservation and management of areas of natural vegetation that provide habitat for koalas to ensure a permanent free-living population over their present range and reverse the current trend of koala population decline:

(a) by requiring the preparation of plans of management before development consent can be granted in relation to areas of core koala habitat; and
(b) by encouraging the identification of areas of core koala habitat; and
(c) by encouraging the inclusion of areas of core koala habitat in environment protection zones."

And what do we have to show for 20 years? Not a lot if measured by preparation of plans of management. Four approved Comprehensive Koala Plans of Management (CKPoMs) across the state: Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour, coastal Kempsey and South-east Lismore; a couple adopted by their respective councils, coastal Bellingen and Tweed; a few more in the pipeline: coastal Byron, the lower Clarence Valley and shire-wide Ballina, Campbelltown and Gunnedah. Oh, and there's a scattering of approved Individual Koala Plans of Management - probably fewer than 20 in the Northern Rivers.

Clearly planning regulations aimed at controlling development are not, in

themselves, a silver bullet for koala conservation. Far from it! SEPP 44 cops a lot of flack from all of us and some are even more critical, concluding it has obscured the landscape-scale, cross-tenure approach necessary for habitat protection effectiveness and damning it as fundamentally enabling legislation.

There's certainly enough evidence to support these views but before condemning the CKPoMs out of hand we need to remember that they are much more than planning instruments. They aspire to coordinate a range of multi-disciplined actions to promote population recovery, including restoration and fire management of koala habitat, reductions of road mortalities and pre-



dation by dogs, support for welfare and disease issues, population monitoring, identifying research needs and raising awareness

Australia's first **GREAT KOALA NATIONAL PARK** WILL COVER MORE THAN 315,000 HECTARES, AND WILL PROVIDE A safe and secure home TO THE 4,500 KOALA'S LIVING IN THE REGION.

of all the above.

Having served on the steering or reference groups for four of them over recent years I can vouch for the effort that has been invested in developing and refining each, so the particular challenges presented in the four study areas are properly addressed.

Assessment of the success or otherwise of these CKPoMs will take two or three koala generations. Competent and consistent application of their regulatory actions and innovative processes to raise the profile of koala conservation and to elucidate the contribution that citizens can make, will be absolutely vital. The stronger the community engages, the better the likelihood of koala recovery.

With the four contiguous councils of Lismore, Tweed, Byron and Ballina

implementing or close to implementing their CKPoMs, I'd like to think we are on the threshold at last of a truly meaningful scale of koala conservation. New collaborative opportunities afforded largely by social media will assist in delivering information to the public and also to motivate people to active involvement in koala conservation.

During the quarter we wrote supporting submissions on the NSW Scientific Committee's preliminary determination to list Tweed's coastal koalas as an endangered population and Lismore City Council's Biodiversity Management Strategy.

We lodged objecting submissions on the Revised Draft NSW-Commonwealth "Assessment Bilateral" Agreement and the RMS Strategic Assessment "Part 5" Environment Impact Assessment Procedures which will replace *EPBC Act* assessments and approvals.

The Federal Government's determination to hand back its powers to the States is such a slap in the face to everyone who campaigned long and hard to get the Koala listed under the *EPBC Act* that we have lost whatever little faith we had that the Koala would at last be properly protected.

I represented Friends of the Koala at the Australian Koala Foundation's briefing to garner support for a united voice in campaigning for a simple, impenetrable, national Koala Protection Act. Although the draft is under extremely tight wraps, "top secret" you might say, the idea is highly appealing.

In truth though, most of the quarter's advocacy effort has been applied to the Save Ballina's Koalas Campaign and the NSW elections.

Perhaps due to Labor's environmental policy commitments and the Northern Rivers media event which was held at the Koala Care Centre, koalas seem to have been quite prominent. While not to the extent of escalating bids between the parties on how to save them as posited by one journalist, images of koalas seemed to be everywhere. On the North Coast the North East Forest Alliance ran the slogan Vote 1 Koalas as a "third party campaigner" and we were happy to bring its How to Vote guide to members' attention.

—Lorraine Vass

Eco School Projects Underway

In December's issue we reported on the two funded Eco School projects Friends of the Koala will be assisting. They are Goolmangar School Koala Community Connections and Enhancing Koala Habitat at Tregeagle Public School and Surrounds

In regard to the first, planning has commenced for the participating schools (Goolmangar, Coffee Camp, Larnook, Blakebrook, Wyrallah Road and Nimbin Central School) to visit Dorroughby Environmental Education Centre (EEC) at the end of April and early May (three schools per visit). There will be three sessions during the day; koala food tree propagation workshop, threats to koalas, and the development of a koala resource/display including use of technology.

At Tregeagle FOK's Mark Wilson and Richard White have constructed the greenhouse required to carry out the project's propagation activities.

—Mark Wilson



Member for Lismore, Thomas George, presented a certificate to launch the Tregeagle project



Mark Wilson and the new greenhouse

Lismore Council's CKPOM

Implementation of Lismore Council's *Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for south-east Lismore* (CKPOM) has at present come to a standstill, and its future is uncertain.

As you probably recall, the Council allocated no additional funds to the CKPOM for the current financial year and I've been advised that it's most unlikely any additional funds would be allocated by Council for the 2015/16 financial year.

The funds that remained from previous years have now been spent on the consultation process for Council's draft Biodiversity Management Strategy (BMS) and the proposed Special Rate variation (SRV) to fund it. This was justified on the basis that several of the actions from the CKPOM are embedded in the BMS, and if the SRV is supported by the community, the CKPOM itself is embedded in the BMS and will therefore be funded on an ongoing basis.

The Draft BMS was recently exhibited for public comment, and Council is continuing to consult with the community regarding the proposed SRV. Outcomes of the public exhibition and consultation will be reported to the April meeting of Council.

As predicted, a concerted campaign was run by some groups in the community to ensure the SRV is rejected. That aside, raising rates always requires political will, and even if the community supports the rise, there's no guarantee that Council will. Absent that political will, the BMS and all the actions included in it will languish 'on the shelf', which would be such a waste of staff resources and funds.

The bitter-sweet outcome for the CKPOM is that if the SRV doesn't proceed, staff resources currently focused on the BMS will probably be available to implement actions in the CKPOM! I'll keep you in the loop on this frustrating issue for FOK and of course our koalas.

—Ros Irwin

The Federal Government invests in koalas

For the second time in 12 months Friends of the Koala's applications to restore koala habitat have met with success.

The Federal government investment of over \$2 billion in complementary Natural Resource Management programmes is enabling us to sponsor two *Green Army* teams and to be the recipient of a *25th Anniversary Landcare Grant*.

The Green Army project, *Assisting the recovery of koala populations on the NSW North Coast*, commenced at the end of January. The 25th Anniversary Landcare project, *Forming partnerships to keep Lismore's urban and rural koalas connected*, will commence in April.

The "Anniversary" Grant will fund the first stage of a strategic approach to facilitate koala movement between Lismore's urban and rural populations. Friends of the Koala will work with Lismore City Council, Southern Cross University and private landholders to restore koala corridors through natural area restoration and community education.

The project aims to assist stakeholders to sustainably manage landscapes to protect high profile habitat for the iconic koala while creating cross tenure wildlife corridors. Community education is an important component of the project, striving to raise awareness and involve the local community on a wide range of related issues, from garden waste dumping, garden plant selection and responsible pet ownership.

Higher consciousness of Lismore residents who share koala habitat should increase their understanding of the plight of local koalas and the threats posed to these animals, leading to behavioural change.

The long term goal is to see a reduction in the incidence of diseased and injured koalas coming into care as a result of physical injuries and stress related diseases, and to enhance existing core koala habitat for the benefit of the Lismore human and koala population.

Friends of the Koala is pleased to see four other projects focussed on koala habitat restoration in the Page electorate that have been funded under the *25th Anniversary Landcare Grant Program*.

—Julie Reid

Treetops is printed on recycled paper.



How Blake came to join the Green Army

I was studying to become a zoo-keeper and never really had much interest in koalas.

On my 18th birthday, I joined Friends of the Koala to further expand my knowledge of koalas and to keep my foot in the field I wanted to work in later in life.

were taught correct OH&S and how to use tools safely. We also received First Aid training, in case we encounter an emergency situation on a worksite or travelling, nowhere near a hospital.

With that behind us, we visited a few of the properties on which we would be working. One that sticks in my mind was just south of Lismore, along Gundurimba Road. It had been a cow paddock and I saw firsthand how hard some of

1,500 holes in anticipation of our arrival. In just over a week, our team of nine plus the owner were able to plant 1,000 trees, a number we are all proud of, especially given that the weather during the week was extremely hot and humid.

To add to our satisfaction, the owner told us that his resident koala has recently been joined by a new young male. The two koalas have been hanging out in previously planted Tallow-

woods, but in five years' time they will have a variety of both primary and secondary food trees to enjoy as a result of our work.

The Green Army is a Federal government programme. Teams throughout the country are working on various projects which are funded for six months. Members are often unemployed people between the age of 17 and 24. Friends of the Koala is our team's sponsor and EnviTE is the project deliverer. We are of different

ages and walks of life and there is never a dull moment when we are travelling to a work-site or on break.

If you know a young person who is struggling to get a job, encourage them to keep an eye out for the next round of Green Army recruitment ads which should be around May – June. It is often hard work, but you are looked after and learn skills that can be carried on through your life.

—Blake Dobbs



(l to r): Amanda Gray, Lauren Palmer, Tahlia Carr, Keith Williams (Supervisor), Mark Wilson (FoK Trees Officer), Luke Condon, Steven, Liam Boyd, Blake Dobbs.

I volunteered at the Koala Care Centre throughout 2013. I enjoyed coming to my shifts, as each koala had its own unique personality and, at times, were quite fun to work with. It also was a great feeling to care for koalas through their treatments and to see them off when they were released; given a second chance of life. I found I'd grown attached to koalas and I became quite interested in them as a species.

Though I was very active in my volunteering at Friends of the Koala, I needed to work a paying job. A FOK member told me about the successful application the group had made under the Green Army programme and that a Green Army team needed to be recruited. It being a paying job and I would be helping restore koala habitat, I was quick to apply and was accepted.

Similar to Green Corps, the Green Army is focused on bush regeneration and expanding existing natural habitat. I am enjoying the work I'm doing because it's building on my previous knowledge of the flora of the Northern Rivers area and the training I am receiving will be valuable should I decide to change career paths.

Our project started in the last week of January. First up we had to do our White Card training which gave us a certificate allowing us to legally work on worksites. We

our koalas have it. The trees that dotted the roadside were dry and had little leaf to be eaten. In the few that were fit for consumption we often saw two koalas sitting closely together. It was at that point that it hit me how much the local koala population was in need of help; how important are projects like the Green Army to restore at least a little of their previous habitat.

More recently we've been working on a beautiful property at Rous Mill. The owner had prepared the site, digging

GREEN ARMY GOES INTO BATTLE FOR KOALAS

Council now has a new Green Army that will help us restore koala habitat in Tregearle and provide sanctuary for local koalas.

Green Army is a new Australian Government initiative for 17 to 24 year olds to gain training and experience in environmental conservation.

The team will plant trees, attend local Landcare events and control invasive weeds, which limit koala movements and block access to food trees. Meanwhile, another Green Army will work with Friends of the Koala to grow koala trees, which can be given free to property owners who wish to expand habitat on their land.

The loss of bushland habitat often forces koalas into small 'pockets' of trees surrounded by houses, dogs and roads. The aim of the project with the Green Army is to try and link these pockets of habitat to provide wildlife corridors and enable safe movement of koalas and other native animals.

The work is part of a push to assist Lismore's south-eastern koala population, which is struggling to survive from a lack of genetic diversity and the constant threat of habitat loss, dog attacks, road injuries and disease.

The projects are supported through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme and the Australian Government's Green Army Programme.

Image: Council's Environmental Strategies Coordinator Damian Licari and EnviTE Green Army team leader Daniel Riordan (centre) with Council's new Green Army (l-r) Jarrod Wilson, Jeremy Rogers, Grace Kake, Jake Mills, Alexander Thompson and Dominic Gray.



Reproduced from Local Matters, Lismore City Council News, Issue 31, 18 March 2015

NSW's Biodiversity Legislation

NSW votes on 28 March. For the environment, and more specifically, for our koala conservation work, there is a lot at stake. Not to put too fine a point on it, the Baird government is more than likely poised to scrap laws that have protected the State for the past 40 years.

Just a week before Christmas the Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review Panel appointed by Rob Stokes, Minister for the Environment, released its Final Report. The Panel's 43 recommendations are presently being considered by government. Premier Baird has promised to announce his government's intentions before the elections. We sincerely hope he does so voters can determine whether or not it seriously cares for the environment.

So, what are the Report's key points? Not surprisingly, given the Terms of Reference, and the Panel's composition, it considers that the existing statutory framework does not align with contemporary government policy directions; that it's complex and over-regulated.

Concerns are expressed that multiple assessment pathways exist for determining biodiversity impacts of land management activities and land use change. Regulation of agricultural activities is intolerable. The current "improve or maintain" standard at a site scale under the *Native Vegetation Act* is inefficient, and the 7-part assessment of significance under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* is open to inconsistent application due to it being more subjective and heavily reliant on consent authority discretion.

The Panel's recommendations are made under the six themes of Conservation in development and land management; Conservation in land use planning; Conservation action; Managing wildlife interactions; Knowledge, information and science; and Objects for a Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Yep, the Panel is recommending repeal of the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*, the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, the biodiversity-related parts of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and the 7-part test in the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979*. A new, integrated *Biodiversity Conservation Act* will replace them. The Panel believes the new Act would enable NSW to obtain accreditation of its assessment and approval processes under bilateral agreements or strategic

assessments made under the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

What's being proposed is a monumental shift from site-specific assessments and conservation requirements to State or bioregional-scale conservation. The assumption being that the latter will improve environmental outcomes, reduce compliance burden and provide a greater potential for productivity gains by regulated parties.

But what's that mean? I'd suggest opening the door to increased clearing of native vegetation and making things a lot easier for economic activities like logging, mining, development and agriculture. Indeed, the Panel is very supportive of biodiversity offsetting as a means of achieving its broad-scale, simplified, risk-based licensed conservation system.

Heaven help the koalas and all our native wildlife if the Panel's recommendations are adopted.

The future of wildlife rehabilitation could change as well. Quietly tucked away in the section on Managing wildlife interactions consideration is given to modifying government's role in wildlife management to devising and implementing a risk-based tiered system and the tools to regulate interactions with wildlife.

Four tiers are proposed: exempt activities, code-based complying activities, assessable/licensed activities and prohibited activities.

The Panel concedes that introduction of the new approach and the effectiveness of government's role would be increased if underpinned by better resourced community-oriented programs.

Programs that educate and inform people about the conservation needs of native animals and plants, the impacts of human-wildlife interactions, and, at an individual animal level, the welfare and care need of animals in captivity. The way forward on this will be to facilitate effective local wildlife care through strategic partnerships with wildlife rehabilitation providers. Hang on, that's us! Or is it?

The Panel talks about government accrediting peak bodies or representative organisations but doesn't actually spell out what accreditation might encompass. The Report suggests that govern-

ment's role in licensed wildlife rehabilitation focusses on setting operational standards, providing assistance in conflict resolution, facilitating state-wide training and education and undertaking targeted compliance. If we assume an intention to distance government's involvement, then accreditation could be for all or part of the above.

Wildlife rehabilitation providers would deliver on-ground services, ensure members and volunteers comply with standards and they would provide data to monitor State-wide wildlife trends to the government (just as they do now).

There are two state-wide organisations, the NSW Wildlife Council, Inc. (NWC) and the NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service Inc. (WIRES). The NWC is an umbrella organisation comprised of 25 independent rehab groups and WIRES is a multi-branched entity presently independent of the NWC.

Watch this space!

—Lorraine Vass

Cudgen NR

Revegetation projects are boosting Koala habitat in Tweed's Cudgen Nature Reserve. Kicked off last year with Koala Connections' planting 5,000 koala food trees, a \$200,000 project to plant a further 15,000 trees and restore 23 ha of former banana land was launched in February.

A few days out from the election, Environment Minister, Rob Stokes announced a further \$99,875 over 3 years under the Environmental Trust's Restoration and Rehabilitation Program to create an extra 2 ha of core koala habitat.



President Lorraine with Minister Stokes at the funding announcement

WetlandCare Australia Northern Rivers Region had written the successful application. Friends of the Koala is a major partner.

We'll be contributing 3,000 koala food tree tube stock free of charge,

4,500 additional seedlings at a reduced rate, technical guidance and specialist advice on koala habitat rehabilitation and assistance with community education activities.

Christmas Day Fire

A wildfire deliberately lit in Pottsville Wetlands on Christmas Day 2014, threatened koalas, koala habitat and properties that surround the reserve. The Pottsville Wetland reserve is approximately 285 hectares and is located immediately south and west of Pottsville residential areas. The reserve is managed by Tweed Shire Council and has been the focus of extensive bushland rehabilitation and koala habitat revegetation works.

About half of the site is very low-lying and typically inundated for extended periods following moderate to heavy rainfall. However due to dry conditions in the year preceding the fire, it is highly likely that at the time of the fire, areas that are typically inundated were dry, thus increasing fire risk to the site.

A total area of approximately 220 hectares was effectively completely burnt at the ground layer by the fire and associated back-burning. In some areas the mid stratum was also burnt, as were some areas of canopy. The Rural Fire Service aimed to undertake all back-

tum and areas of Broad-leaved Paperbark forest with a wet heath/sedge understorey

- unfavourable weather conditions with high temperatures and moderate to strong winds during back burning operations on the 26th December
- very dry vegetation and the presence of peat in some areas.

Searches for koalas were undertaken by Council staff and community members during and after the fire. Due to safety and access constraints, this search effort was very limited in extent and compre-



Pottsville Wetland Reserve (mapped koala populations from Tweed Coast Koala Habitat Study depicted by white lines).

hensiveness. Koalas located during these searches were checked visually by observers, typically with binoculars whilst the koala was up in a tree. Some of these koalas have been checked on a number of occasions but not all koalas have been able to be located since. It was evident during these searches that individual primary koala feed trees retained within asset protection zones provide a

very important resource for koalas both during and following the fire event.

Although no dead or injured koalas were located, as some areas of primary and secondary koala habitat were sub-

ject to high intensity fire, the extent of any impact on koalas remains unknown. Some potential indirect impacts including temporary loss of foraging habitat and increased human and dog activity in the reserve are likely to have been at least partly ameliorated by significant rainfall received immediately after the fire.



Pottsville Wetlands fire extent 26th December 2014 Approx 3.30pm.

burning operations at the lowest practical intensity with the intention to avoid direct impact to koalas in the reserve. In areas this was not possible due to a number of factors including:

- high fuels in some vegetation communities, particularly areas of Swamp Mahogany/Pink Bloodwood/Swamp Box Forest with a shrubby mid stra-

The fire has highlighted a number of new actions that are being implemented to significantly improve the response to future wildfire events in koala habitat on the Tweed Coast. This includes ongoing collaboration with RFS, training of Council staff to enable active participation in wildlife response, detailed mapping of koala refuge areas and preparation of mapping to identify priority koala habitat areas.

—**Scott Hetherington**

Senior Biodiversity Program Leader
Tweed Shire Council

From p1 | disgusting and I can't believe you expect me to eat it". That's what I interpreted from the looks she would give me.

She gave me so many scratches that my doctor asked me if I was self-harming. She also reminded me of the terror that is a panic attack.

During it all, Pat provided calm advice and laughed with me at my over reactions. In retrospect, freaking out about Dot's scats being small and crumbly or worrying that the way she threw her head back whenever she was unhappy was some sort of seizure or that when she bit me over and over that it meant she hated me, all seems crazy now, but I assure you at the time it was serious stuff.

Six weeks later (and several more grey hairs for me), Dot was nearly a half kilo heavier and completely free of Chlamydia. Time to move on!

Home-carers Sue Johnson and Jo Cabale kindly took Dot to live in their outdoor enclosure. They already had Leah and Lila, who were a bit older but close enough in size that we were hopeful Dot would fit in with them.

She didn't disappoint. After a day of settling in, Dot was found cuddling up to her new buddy Leah. Since then, Sue tells me Dot spends some of her time cuddling and some sitting alone.



Dot and Leah

As a foster Mum, there is nothing greater than watching Dot's koala instincts kick in. She's been given a second chance at a full life and I'm so honoured to have been part of it.

—**Susannah Keogh**

Restoring Koala Habitat - 2

This is the second of a series of articles to assist landowners with restoring their bit of bush for the benefit of all wildlife and in particular our threatened koalas. Julie is a member of the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR), and a bush regenerator with more than 30 years' experience.

Planning revegetation projects to enhance koala habitat.

The question to ask before planning a revegetation project is: do you even need to plant?

When planning restoration works it is important to have a good understanding of the type and condition of natural areas on the property and consider:

- it is cheaper and easier to protect healthy sites than it is to regenerate degraded sites
- it is cheaper and easier to regenerate degraded sites than it is to revegetate totally cleared land
- where possible, only revegetate cleared land after all healthy sites are protected and degraded sites are regenerating.

Planting should be avoided where natural regeneration is possible.⁽¹⁾

Once the decision to plant has been made, accurate species selection is critical for plant survival as well as for maximising the success of the project. Good koala habitat is unique in character both structurally and with the species present, and should be maintained by using plants that would occur naturally on the site and are of local provenance (i.e. are found in the local area). Friends of the Koala's Trees Officer, Mark Wilson, propagates plants with local provenance and can advise on koala preferred food trees that occur in your specific location.

An individual property may have, or once have had, a range of different bushland types in different environments. Ecotones exist on properties where tree species may be determined by factors such as soil type and depth, aspect or wind protection. Species of eucalypts growing near a drainage line or floodplain could be completely different to those that grow on a nearby ridge for example. When choosing the ideal area to revegetate study the native vegetation patterns in the vicinity where good vegetation structure remains. A range of understorey and ground cover species, not just trees should be planted, to assist with suppressing weeds and replicate the natural order.

Koalas are ecological specialists which feed primarily on eucalyptus trees. However koalas also use other tree species for shelter so structural variety is important, examples are Casuarinas, Cypress Pine and Brush Box. Although primary and secondary food trees provide most of a koala's diet other species may provide seasonal or supplementary food. Gather as much local information as possible before making a species list for planting to replicate a sustainable koala habitat.

It is important to consider how the planting is going to be maintained until it is established. Unless funding and/or assistance is available it is advisable to keep the planting at a level that can be easily maintained, alternatively the planting may need to be done in stages.

In nature, plants are not evenly spaced, but grow in groups or random patterns. Where possible this should be replicated in planting. Groundcovers do best if planted close together; trees may be more widely separated. Planting techniques will be covered in the June issue of *Treetops*.

One of the greatest costs for any planting project on the North Coast in the last decade is browser control; this could be individual tree guards or wallaby proof fencing. Healthy habitats come with increased biodiversity and this includes wallabies.

This information is provided for those landowner/managers who wish to enhance existing habitat or create new areas to link existing habitats ensuring a high standard. Mass plantings of koala food trees is an activity that requires less planning but will still serve to benefit koala movement and survival.

⁽¹⁾ *Managing bushland and wildlife habitat –Revegetation*

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/cpp/Revegetation.pdf>

—Julie Reid



Two year old koala habitat using eucalypt species occurring on the Jiggi site. Natural regeneration of ground covers (foreground) occurred throughout the planting once weeds were removed. Tree guards are being removed and reused for a third planting. Tree were sourced from FOK's nursery and planting was funded by the NSW Environment Trust.

Tyagarah Regen Pilot

Koala Connections and Brunswick Valley Landcare have teamed up to produce an on-ground trial to test methods to facilitate germination and establishment of native trees.

The project is utilising the seed falling onto measured plots in a grazed paddock adjacent to remnant sclerophyll vegetation at Tyagarah. The role of fire has been identified as crucial to the future of the sclerophyll plant communities but proximity to urban and peri urban areas or seasonal conditions such as drought and wet seasons are crucial issues for the timing of burning in regeneration sites.

The project aims to determine the most efficient methods for the regeneration of koala food and shelter trees *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, *Eucalyptus robusta*, *E. tereticornis* and other co-existing swamp sclerophyll species on cleared and previously grazed paddocks.

The project utilises 15 regeneration treatments including fire, herbicide, scraping, tillage and nil treatments, overlaid with seeding, watering and no watering. There are 10 replicates of each treatment giving a total of 150 plots.

Measurements include plant species, distance to seed source and closest koala feed trees, climatic factors such as rainfall, temperature, wind speed and direction.



Burning trial plots, Tyagarah, November 2014

—Jo Green

Project Officer, Byron
Koala Connection

Bulletin Board

New Members

A very warm welcome to the following members who have been formally accepted into Friends of the Koala over recent months:

Yasmin Cabot, Michael Chapus, Katy Ziemiak, Marlee Monahan, Bronya Lipski, Mary Jo Enright and Miranda Retz, of Lismore, **Kim & Nigel Walters** of Tweed Heads, **Victoria Pitel** of Larnook, **Mark Daly** of Numulgi, **Dale Johnson** and **Blayd Reid** of Goonellabah, **Kelly Dummett** of Alstonville, **Lindy Margan** of Federal, **Keith Williams** of Tintenbar, **Marama Hopkins** of Uki, **Alison Bryant** of Ocean Shores, **Downie Jhabel** of Ettrick and **Anna Powel** of Coraki.

Congratulations Katrina

FOK member Katrina Jeffery has received a 25 Anniversary Landcare Grant of \$12,100 to push along her *Tuckurimba Koala Habitat Regeneration Project*. The grant is for regenerating and nurturing 700 native trees including primary koala food trees and most importantly three community field days to encourage input, involvement and education about koala habitat. Keep track of the project on its FB page.

Bunnings BBQ (Lismore Warehouse)

Many thanks to Sausage Sizzler extraordinaire, Mark Wilson and his band of helpers, Wendy Poole, Helen & Graeme Hargraves, Lili Bailly, Susannah Keogh, Lola Whitney, Pat Barnidge, Rick Stewart, Ros Irwin and Bill Sheaffe for getting this year's fundraising off to such a good start, raising well over \$900. Thanks also to Jenni Ruane, Bunnings'



Sausage sizzle afternoon shift, (l-r) Ros Irwin, Rick Stewart and Bill Sheaffe

Activities Organiser, for her assistance throughout Saturday 3 January.

Koala Medicine Research

Christie Budd is a veterinarian and part of the team at the University of Sydney, Faculty of Veterinary Science researching medical treatments of koalas. More specifically here work is focussing on how koalas absorb and process the drugs they are being treated with. As well as a

FB page, Christie keeps an interesting blog at

<https://drchristiebudd.wordpress.com/>

Promoting Koala Awareness

Raising koala awareness doesn't have to cost much. Lismore City Council's envelopes now come with a koala safety message. Tweed Shire Council is distributing fridge magnets to help koalas on the Tweed Coast. Our revised brochure, *Responsible Dog Ownership and Koalas* was a collaborative effort with Lismore City Council and the Office of Environment & Heritage.



Dexter Donation

Award-winning Myocum author, Jesse Blackadder has generously donated 25 copies of her latest book, *Dexter The Courageous Koala*, for FOK to sell. Aimed at 8-12 year olds, the novel was inspired by our own Dexter, one of the numerous rescues that resulted from ex-tropical cyclone Oswald in 2013. A few copies are still available from the Koala Care Centre at \$15.

NSW EDO 1985-2015

The Environmental Defender's Office is 30 years old. Identifying the need for an independent legal service to help community involvement in contesting environmentally damaging development, the newly formed Environmental Law Association of NSW pushed the idea and with a few donations and a grant

from the Legal Aid Commission, the Office opened its doors in May 1985.

Friends of the Koala's first use of the service was in 2002 when we sought advice on the prospects of challenging Lismore City Council's proposed upgrade of Skyline Road on the basis of not having obtained development consent under Part 4 of the EP&A Act. The

Skyline Road campaign was to last a couple of years. We've been EDO Northern Rivers clients since the office opened in July 2006.

Koalas Watch Out

Since December Roads & Maritime Services (RMS) has introduced messaging [*Watch out for koalas*] on electronic signs between Port Macquarie and the Queensland Border to help raise driver awareness of koala movements on the Pacific and Bruxner Highways.



Drone-driven Koala Spotting

The QUT team working on a project to locate koalas using drones fitted with infrared cameras claims that the remotely controlled cameras pivot and swivel so scientists can scan trees from all angles, picking out koalas even in dense vegetation. Testing has been done at 20 metres and 80 metres. Resolution is good at 20.

NSW Labor Support Wildlife Rehabbers

"The unsung heroes of animal protection in the state..." is how *Labor's Plan for Our Environment* describes voluntary wildlife carers. Should Labor be elected they will:

- Ensure the efforts of voluntary wildlife care and rehabilitation providers are acknowledged and incorporated into the species recovery efforts of the NPWS through a formal relationship with the NSW Wildlife Council, and;
- Support the work of voluntary wildlife care and rehabilitation providers with funding of \$4million over four years to assist them in the work.

2015 International Year of Soils

The 68th UN General Assembly has declared 2015 the International Year of Soils. Under the slogan Healthy Soils for a Healthy Life, IYS aims to be a platform for raising awareness and understanding of the importance of soils for food security and essential ecosystem functions.



New look LECG Program

For several years, FOK has successfully applied for grant funding under the NSW Environmental Trust's LECG Administration Assistance Grant Program.

This year the Program's focus has changed away from administration to community education and building the capacity of NSW's people to protect and conserve the natural environment.

While initially disappointed, because there are so few funding opportunities for assisting administrative costs, we quickly saw from the guidelines that we could prepare an application around the challenge we face of engaging the rapidly expanding Northern Rivers community in our koala conservation work.

Some of the most frustrating issues for FOK are the lack of understanding about koalas and what members of the community can do to provide greater protection for them, both now and into the future. In particular, key issues FOK has focused on are: how to identify a healthy koala and therefore report it as a sighting (which goes into online databases); recognising a sick koala that needs immediate rescuing; how to reduce the number of injuries caused by dogs and cars; and how to conserve their essential habitat.

Our communication with both members and the broader community has predominantly been through print including this newsletter, newspaper articles and brochures and our website. In addition to our efforts, Councils in the Region also produce koala-specific material both in print and on their websites. Nevertheless, time and again we're made aware that there's still a long way to go.

FOK's use of social media has been limited by the lack of: appropriate skills in our volunteers; and the absence of a communication plan that focuses on a coordinated approach to saving koalas and their habitats in the region. Partly in recognition of the capacity of social networks to reach many more, and a greater diversity of, members of the community, and partly as an attempt to rectify these limitations in our volunteers, a small group comprising Lorraine Vass, Aliison Kelly, Julie Reid and me set to work.

Our project, if approved, will result in implementing a coordinated communication plan that publicises what FOK and the other organisations do within the Region through social media. This will hopefully result in an increase in the number of active volunteers working on koala conservation and increase the public's knowledge about koalas, their habitat, how to recognise their needs and how to protect them into the future.

As part of the project we will identify individuals across the region and train them in the various social media platforms of FaceBook, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter to create a network of '*Koala Champions*' who will publicise and share strategic information building the general public's knowledge and understanding of how they can actively contribute to saving our koala population and protecting our natural environment.

More of this later if our application gets the tick of approval!

—Ros Irwin



2014 Koala Count

The Koala Count initiated by the National Parks Association of NSW in 2013 was held again from 7-17 November 2014.

Encouragingly participation increased from 274 citizen scientist recorders in 2013 to 308 in 2014 and the number of koala sightings rose from 966 to 1,161. 75 participants engaged in both 2013 and 2014.

The Gold Coast saw most of the increase. Only 12 citizen scientists participated in 2013, recording 18 koalas. In 2014, 66 citizen scientists recorded 218 koalas, demonstrating that (a) Gold Coast City Council's promotion worked, and (b) despite everything, there's still a significant koala population in the local government area.

Regrettably the Northern Rivers accounted for a lot of the drop-outs. Our participation decreased by 56% from 144 recorders to 80 and the number of koalas we counted dropped from 503 to 337 or 67% over the two Counts. Byron accounted for the largest percentage drop from 33 participants in 2013 to a mere 20 in 2014. Even so, it came in second after Lismore in NSW for both the number of recorders and the number of koala sightings, 64 compared to 75 in 2013.

For more, read the report at

<http://tinyurl.com/p4uqj9l>.

Member Profile – Bill Sheaffe



I'd known Lorraine and Rick Vass a long time and admired their work. When the opportunity arose with my paid work reducing, I started leafing, taking the FOK trailer to the

tip, staffing the Rescue hotline and rescuing koalas. I became a bit of a general dog's body/handyman at the Care Centre, which often starts when Lola rings (Bill, can you fix this?).

What's the best thing about where you live? Freedom, the climate, the pristine environment and general beauty of the area.

What are you reading? Police crime novels set in Venice and Sicily – more to do with the Italian life-style than crime.

Favourite pastime/hobby? Gardening, music, reading, cooking, tinkering and travel within Australia.

Your idea of a perfect Sunday? Rise late(r), morning coffee, brunch, coffee, snooze, interesting drama/documentary on the box – with my lovely wife – did I mention coffee?

Your most memorable travel experience? Nine weeks of globe-trotting with my lovely wife – Italy, France, England, Scotland (where we were married) and Peru.

What would you like to be doing in five years' time? Seeing more of this great country in our little old Bedford motor home.

Who is the person you'd most like to meet? The next person who might motivate me or enable me to see things in this complex world with more understanding and compassion.

What has been your favourite koala moment? Rescuing Gideon after a brush with a greyhound and then setting him free as a healthy young male – he left a good scar on the greyhound.

Application/renewal form — 'Friends of the Koala, Inc.' Membership runs from 1st July to 30th June.		I/We are interested in: (please tick)	
Name.....		<input type="checkbox"/> Tree Planting	
Postal address.....		<input type="checkbox"/> Plant Nursery work	
City/Suburb.....	Postcode.....Country.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Caring for sick & injured koalas	
Phone.....	Mobile.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Leaf collection	
Email.....		<input type="checkbox"/> Rescue	
Membership category (please tick)		<input type="checkbox"/> Committee / Administration	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ordinary—Individual/Family (within Australia) \$20		<input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising	
<input type="checkbox"/> Concession—Full time Student/Pensioner (within Australia)..... \$10		<input type="checkbox"/> Publicity	
<input type="checkbox"/> International—Individual/Family (outside Australia) \$50		<input type="checkbox"/> Education	
I/We would like to make an additional donation of : \$.....		<input type="checkbox"/> Surveys / Mapping	
Total payment is: \$.....		<input type="checkbox"/> Information Technology	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Phone Roster	
		<input type="checkbox"/> I/We would like someone to phone and explain about volunteering with Friends of the Koala	
Payment by:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Direct Debit (your name as reference) to: Friends of the Koala Inc., BSB 722-744 A/C 38533 Southern Cross Credit Union Ltd.			
or <input type="checkbox"/> Cash (preferred) <input type="checkbox"/> Cheque <input type="checkbox"/> Money order			
<input type="checkbox"/> Credit card (amounts over \$20) Cardholder Name.....			
Card Type (e.g. Visa).....Number.....Expiry Date (mm/yy)....../....			
Post to: The Treasurer, Friends of the Koala Inc., PO Box 5034, East Lismore, NSW 2480			
<i>I agree to abide by the licensing requirements, the constitution and the policies of 'Friends of the Koala' Inc.</i>			
Signature.....Date...../...../.....			
<i>The Management Committee reserves the right to refuse any application for membership or renewal.</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Please tick here if a receipt is required			
<input type="checkbox"/> Please tick here if you would like to receive Treetops by email (~ 2 mb pdf colour file)			
Office Use Only			
Date Received.....Receipt #.....Donation Receipt #.....Date Passed by Committee.....			
Contact Information: 24 hr Rescue Hotline: 6622 1233 Koala Care Centre: 6621 4664			
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Care Centre Coordinator	Lola Whitney	6621 3523	lola.fok@hotmail.com
Training Officer	Julie Reid	6688 8320	taulangau@clubtelco.com
Leaf Harvesting Coordinator	Ros Irwin	6621 5906	roslyn.irwin@gmail.com
Phone Roster Coordinator	Pat Barnidge	6622 3690	pat.fok@hotmail.com
Volunteers Working For: Koala Rescue and Rehabilitation . Advocacy . Education . Environmental Repair			



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Deadline for next newsletter:
Tuesday 26 May: 2015
Contributions gratefully accepted
– please post to FOK or email
info@friendsofthekoala.org