



Koala Management Plan

Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade Richmond River to Coolgardie Road

Progress update – February 2018

The Australian and NSW governments are jointly funding the \$4.36 billion Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade. The project was approved by the NSW Minister for Planning in June 2014 and the Federal Minister for the Environment in August 2014. The approvals come with strict conditions about managing the project's impact on the environment, including the koala and other threatened species.

Woolgoolga to Ballina upgrade



Background

The Koala Management Plan and Ballina Koala Plan have been approved. These plans set out Roads and Maritime Services' mitigation and monitoring actions for the upgrade. In the Richmond River to Coolgardie Road section near Wardell, a Population Viability Analysis also modelled the Ballina Koala population for the next 50 years.

The Koala Expert Advisory Committee, chaired by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer Mary O'Kane, has guided the process of preparing the plan. Independent members of the Committee have endorsed the Ballina Koala Plan following extensive input and advice from 15 independent scientific experts.

This update informs the community and stakeholders about our progress on implementing the Koala Management Plan and other initiatives from Richmond River to Coolgardie Road.

PROGRESS SNAPSHOT:

- Installed koala safety signs – six vehicle activated and seven static
- Planted 110 hectares of koala habitat and food trees
- Since the project started, 5,329 workers have been trained in koala zero harm strategies
- No koalas have been confirmed injured or killed as a result of the project
- Trapped two wild dogs and seven foxes found in koala habitat
- Completed 110 pre-clearing spotlight and detection dog surveys.

Koala Management Plan

The Koala Management Plan incorporates pre-construction, during construction, and post-construction koala management strategies, as required under the project's condition of approval.

The following progress report shows the type of work we will be doing to ensure koala populations are protected, the impact to koalas of the approved route through this section is minimised, and connectivity between existing and new koala habitats is improved.

Recent news

Bushfires - working with Rural Fire Service

In October we worked closely with the Rural Fire Service (RFS) when a bushfire burned through koala and long nosed potoroo habitat on Jali Land. If a bushfire moves towards a fauna fence RFS will remove the fence so wildlife is not trapped. To control the fire RFS backburned a section near the project boundary and no fences were removed. After the fire ecologists found no evidence of remains or injured wildlife.

Reports of koala deaths

In January there were reports that four koalas were killed as a result of the Pacific Highway upgrade. These reports were investigated in consultation with other agencies and none of these koalas could be confirmed as having died because of construction activities.

Progress report

Koala exclusion fencing and grids reducing road strike

All permanent fauna fencing on Wardell Road and the existing Pacific Highway is complete. We have no road strike deaths reported since the fencing has been installed. The previous 12 months recorded eight koalas killed by road strike in this area. Koala grid speed limit signs have been installed along Old Bagotville Road at a signposted advisory speed of 10km/h between the grids.

Next steps:

- Ongoing monitoring and maintenance to assess effectiveness of fauna fencing
- Continue to work with Rural Fire Service to ensure fauna is kept safe in a fire event.



Koala grid speed limit signs, Old Bagotville Road.

Phased resource reduction

The phased resource reduction process and extensive monitoring has resulted in the removal of vegetation with no injuries to koalas.

Next steps:

- Evaluate and report on koala stress study that monitored stress hormone levels in droppings.



Mother and young spotted near Broadwater.

Pre-clearing surveys

Before clearing any trees ecologists completed more than 110 pre-clearing spotlight and detection dog surveys to ensure koalas and wildlife were not harmed.

Five threatened species have been recorded and managed during pre-clearing surveys including koala, squirrel gliders, wallum froglets, spotted harrier and eastern grass owl.

Eight koalas were recorded inside the clearing area with two triggering clearing exclusion zones to allow koalas to safely leave the area. Also on the project:

- Five nest trees were retained to enable chicks to fledge
- 202 vertebrates were relocated
- 23 squirrel gliders were captured and relocated.

Next steps:

- Continue surveys, fauna recording and management.

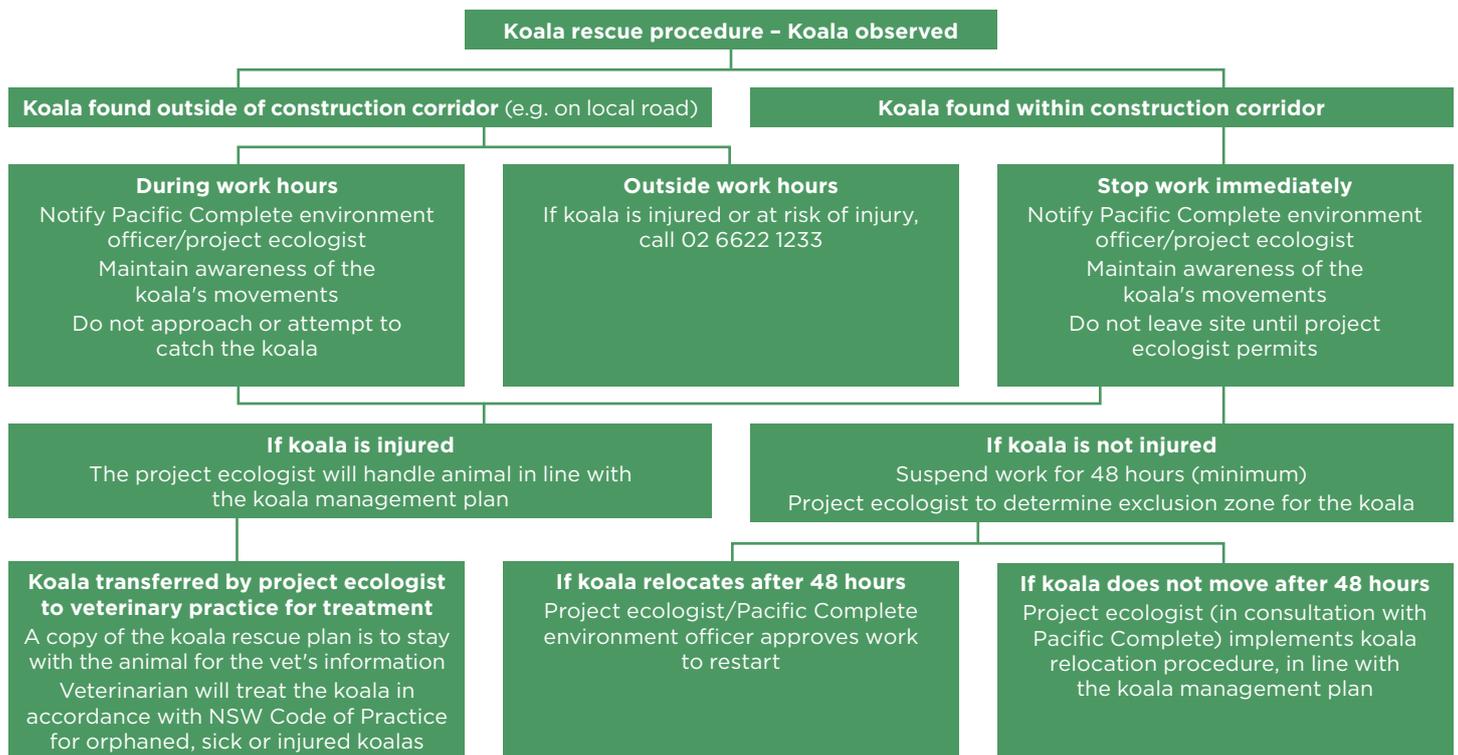
Koala feed tree planting

So far koala habitat and food trees have been planted on 110 hectares of the total 130 hectares to be planted.

This work is part of a revegetation strategy designed to improve habitat connectivity and provide extra koala food trees on land previously cleared for farming.

Next steps:

- Plant a further 20 hectares of trees when construction has finished
- Ongoing weed management to ensure new trees thrive.



*We notify Friends of the Koala, the approved welfare group for koala handling, when koalas are observed within or adjacent to the project corridor.

Koala population monitoring near Wardell

Sandpiper Ecological Surveys has been awarded the koala population monitoring program for project. The population monitoring will help us to measure the effectiveness of our mitigation measures, including the koala exclusion fencing, food tree plantings and connectivity structures. Koala monitoring is planned to continue throughout construction and well after the road opens to traffic. This will provide us with an understanding of whether the mitigation measures have had an impact on the projected population decline.

Next steps:

- Continue monitoring.

Predator control

Wild dogs, foxes and cats contribute to koala deaths. So far, nine have been trapped and removed over an area of 367 square kilometres as part of our predator control program. A soft claw trapping method is being used so any non-targeted animal can be released without harm. Baiting is not being used.

Next steps:

- Continue predator control on all our biodiversity offset properties and nearby private properties.

Koala zero harm induction training

Since the project started 5,329 workers have been trained to identify koala habitat, key threats, mitigation strategies and strict protocols to follow when a koala is spotted. There are on average 2400 workers on site each month and zero harm training is included in the induction of all project workers.

The above flow chart outlines the koala rescue procedure followed on site.

Koala rescue kits have been revised and improved following the October bush fire near the project.

A worker who spotted Azam the koala, see story overleaf, was a key part of our koala rescue procedure that helped ensure the koala's safety.

Next steps:

- Continue to induct new workers in the zero harm program.

Koala sightings

We continue to work with Friends of the Koala to share information about koala sightings in and out of the project boundary. From September to February, eight koalas were sighted in the project boundary. Due to obvious disease and health concerns Friends of the Koala captured three (1 released and 2 euthanased). Four moved on their own and the old bones of a koala were also found before construction started. Since construction started one koala was captured, rehabilitated and released.

Outside the project boundary a further 12 koalas were sighted. Four were deceased (road strike, dog attacked, two with disease), four captured and euthanased by a vet and four moved on their own.

Koala road safety

We have installed six vehicle activated and seven static koala safety signs in partnership with Ballina Shire Council and Friends of the Koala. See the back page for more information.

Next steps:

- Continue to monitor effectiveness of signs.

New initiatives

Vehicle activated safety signs

To improve driver awareness and reduce koala road strikes we have installed six vehicle activated signs and seven static koala signs on local and state roads that are hot spots for koala road strikes.

The vehicle activated signs are permanent and combine a static sign and radar activated LED sign that lights up when a vehicle is travelling faster than the speed limit. Each sign has flashing amber lights in the top corners of the sign and SLOW DOWN in white LED at the bottom. Using these types of signs ensures drivers do not miss the important message.

We have worked closely with the Environmental Protection Authority, Ballina Shire Council and Friends of the Koala to decide the sign locations. Ballina Council's Koala Plan of Management also includes road and traffic management measures targeting vehicle strike black spots and signage in key koala habitat areas.

We are committed to reducing koala road strikes, one of the key threats to the Ballina koala population identified in the Ballina Koala Plan.



Contact us – Woolgoolga to Ballina

 1800 778 900 (press 1)
 W2B@pacificcomplete.com.au
 www.rms.nsw.gov.au/w2b

 This document contains important information about road projects in your area. If you require the services of an interpreter, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask them to call the project team on 1800 778 900. The interpreter will then assist you with translation.

Casestudy: Saving Private Azam

As part of our pre-clearing ecological surveys and phased resource reduction koala surveys rigorous monitoring and assessments are carried out to ensure koalas are unharmed and get veterinary treatment if needed.

Azam, a four year old adult male koala, was found between bushfire affected habitat and an area to be cleared near the project boundary, just north of Old Bagotville Road. Project ecologists and Friends of the Koala worked together to visually assess Azam who was showing signs of stress and looked to be slightly malnourished.

Azam was carefully captured using a koala rescue kit and transported to Friends of the Koala Care Centre in Lismore where he was given a preliminary assessment and provided with fresh leaves. A veterinarian assessed him as generally healthy and after two weeks rest and food Azam was ready to be released. With agreement from Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council, he was released into suitable habitat within Ngunya Jargoona IPA with support from IPA rangers. Azam has been described as 'one chilled out dude' and is being monitored to ensure he settles into his new habitat.

A special acknowledgement goes to Maria Matthes, Maddie Collins, and Anthony Cook in the koala rescue process.



Azam after being released November 2017



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RMS 18.747

