

Dear NR Guardians -

there is some great info in the emails below - can you do your bit and write to Tweed Shire Council (TSC) on behalf of our koalas!!

Dear koala lovers

The following is a long email from Dave Norris to Tweed Shire council regarding the state of affairs at Black Rocks sports field, calling on council to act. Up to now they have failed to protect this critically important cell of coastal koalas.

If you can please write to council and urge them to keep the gate closed 24/7 except for matches where the patrons have a key. Ideally to revegetate the field too because that is what the koalas need so desperately - and the osprey.

Thanks,  
Menkit

Dear General Manager, Councillors & Council Staff

As a result of further clearer photographic evidence, today I received confirmation from Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers/Friends of the Koala that previous advice has been revised and the two koalas highlighted in red below are not considered to be suffering from symptoms associated with stress-related disease. However, the other incidences and indications of stress-related disease symptoms below substantiate the need for increased koala protection to ensure there are no further koala deaths.

This is what the experts are saying:-

- *Of 40 koala mortalities recorded from the Tweed coast area since 2007 by Friends of the Koala Inc, 20 (50%) were reported to be from disease (Phillips et al, 2011) [NSW Scientific Committee Preliminary Determination for listing koalas between the Tweed & Brunswick Rivers east of Pacific Highway as an ENDANGERED POPULATION, page 5, No 16].*
- *Be aware that the clinical expression of Chlamydia in koalas is in itself a symptom rather than a cause; it may already be that the levels of disturbance at Black Rocks are already contributing to elevated levels of disease in the small population that is now left following the*

*recent fire* [Ecologist & koala expert Dr Steve Phillips, 26/1/2015].

- *If the Tweed Coast koala population is to be afforded a realistic chance for survival and recovery over the longer term, a precautionary approach will be necessary and the future of each remaining koala will be critical* [Ecologist John Callaghan, 10/6/2015].
- *The Pottsville Wetlands/Black Rocks koala sub-population is critical to the survival of the koala on the Tweed Coast* [Ecologist Sandy Pimm, 5/12/2003].

Yours faithfully

David Norris

President

Threatened Species Conservation Society Inc

Dear General Manager, Councillors & Council Staff

The following is a summary of the known incidences of stress-related disease associated with retrovirus and/or chlamydia at Black Rocks:-

- "DAVE": Male koala captured 30-40m north of Black Rocks sports field access road on 27 January 2014, transported to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital (reference 28779), euthanased 24 February 2014. This koala had suffered extensive internal injuries probably as a result of falling out of a tree due to blindness from Chlamydia.
- "MAX": Male koala captured on Kellehers Road, Black Rocks on 15 April 2014, transported to Australia Zoo (reference 53390), euthanased 27 May 2014. This koala was so sick it made no resistance when rescued. It suffered from Chlamydia, pneumonia and partial blindness.
- Unnamed sick koala sighted in tree adjacent to south-east corner of Black Rocks sports field on 6 January 2015. Photos sent to Friends of Koala and Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers, who confirmed koala had chlamydia-like symptoms and needed to be treated. This koala remains uncaptured and untreated and Council staff have advised

that it has most likely perished. On 7 January 2015 the koala/dog-proof vehicle access gates at the sports field access road entrance were temporarily locked in order to minimise stress to this sick koala.

- "POTTSY": Koala captured in bushfire asset protection zone west of Border Crescent, Black Rocks, Pottsville on 9 September 2015 and transported to the Currumbin Wildlife Hospital (reference 41940). Euthanased due to symptoms relating to retrovirus.
- Unnamed sick koala sighted in tree 20 metres within koala habitat west of Black Rocks sports field access road entrance on 16 October 2015. Photos sent to Friends of Koala and Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers, who confirmed koala had chlamydia-like symptoms and needed to be treated. Council staff have confirmed that this koala is probably the same koala also sighted on 17, 18 and 21 October 2015. To date this koala remains uncaptured and untreated.
- Unnamed female koala (sighted on 14 November 2015 low in a tree at the northerly point where the access road meets the sports field) has a brown coat, which is a symptom of general malaise associated with stress. [NOTE: Currumbin Wildlife Hospital has advised that the fact it was low in a tree and did not attempt to flee when in close proximity to humans suggests that this koala is ill.] This koala was accompanied by a joey.
- Since I have been taking records of Black Rocks koalas in 2011, photos have revealed that there have been at least another 8 koala sightings which appear to have chlamydia-like symptoms which were not recognised at the time of sighting.

**Could Council please respond to the following:-**

- Have there been, or will there be, any investigations and/or reports into the above incidences of koala disease and death?
- Is there a recovery plan in place to restore koala numbers as a result of koala deaths due to stress-related disease?
- Are there any recommended mitigation measures to prevent further koala deaths from stress-related disease within Tweed Coast's 3 koala source populations including Black Rocks, Koala Beach and Kings Forest which are managed under Individual Koala Plans of

Management (and are not covered by the Tweed Coast Koala Plan of Management 2015)?

- Do the Tweed Coast koala management measures include the capture of sick koalas by Council so that they can be treated for their illness?
- Does Council intend to review and update the Black Rocks IKPoM to bring it in line with the koala protection advocated in the TCKPoM?

The Threatened Species Conservation Society believes that these actions are necessary to ensure the survival of the very small, extremely fragile Black Rocks/Pottsville Wetlands koala source population and the other koala source populations on the coast.

It is well-documented that ongoing persistent disturbance causes stress to koalas, culminating in stress-related disease associated with retrovirus and/or Chlamydia. There are now over 300 reported koala-impactive activities at or adjacent to the Black Rocks sports field site. Unless strong, assertive decisions are made to remove the impacts which are causing stress to koalas, this disease has the potential to wipe out the entire Pottsville Wetlands/Black Rocks and other Tweed Coast koala source populations.

Below is an email from ecologist John Callaghan dated 10 June 2015 which has been forwarded to GHD (external consultants assessing the Men's Shed development application at the Black Rocks sports field). I draw your attention to the last paragraph of his email, ie:

***If the Tweed Coast koala population is to be afforded a realistic chance for survival and recovery over the longer term, a precautionary approach will be necessary and the future of each remaining koala will be critical.***

In telephone conversations I was advised by several Council staff members that Council's Natural Resources Management Unit is comfortable with the current level of koala protection and mitigation measures at the Black Rocks sports field site [PLEASE CONFIRM THIS IN WRITING]. However, the koala-impactive activities, ineffective mitigation measures, the incidences of disease and death, and the threats to the Black Rocks/Pottsville Wetlands koala source population suggest that current koala management is inadequate.

#### **Reported koala-impactive activities at the Black Rocks sports field**

- Hooning through koala breeding area on access road and on sports field.
- Use of sports field, access road and adjacent koala habitat as unleashed dog exercise area.

- Launching, landing & flying site for model glider & petrol-powered aeroplanes, para-motoring aircraft & helicopters in close proximity to koala habitat & osprey nest.
- Vandalism, break and enter, fire-lighting.
- Shooting, spud cannon launching.
- Motor bikes through koala breeding area on access road, on sports field and in koala habitat.
- Long-distance golf practice, including hitting balls in close proximity to koala habitat & osprey nest.

### **Ineffective and/or absent mitigation measures to ameliorate koala-impactive activities**

- A continuous koala/dog-proof fence which has a gap in it during the day when the koala/dog-proof vehicle access gates are left open.
- Non-enforcement of the 'limited dog' and 'no cat' rule in the Black Rocks-by-the-Sea estate as required by Black Rocks Individual Koala Plan of Management.
- Speed humps on access road which are by-passed by hoons and motorists who drive on adjacent grass verge.
- Educational and prohibited activity signage which is ignored by some members of general public.
- Absence of 'koala crossing' signage on access road.
- Non-enforcement of the 'no dog', 'no motor cycles' and 'no golf' rules on the sports field and access road.
- Ineffective surveillance by Council rangers at the site.

### **Environmental values needing to be protected at the Black Rocks sports field site**

- Located 300 metres within the koala corridor at the junction of 3 koala linkages.
- Identified by koala expert Dr Steve Phillips as strategically important as a central hub for north-south and east-west koala movement.
- Surrounded by core koala habitat, with significant stands of primary koala habitat.
- Home to 3 threatened species (koala, bush stone-curlew and osprey).
- Home to a resident koala source population, which ecologists state is critical to the survival of the koala on the Tweed Coast.
- 2 koala breeding areas (one either side of the western end of the access road and the other north-east of the sports field). Koalas move between these 2 breeding areas in the thin strip sandwiched between the urban development and the sports field.
- Significance of site identified by National Parks & Wildlife Service (Item 16, Council Agenda 6/11/2002) when they stated that the sports field's location would *'sever the wildlife corridor and koala habitat, and create human disturbance where it currently does not exist'*.

- Geolink Local Environment Study 6/11/2002 (page 29) recognised the significance of the swamp mahogany on the southern boundary of the site and the importance of the link between it and the forest red gum to the north via the central dunal ridge.

### **Threats to the survival of the Black Rocks/Pottsville Wetlands koala source population**

- A 30-60% mortality rate due to the Pottsville Wetlands Christmas Day 2014 bush fire (according to Dr Steve Phillips).
- Destruction and severe damage to over 200ha of koala habitat as a result of this fire.
- Incidences of stress-related disease and koala death (see separate email sent today).
- Abandonment of the site due to ongoing stress and disturbance from the above koala-impactive activities.
- Unsuccessful breeding due to ongoing stress and disturbance from the above koala-impactive activities and abandonment of their preferred breeding site.
- Dog attack.
- Vehicle strike.
- Habitat fragmentation.
- Fire.

### **Actions Council needs to take**

With so few Tweed Coast koalas left and an inability to eliminate the threats to their survival, it is imperative that Council takes the following actions:-

- Retain the koala protection gates at the entrance to the Black Rocks sports field access road.
- Lock the koala/dog-proof vehicle access gates at all times times with a key provided to authorised personnel.
- Disallow any sporting and recreational activities which may impact on the koalas and other threatened species at the sports field site.
- Re-direct scheduled sporting events to other venues wherever possible, especially during threatened species breeding seasons.
- Take the precautionary principle if there is potential for impacts on resident koalas and other threatened species at the sports field site.
- Provide a report with a view to revegetating the Black Rocks sports field with koala food trees, as recommended by independent ecologists including Dr Steve Phillips and Sandy Pimm.

We therefore request that Council applies the precautionary approach as recommended by ecologist John Callaghan. There can be no more koala deaths - only every opportunity for the

surviving Black Rocks/Pottsville Wetlands koala population to rest and recover to sustainable levels.

Yours faithfully

David Norris

President

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