

MYALL KOALA AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP INC

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2009

As this is my first President's Report I read through Kevin Haskew's last report to get an idea of how to go about it and the one thing that struck me was that this year the tide has turned a bit after all Kevin's unflinching work and we have had many successes with few disappointments. This is good news for the survival and expansion of our koala population and for all our flora and fauna.

The Land and Environment Court appeal by the proponent of the Brancourt development failed miserably and because they wouldn't compromise on their plans they came away with nothing. Well not quite nothing, the town houses facing Moira Parade were approved but that was not contested as they are sited on degraded land with little koala habitat. But the spin-off from this wonderful win will probably reverberate around future development proposals involving koala habitats both here and elsewhere with the expert for the other side no longer able to position himself on the top of the expert witness totem pole. There may in the future be another development plan submitted but it will have to occupy a much reduced area in line with the constraints determined by the court. It is this that makes it a very significant win for our koala population. Efforts by our Koala Group, Great Lakes Council and the Department of Planning were all astonishingly dedicated to seeing common sense prevail and it gave us hope for the future.

Although the Crighton Properties' Riverside at Tea Gardens proposal for more than 1000 houses opposite BiLo was released with glossy brochures and promises of sensitive development, the general view was that it was more of the same, had little true concern for wildlife and did not adequately address the mammoth issues relating to water. The new Minister for Planning, Kristina Kenneally, appointed a panel of 4 experts to assess the environmental and hydrological issues and as part of that process, a meeting was held for locals to voice their opinions. It was a successful meeting with several excellent presentations, most particularly Ian Morphet's on our behalf. The experts were interested, well qualified to judge the issues and open to all views. It seems unlikely that the current plan will succeed and likely that the proponent will have to make significant reductions in the number of lots and much more effort to accommodate wildlife and water.

An LES for a development at North Shearwater was also released recently and was in stark contrast to the Crighton Properties' proposal. Concern for

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the needs of all wildlife was obvious and at this stage it appears to fit more easily into the sustainable development category.

In addition to these positives, a slight glint of hope has been seen with regard to limiting the destruction of the beautiful Fame Cove and the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy has been released and did not include North Arm Cove after which a huge sigh of relief was heard up and down the coast. Although there were fears that Crownland Developments' plans for North Hawks Nest were going nowhere, recent indications are that it is still making its inexorably slow passage through the Department of Planning, which is good news.

Locally we have now got a Bushcare Group, the Bitou Bee, to clear away weeds from areas used by koalas and we hope to be able to keep it together and expand the numbers to the wider community over the next year. It is a surprise to see how much bitou can be removed by 7 or 8 people working at a comfortable pace for 2 hours. The idea is that paid bush regenerators do the big stuff and we do the followup – a win-win I hope, as our contribution helps get the grants to pay the regen group.

Finishing in March, the Conservation Volunteers Australia Karuah First group did six month's work here, planting koala food trees and clearing much bitou and morning glory from wildlife corridors. They have now set up their own bush regeneration group and the council is keen to use them for our local work.

They may get some work soon as the Koala Working Group has money from their budget allocation of a few years ago and the group has asked for funds for regeneration work at Jean Shaw Reserve, Yacaaba, reserves in Shearwater and around Jimmy's Beach. Planting of koala habitat trees south and east of Jimmy's Beach Caravan Park, on the strip before Winda Woppa and along urban streets are also on the agenda as is some traffic calming on Kingfisher Avenue and tree propagation from local provenance seeds. Fantastic!

Because koala food trees have been planted over the last many years at Winda Woppa Park and also at Jimmy's Beach Caravan Park, there is a need to join the two with a corridor of trees down the back fences of the Winda Woppa houses. To this end, an article in the Winda Woppa Conservation Association's newsletter about the history of koalas there was written and

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followed up with a koala food tree giveaway at Easter. Gail, Ian and I had a welcome from almost everyone, interest was high and because we also planted the trees there and then, we managed to give away 50 or so swampies, dwarf red gums and paperbarks. And we got half a dozen new members too, which was an unlooked for bonus.

The Tea Gardens Riverside Festival and Hawks Nest Walk on the Wildside were a success and continued to showcase the Koala Group to the community and thanks to the many members who worked very hard to make this happen.

The Koala Report has mostly been published in the Nota each month and many thanks to Gail Morphett for this and to Gail and Ian for their maintenance of the Hotline, collation of statistics and generally caring for the local koalas in all ways. The loss of Lilly, one of our young female koalas who lived in the magic square, was particularly hard hitting.

Anne Haskew has done a superb job as Treasurer for many years and when this year's new treasurer Bianca Bishop left town to study in Armidale, she once again took up the reins. Many thanks. How lucky we also are to still have Kevin Haskew turning his acute mind to the pitfalls and positives of DAs, LEPs, DCPs, housing strategies, court hearings and all else. Many thanks.

So to all those people who have assisted in any of the myriad ways this year, keeping the group alive and active, many thanks.

Helen Dauncey
President