

ITEM 9 NOTICE OF MOTION - COUNCILLOR CATH BLAKEY - KOALA PROTECTION

Councillor Cath Blakey has submitted the following Notice of Motion –

“I formally move that Council -

- 1 Recognise the importance of the preservation and protection of koala habitats and populations in Greater Sydney and New South Wales.
- 2 Note the report from the NSW Legislative Council inquiry *Koala populations and habitats in New South Wales* that found koalas are projected to become extinct in NSW by 2050 unless there is urgent government intervention.
- 3 Write to the Premier, Minister for Planning & Public Spaces, Minister for Energy and Environment, and Minister for Agriculture urging them to -
 - a Support the extension of the proposed Georges River National Park to the Illawarra Escarpment and the adjacent Water Catchment area.
 - b Maintain local government’s ability to regulate environmental zones to protect, manage and restore lands of high ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic values, particularly for the protection of core koala habitat.
 - c Provide planning certainty, resources and support for identifying core koala habitat and the development of Koala Plans of Management; and
 - d Allow for departures from the Koala Habitat Protection Guideline based on existing surveys, local circumstances or emerging technology where this is agreed to by the Department.”

Background provided by Councillor Cath Blakey:

Koalas, once numbered in their millions across the entire NSW coast, have experienced a major decline and are threatened with extinction in our lifetime. Habitat loss is the biggest threat to koalas and land clearing is listed as a key threatening process for koalas under NSW and Commonwealth environment laws. Reduced and fragmented habitat, with the accompanying loss of food trees, shelter and refuges, is both a direct driver of population decline and also exacerbates the impact of other threats such as dog attacks, vehicle strike, disease and other impacts associated with high levels of human interaction. The protection of habitat from loss and fragmentation is therefore the vital first step in dealing with the flow-on threats.

The main drivers of ongoing koala habitat loss and fragmentation in NSW are:

- Native forest logging on public and private lands
- Clearing of native forests for agriculture, and
- Clearing for urban development, infrastructure and other major projects such as mining.

Despite this, koala habitat has insufficient protection from development, clearing or logging on private lands, and ineffectual protection in State Forest.

Within in the Wollongong local government area koalas are predominately located in the Special Areas under drinking water catchment areas, with notable records at Mount Kembla, and recent citizen sightings and evidence reported on the lower escarpment area west of the University of Wollongong and at Thirroul. There are well recorded koala populations in lands adjoining Wollongong, including in the Sutherland, Campbelltown, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee local government areas. The koalas between Picton Road and Campbelltown are part of the only population in the State that is disease free.

Sub-adult male koala’s can range over a wide area looking for females and to establish their own home territory, whereas the females and mature males tend to be more sedentary.

Recent Illawarra wild koala sightings are summarised by local archivist Michael Organ, and published here: <https://koalaillawarra.blogspot.com>.

The Wollongong local government area is also home to Symbio Wildlife Park which plays a popular role in koala conservation and community education, offering the opportunity to hold and be photographed with a koala.