

SUBMISSION: Proposed Framework for Reviewing SEPP 44-Koala Habitat

To: Director, Planning Frameworks
NSW Department of Planning and Environment

From: Valley Watch, Inc.
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Dear Director:

Congratulations on commissioning this Report of the Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Areas of NSW. Valley Watch applauds the Chief Scientist's recommendations that address major issues, and the proposed framework for State Planning to proceed with updating SEPP 44. The report calls for deadlines to be set and funding applied to achieve desired outcomes. We say the sooner the better.

The Clarence Valley LGA has a number of koala populations, only one of which has been properly studied—that of the lower Clarence in Ashby and Iluka. We know the Ashby population is declining, and in Iluka koalas are in danger of disappearing. Valley Watch doesn't know what the numbers and locations are of populations outside of Ashby, but development pressures and logging by state forests is no doubt affecting koala numbers in the Clarence as with elsewhere in the state.

Under SEPP 44, Clarence Valley Council have tried to do the right thing by adopting a Koala Plan of Management for Ashby and Iluka. This effort has stretched over about 16 years after it was back-burned during Council amalgamation, and koalas are the ones who suffer from this lack of action.

A Draft KPOM was finally released for public review by CVC in 2015, but it has yet to be approved by State Planning. This knit-picking and seemingly endless micro-managing of local governments needs to end. The Clarence Council's KPOM as well as that of Lismore are very good documents, both being held in limbo. Since the Northern Rivers is a priority region identified in the Independent Review, Valley Watch propose that an additional recommendation be made to the report calling for quick approval of the plans, even if they don't fully incorporate every little thing the Department of Planning would like to see.

There are some innovations in the 2015 Clarence Valley Draft Plan of Management that are worth incorporating into the SEPP 44 framework that can also be applied to other jurisdictions. Valley Watch especially support the use of "Development Envelopes" as an excellent approach to managing new and existing development within koala habitat. The mapped areas of key habitat that are included in the plan provide certainty to the property owner and the development community, based on objective, professionally prepared koala habitat studies. The stringent

development standards and requirements for preparing individual koala management plans are also exemplary.

One theme throughout the 2015 Clarence Valley Plan is the need for cooperation with the Rural Fire Service to best achieve good management of koala lands. Valley Watch fully supports this objective as well as coordination with the very successful National Parks Hot Spots program that assists landholders to prepare their own fire management plans with wildlife protection in mind. We suggest that required coordination with the RFS be included in changes to the Framework for SEPP 44.

It is our understanding that the Chief Scientist's report recommends spending \$10 million to purchase properties deemed critical to koala habitat. We sincerely hope that this is not a one-off grant for funding, and that the amount be increased to around \$50 million. By comparison, the Australian government has granted \$45 million to the Antarctic ice core drilling project to evaluate climate change going back one million years. Surely we should give koalas commensurate funding. Our detailed comments on the proposed framework for updating SEPP 44 follow:

Section 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The introduction to Chapter states: "Several of the recommended measures, particularly those focused on data and monitoring, will require additional, sustained and dedicated resources." We suggest that a table be included as part of the Framework outlining specific measures that will need funding for periods of 6 month, 1 year, 3 years, 5 years, and so on. If possible an estimate of funds needed should at least be provided for the 6 month and 1 year measures.

The introduction section should also recommend that the State establish an on-going koala management committee to oversee and monitor funding recommendations. Such a committee should be comprised of a broad range of people from agency representatives to wildlife groups to individuals who reside in koala areas.

Section 4.3 Recommendation 4

This section needs another subsection to give immediate priority to KPOMs that have already been adopted locally but remain in limbo with State Planning, especially those in the Northern Rivers. In the case of Clarence Valley Council, their KPOM was adopted locally in October 2015, but has been held up by State Planning. It doesn't matter if these plans don't perfectly meet the ever-changing objectives of SEPP 44. The local plans should only be evaluated according to the provisions contained in SEPP 44 at the time of submission. This is especially important for the Clarence Council, which back-burnered preparation of a KPOM when they amalgamated, and now the process has stretched over 15 years, which is a disgrace.

Recommendation 6

This section talks about mitigation. There needs to be a last paragraph or sentence added that clearly states that avoidance of koala habitat must always be explored before considering undertaking mitigation, as koalas are very loyal to trees that they frequent, and relocation stresses them. A final sentence should be added that mining interests and state logging undergo rigorous development review and monitoring to ensure that they do not violate koala protection measures. As well, the selling of Crown Reserves and stock routes should have to go through a rigorous review to first ensure if koalas are present.

Recommendation 7

The last bullet in this section states: "identifying target areas for dog control and other threat mitigation." Friends of the Koala and WIRES often have koalas bitten by dogs that come into their care. We support this section, and request that a finishing sentence be added, that the State should make it a priority to assist in the funding of local rangers to patrol for loose dogs in koala protected areas during the breeding season.

Recommendation 9

The Clarence Valley and Lismore Councils have both adopted "development envelopes" as vital components of their KPOMs. There should be an additional bullet adding that the State supports the concepts of "development envelopes" in key koala habitat. After the State's final approval of the Clarence Council and Lismore KPOMs, other jurisdictions should be encouraged to adopt the same concept as part of their KPOMs. The State also needs to periodically review and monitor Development Approvals to see if the development envelope approach is working.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, we look forward to participating in community forums in 2017.