



THE MYALL KOALA & ENVIRONMENT GROUP INC.

President's Report for 2009-10

Plans and achievements

This year has been one of waiting and not as much has been achieved as was hoped. There are several reasons, the main one, I think, has been the delay in getting final approval from the Koala Working Group to spend the money left over from the initial government support for the endangered koalas in Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens. In addition, the Koala Group has committed to contributing some money, about \$3,000, towards the projects and an in kind contribution of some labour, about \$2,000 worth, to help ensure the tasks are all completed as written. This is a really excellent opportunity to make some big steps towards expanding prime koala habitat with more extensive planting, tidying up a lot of weedy areas and also implementing educational programmes.

The hope now is that there will be a KWG meeting before too long and the work can begin.

In case you don't remember what the money will to be spent on, here is a summary:

- * The Jean Shaw Reserve will have follow-up weeding
- * Jimmy's Beach south of the caravan park will have money spent on a landscape management plan, signage and bollards or fencing to protect existing trees, infill planting with koala feed trees and understorey planting and mulching
- * At Winda Woppa, Jimmy's Beach will get money for follow-up weeding of invasive shrubs (bitou, etc), restoration and re-establishment of dunal vegetation (mulching, planting, seeding, wind fences) and specimen planting of shelter trees on The Anchorage verge
- * The bushland east of the Jimmy's Beach caravan park will be weeded and planted where needed
- * Bitou removal from the National Park on Yacaaba will be funded
- * At Shearwater money has been allocated for mature pine trees and seedling and also invasive native shrubs to be removed
- * Bushcare weeding will be supported in the Sanderling, Tuloa, Yamba Sts block (we have finished that already); the Mirreen Tuloa Sts block (this is also nearly finished); the Michael Rowe Walk; Winda Woppa Reserve; Albatross Avenue and along Bennett and Coorilla Streets
- * Planting of koala food trees will be undertaken in pocket parks, for example on The Anchorage and in Yamba Sts and the Tea Gardens Playing Fields. Specimen tree planting in Sanderling Avenue will finally be carried out.



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So you can see why we have been waiting and hoping, the list above includes just about everything we could think of to help our local koala population prosper.

The state of the current koala population in town will be discussed in full in the Koala Report by Gail and Ian Morphett but overall, they are holding their ground fairly well. The efforts over the years to give the remaining animals the best chance of survival do seem to be bearing fruit. Many thanks to Annette Miller for walking the streets and reporting the koala sightings once again this year.

Deb Tabbart, CEO of the Australian Koala Foundation has been making life a bit hard for the Endangered Species Committee who are due to announce their decision whether or not to list koalas as a vulnerable species Australia-wide. Deb is convinced that koala numbers are falling below sustainable levels in many places but the Committee is tight lipped when asked to comment publicly on her evidence. Politics is a not inconsiderable part of all this as a listing will have flow-on effects for developers and their land releases and their lobbying will no doubt have some influence.

For a bit of perspective, here is a short excerpt from “*Brimming Billabongs*” by Bill Harney giving an indication of how it used to be in some places:

“My most vivid recollection of the Barcoo country is of the droves of koala bears... That was 1908. Long before we came to the feeding creatures we knew there were hundreds of them near by because of the eucalypt leaves strewn in our path.... Finally we saw them – and what a sight! I’d never seen such a thing before and I never have since. There were dozens of them in every tree, marsupials devouring acres of trees as they moved slowly along the river.”

The Bitou Bee has been meeting intermittently this year but the bushcare achievements have been worthwhile. As noted above, the block opposite the pharmacy bounded by Sanderling, Tuloa and Yamba Streets has had all the bitou removed, a mammoth task, with help from the 30 Barker Boys who came to the area at the end of the school year. The Mirreen and Tuloa Street block is also reasonable free of bitou although some huge plants near the mangroves will need a professional team to complete it. Follow-up will be needed in both places every year to pull out seedlings. Thanks to the regulars who made the mornings pleasurable and productive.

Development issues

The low density DCP, which contains the new council design guidelines for Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens houses, was supported by the Koala Group submission. Generally they guide development towards light materials, beachy house designs and colours and no colourbond fences. A real step in the right direction for a koala friendly and aesthetically pleasing townscape.

North Hawks Nest At the September meeting of council the North Hawks Nest LEP was passed, much to the relief of all those who have been working towards this for the last 5 or so years. Kevin Haskew has played a significant role throughout. Although no development would be preferable, one area was allocated for development by the commission of inquiry in



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about 2000 and it was always going to happen. What is so good is that the developer is environmentally aware and has co-operated with locals from the start of the approval process and his plans are eco-friendly. The major downside is that the **Michael Rowe Walk** will be gutted for much of its most beautiful section but the Koala Group has discussed ways of making the most of what is left with Council and it appears that we have been successful and an alternate route is going to be created. Of greater worry is the Department of Planning's dismissal of the proposal to include the **Swan Bay** end of the area into the National Park, they still have in mind that houses would be nice there. If such a thing were to happen, it would be the end of the endangered community of koalas in town – they would have no corridor along which to travel to get there. But that is a fight for the future, if and when it comes to pass.

Crighton Properties' Riverside at Tea Gardens has its second DA in to Great Lakes Council but at this stage we have little idea about what it entails, what the chances are for approval and whether the wildlife issues which were so neglected in their first DA have been adequately addressed.

Crighton's have begun building their aged care facility out at the Grange in partnership with Gosford RSL. We hope this will take the pressure off the Mirreen and Tuloa Streets block of wonderful bushland where the RSL have long wished to build an extension to the existing facility there.

Fun and fundraising

The Easter Stall made a profit of over \$1000 which was a great result. Reasons? Maybe 3 good prizes, each of which was good enough to be a first prize and a terrific lot of donations to the stall. The **October raffle** was also successful with nearly \$900 raised at the Riverside Festival where we had a stall and gave away hundreds of trees and shrubs. Thanks to those who sold raffle tickets and manned the stalls. This year the organisers have, in their wisdom, decided to combine the Riverside Festival and the Wildside Festival and to take out all the Wildside activities. To say we are disappointed and somewhat annoyed about the decision is to put it mildly.

The Christmas Party was, as always, a pleasant night on the waterfront with delicious food organised and cooked by Gail and Ian Morphett. It provides an opportunity for those people in town who don't want to come to meetings to get together for a bit of cheer and chat and as always, it was well attended.

Vale Barbara Morrison. The Koala Group lost a much valued, long term member in early December. The following was largely written by Ian and Gail Morphett who knew her well.

Although she had not been in the best of health for some years she was at her U3A Art Group a couple of days before her death and she also spoke to Ian Morphett on the phone about a couple of koalas that Gail and he had rescued in her street, Karthena Crescent, Swan Bay, that week.

In the early days of the Koala Group Barbara and her husband Ron were very active members and, in fact, Barbara was the Secretary of the Group in 2002. Her most famous activity was



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standing up to the bulldozers with Jean Shaw and Pat Pritchard in 2000 at the illegal clearing of the Brancourt land. With Ron's death and her deteriorating health she had become a little less active in recent years but was passionately interested in the koalas and wildlife in general in Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens. She always attended our Christmas BBQ on the Tea Gardens waterfront to catch up with friends in the Koala Group. Barbara was also renowned for her wicked, dry sense of humour and she still appreciated the jokes sent to her over the internet.

Health Issues. It is with great relief and a tribute to the skills of modern medicine that I report that Kevin Haskew, Ian Morphett and Gail Morphett have all had medical scares this year but all are now out of the woods and progressing well. What a year it has been for them.

The Committee this year has Ian Morphett to thank for his extraordinary dedication in every sphere. Ian has really been the President for about half the year when I have been away and for the other half of the year he has, as the news readers say, punched well above his weight. Thank you so very much Ian.

As well, Gail and Ian have continued to monitor the koala hotline, rescue sick or injured koalas, give a great talk at the Wildside Festival, write a report for the group and for the Nota each month. They have been the protectors of our koalas throughout the year. Fantastic.

Liz Burgess put her hand up for Treasurer and did a fine job until she became unwell when Anne Haskew came to our rescue. Thank you to both for your efforts.

Kevin Haskew continues to offer strategies and sage advice while writing submissions on subjects that defeat most of the rest of us.

What the group really needs is someone to take over as Secretary so that Ian can not only have a well deserved break but also so that he will be free to be President. I do hope that this comes to pass.

So to all those who have sold raffle tickets, weeded bitou, made cakes, donated bric-a-brac for the stall or just spread the word about the group, to you too, many thanks.

Helen Dauncey
President