

Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management

COUNCIL NAME

Tweed Shire Council

WEB ADDRESS

tweed.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

1,309 square
kilometres

POPULATION

90,114

Overview

The Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management responds to the critical challenge of reversing the decline of koalas by providing an innovative, overarching strategy to coordinate recovery actions. The plan reflects the integrated, whole of community response to saving the Tweed Coast koalas.

Background

A detailed study of the status of the Tweed Coast koalas was undertaken in 2010. The study revealed that the koala population had declined by approximately 50% within the previous decade and were effectively confined to three sub-populations (<150 animals). It identified that without intervention koalas could disappear from the Tweed Coast within 15 - 20 years.

As a result of this research the Tweed Coast koalas were nominated as an Endangered Population under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and council secured a \$2.1 million Biodiversity Fund grant from the Australian Government to develop the Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management.



The plan was developed over a number of years and provides a strategy which is fully integrated into Council's Community Strategic Plan and Operational Plan with support across council and the community to manage and protect the koala population. A high level of community interest existed in the recovery of the koala population and all council decisions in relation to the plan received unanimous support.

The plan integrates key planning controls including local environmental plans and development control plans and

provides a holistic approach focusing on the full suite of actions that promote population recovery, consistent with the State Environmental Planning Policy 44 - Koala Habitat and Protection. By providing an overarching strategy to coordinate recovery actions, the plan reflects the integrated, whole of community response required to meet the significant challenge of saving the Tweed Coast koalas.

The objectives of the plan are supported by a management framework to prioritise actions based on landscape scale, spatial location and consistency with a set of guiding principles. These principles emphasise the need to respond to the science, make efficient use of limited resources, share the costs, recognise the public interest, strengthen the current planning framework, provide planning certainty and transparency and ensure ongoing community participation.

Four key aims in the plan are consistent with the key recommendations of the earlier koala habitat study:

1. To recover the Tweed Coast population of the koala to at least 200 - 250 koalas over the next three koala generations (15 - 20 years).

REFERENCEStweed.nsw.gov.au/Koalas

2. To increase the total area of Preferred Koala Habitat to at least 2,600 ha in priority areas and linkages.
3. To ensure that future development on the Tweed Coast takes place in a manner that encourages the proper conservation and management 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 consistent with SEPP 44 and other relevant development controls.
4. To provide information on the status of Tweed Coast koalas and actions required of the community in a regular and accessible format over the life of the plan

Implementation

The plan combines both regulatory and non-regulatory provisions and commits Council as the lead authority to champion the koala recovery process. The regulatory provisions include development control and statutory planning functions of Council. The non-regulatory provisions involve the voluntary participation of the community to contribute to koala recovery and conservation such as measures to increase and improve habitat, better management of fire, reducing road mortality and dog attack.

The main project partners engaged in the development of the plan were the Tweed Coast Koala Advisory Group which was formed to support the plan's preparation and included members from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), Department of Planning, Friends of the Koala, Team Koala and Council, together with individual community and landholder members. Elected members of Council, the executive team and other relevant officers throughout Council also made significant contributions to development of the plan.

Outcomes

One of the main achievements to date has been galvanising the community into positive action and identifying practical solutions for all involved.

The plan includes targetted development controls providing developers and their consultants with "no go" areas and upfront information on the conditions likely to accompany any consent. This is a major improvement on the previous process which was highly speculative, involving costly studies and protracted assessments with little certainty of outcome. The new approach provides greater certainty for the community, by providing clear expectations with all new development required to be consistent with the plan which will be reviewed every 5 years

The plan represents a holistic approach to koala conservation and recovery that has been integrated throughout Council and would be readily transferable to other communities. Implementation of the plan is well underway in all aspects with Council actively embracing the role as lead authority.

Key Learnings

The complexity of the issues involved resulted in the plan taking longer than originally anticipated, however this proved to be an opportunity allowing time to work through complex issues and engage with a wide variety of stakeholders. Development control changes and bushfire management are two of the issues which required additional time to ensure outcomes are delivered and Council could road test and refine management strategies.

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This project was the 2015 winner of the Natural Environment Policies, Planning and Decision Making Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.