

Hello Koala Supporters

More than 100 community group representatives, local residents and others attended the recent Koala Information Afternoon in Pottsville. It was a unique opportunity to learn of the facts from the experts about the grim future our Tweed Coast koalas face. Guest speakers included Mayor Gary Bagnall, Councillor Katie Milne and environmental legislation researcher Lindy Smith. The **keynote speaker was koala expert and leading ecologist, Dr Steve Phillips**, who gave a thought-provoking and heart-wrenching presentation on why we have so few koalas left and what is required to stop koala extinction on the Coast (an abbreviated transcript of his presentation is available on request).

Northern Rivers Guardians (a not-for-profit organisation with over 500 members) stand by Dr Phillips' impassioned plea for the community to put aside their differences and move forward as a strong, united voice to save the Tweed Coast koalas from extinction. I call upon you, your family and friends to write to:

- Mr Troy Green, General Manager, Tweed Shire Council, email [tsc@tweed.nsw.gov.au](mailto:tsc@tweed.nsw.gov.au)
- the Hon Rob Stokes, Minister for the Environment, email [info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)
- Mr Don Arnold, Regional Manager, North East Region, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage, email [don.arnold@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:don.arnold@environment.nsw.gov.au)

and **request a moratorium on development and future use of the Black Rocks sports field until the critical Black Rocks-Pottsville Wetlands koala population cell ideally recovers to more sustainable levels after the recent Pottsville Wetlands fire**, as advocated by Dr Phillips. What you do now could make the difference between losing our Tweed Coast koalas forever or ensuring that they are alive and well for future generations.

The following are the key points I have identified from Dr Phillips' presentation:-

### **BLACK ROCKS IS LAST STRONGHOLD AFTER FIRE:**

- The Black Rocks sports field issues are **dividing the community**. When an issue becomes polarised, it is the focus (of the debate) that invariably suffers. **We are losing sight of what is important** - the Black Rocks-Pottsville Wetlands koala population really needs our help.
- In 2010 there were an estimated 35 koalas in the Pottsville Wetlands-Black Rocks population cell. On Christmas Day 2014 a very significant deliberately-lit fire event in the Pottsville Wetlands damaged or destroyed more than 200ha of primary and secondary koala habitat with an **estimated loss of somewhere between 30 and 60% of that breeding population**.

**•The Black Rocks sports field and surrounding areas of habitat were not affected by the fire and are now the last stronghold for the Pottsville Wetlands-Black Rocks koala population cell, from where recolonisation of the existing habitat areas (once they regenerate) is going to primarily occur.**

•In a fire event koalas get burnt alive or injured to such an extent that they ultimately die. **Other mortalities are indirectly attributable to fire:** they get burn injuries and can't climb, they have respiratory trauma as a result of inhaling smoke, they lose their food resource. The stress caused by fire often manifests into stress-related disease symptoms like Chlamydiosis. Surviving koalas dispersing into adjoining habitat are often picked off by domestic dogs or run over by cars.

### **KOALA THREATS AT BLACK ROCKS AND ON TWEED COAST:**

•The current management situation at the Black Rocks sports field is **poorly informed, ecologically irresponsible and dangerous.**

•Everything is wrong with the location of the Black Rocks sports field - it is a **gap in an otherwise vegetated landscape**, with a long winding road to the sports field which is **not effectively integrated into the developed landscape.**

•The edges of each side of the road and the perimeter of the sports field equals **1.5km of exposed habitat** where dogs and other variables impact on the sustainability of the koala population.

•The threats to koalas we are dealing with are **fire**, unsustainable mortalities due to **motor vehicle strikes** and **domestic dogs attacks, stress-related disease** and **habitat fragmentation.**

•**Signs don't work** - we can't even get people to slow down at school crossings for our kids let alone slow down at koala crossing signs. About **50% of road kills are never reported.**

### **SOLUTIONS AT BLACK ROCKS:**

•We could put a **fence** around the entire sports field and access road, which would **fragment and disrupt the corridor**; we could make it a **political football** as we are doing now; we could rip it up and **rehabilitate it.** All have their problems.

•Dr Phillips is asking the community to put aside their differences and enforce a **moratorium on development and future use of the Black Rocks sports field site** until the critical Black Rocks-Pottsville Wetlands koala population cell has time to recover.

## **ALARMING KOALA DECLINE STATISTICS:**

- There are **3 koala population cells** on the Tweed Coast (Bogangar/Kings Forest, Forest Hill/Tanglewood/Koala Beach/Round Mountain and Pottsville Wetlands/Black Rocks).
- In 2010 there were an estimated 144 koalas on the Tweed Coast. After the 2012 major fire there were an estimated **100-110 koalas**. At that rate koalas will be **extinct on the Tweed Coast by 2025-2030**.
- Based on 100 healthy koalas, an estimated **7.5 joeys** will successfully breed across the **3 koala population cells each year**. This is not a lot of koalas to share around.
- Few breeding female koalas remain, which makes it **very difficult** for the Tweed Coast koala population **to recover to a viable population size**. As the population gets smaller, the recovery tasks and actions get harder, and the cost of recovery increases.
- The rate of **koala attrition exceeds** the number of **those breeding and surviving**.
- In October 2014 the NSW Scientific Committee made a Preliminary Determination to support a proposal for the threatened status of the Tweed Coast koalas to be **upgraded to 'endangered'** under *The threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*.
- The recently adopted Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management is **nowhere near as assertive as what it needs to be if it is going to effect recovery action** and turn this koala decline around.
- We are facing an extinction event in our backyard and in our lifetime.**
- Extinction is forever and pulling back decline is not an easy task.** The survival of the Tweed Coast koalas does not depend on federal, state or local governments - it depends on the community. It is our backyard, our koalas. Ultimately what happens to them is **up to us**. We should hand on an environment to our children and our children's children that is at least as good as the one that has preceded us.

**If you wish to be kept up to date on Koala related action - please add your name by emailing [norrilyn@gmail.com](mailto:norrilyn@gmail.com)**

Kind regards  
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