

SYDNEY BASIN KOALA NETWORK

KOALAS IN SUTHERLAND

Dharawal Land

Fact sheet based on BIOLINK and EDO Reports

February 2023



Map of Koala Habitat and Long Standing Koala Populations in Sutherland

— LGA borders within the Sydney Basin

■ Preferred Koala Habitat

🦘 Long-standing koala populations (6 generations)

🦘 Long-standing koala population (3 generations)

✗ Loss of long-standing koala populations

This is a simplified representation of maps from *Biolink (2023) Sydney Basin Bioregion: Koala habitat and population assessment*. For scientifically rigorous maps see the full report (Biolink 2023). Historical records maps are also at the end of this fact sheet.

Koala Persistence

Sutherland Shire Council LGA supports a small koala population. Although there are 644 ha where koalas have persisted in the same places for at least 3 generations, it is of concern that there has been substantial loss of areas of persistence across the LGA since 2010. Some gains and losses of areas of persistence is to be expected in dynamic populations. However it is concerning in Sutherland that loss outweighs gain by 2 fold, indicating a **loss of long-standing, breeding koala populations**.

Where are the Koalas? Koalas have been sighted in Sutherland LGA from Barden Ridge to Loftus, Worona, Heathcote and Engadine and in the Heathcote and Royal National Parks

The Sutherland koalas are connected to the expanding koalas in Campbelltown, shown by genetic analysis.

Habitat

2,295 ha (6.5%) of the vegetation in Sutherland Shire is Preferred Koala Habitat. Mapped koala habitat is contiguous between Sutherland and Campbelltown LGAs.

Koalas in the Sydney Basin have large home ranges so they require more habitat to meet their nutritional needs than in other parts of NSW, as such, protection of this habitat is critical to their survival.

What is a Koala Generation and why is it important?

A generation time represents the average age of reproducing adults in a population. It is broadly accepted (including by the (IUCN) that koala generation time is 6 years.

Generation 1 in this report spans 2016 to 2021 and is the most recent koala generation looked at here. The occurrence of koala sightings in the same area over three consecutive generations tells us that the population is breeding, because koalas are existing here for longer than one koala lifespan. At the time of analysis 2022 sightings did not represent a full year of data so are recorded separately on the map (pg.3).

Loss of long-standing populations is when koalas were seen over three generations before 2003 (i.e. generations 4-6 (1986 - 2003) but were not seen consecutively in the most recent three generations (2004 -2021).



Threats

Koalas in Sutherland are vulnerable to the challenges of living near urban areas. Recorded vehicle strikes have increased from 1 to 4 to 20 over the last three koala generations respectively. This is a serious concern as it only takes a 3% loss of koalas per year to drive population decline (1).

While koalas in peri-urban areas are protected from the worst of bushfires, they are vulnerable to habitat loss and fragmentation by development and associated risks of vehicle strike and dog attack.

How the Law is Failing Koalas

Despite a history of koala occupancy, the presence of an Areas of Regional Koala Significance (ARKS) and Sutherland being flagged in the NSW Koala Strategy (2) as requiring Immediate Investment, Sutherland is not listed in the SEPP which means protections for koalas provided by the SEPP do not apply in the Sutherland LGA.

Sutherland Shire Council has formed a Sutherland Koala Steering Committee to provide strategic direction on koala conservation and intends to prepare a Koala Management Plan, however it would not be able to be finalised and enforced until Sutherland LGA is listed in the koala SEPP.

Although NSW has many laws and policies that aim to protect koalas and their habitat, they are not up to the job. Planning, environment and natural resource laws continue to enable koala habitat destruction:

- Offsets are overused and not ecologically robust: koala habitat continues to be destroyed through the use of offsets, which allow proponents to set aside other land or pay money into a fund in order to be able to destroy koala habitat.
- Safeguards are failing: Important legal safeguards aimed at safeguarding threatened species from high-impact development, are poorly implemented or underutilised.
- Decision-making is overly discretionary: For State Significant Projects, decision makers have significant discretion in assessing and determining proposals, meaning development can often trump koala habitat protection in NSW.
- The NSW Koala Strategy has no legal weight and is not legally enforceable. It does not address the major threat of habitat fragmentation, modification and loss by development.

Key Recommendations

State Level: NSW legislation and policy has continued to allow the decline of koalas, but there is an opportunity to create immediate impact and halt the decline of koala populations across the state by:

1. Ensuring laws apply to all koala habitat by adopting consistent, comprehensive mapping across NSW as a matter of urgency, to identify key areas for conservation.
 - Once under the SEPP Sutherland Shire Council can develop a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM).
2. Reform state laws to deliver certain protection and strong safeguards for koalas in all environmental, planning and land clearing legislation.

State Government to adopt the five-point plan in the Total Environment Centre's Sydney Basin Koala Policy (3) to halt the trajectory for koalas from endangered to extinct.

- Translocation of Koalas in the Sutherland LGA is not an alternative to allow habitat clearing.

February 2023 fact sheet prepared from:

Biolink. (2023). Sydney Basin Bioregion: Koala habitat and population assessment. Report for Total Environment Centre by Biolink Ecological Consultants.

EDO Report - Protecting koalas in the Sydney Basin Bioregion - February 2023.

Full reports can be viewed at https://www.sydneymbasinkoalanetwork.org.au/policy_and_research

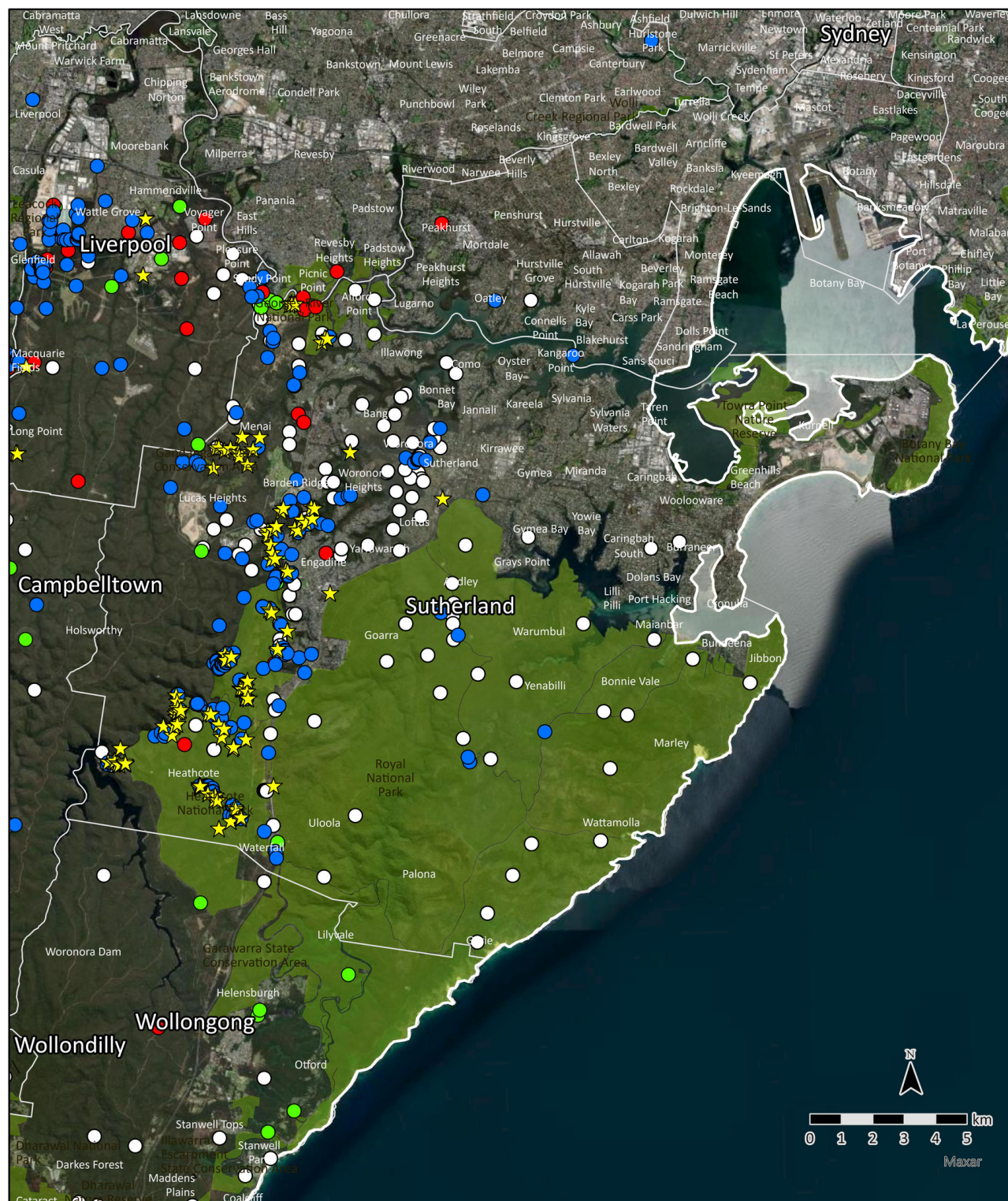
Additional References.

(1) Phillips S., Hopkins M. and Callaghan J (2007) Conserving koalas in the Coomera-Pimpama Koala Habitat Area –a view to the future. Report to Gold Coast City Council. Biolink Ecological Consultants, Uki, NSW.

(2) NSW Koala Strategy

(3) Total Environment Centre's Sydney Basin Koala Policy

Sutherland Historical Koala Records



biolink
Ecological Consultants

Projection	GDA2020 zone 55
Date	31 January 2023
Imagery	ESRI World Imagery 2021

This map remains the property of Biolink Ecological Consultants Pty Ltd and should not be reproduced without permission. Cartographic detail may not be accurate when used for survey purposes.

Sydney Basin Koala Network

Legend
Koala records

- ★ 2022
- Generation 1 (2016-2021)
- Generation 2 (2010-2015)
- Generation 3 (2004-2009)
- pre 2004

- National Parks
- State Forests
- Local Government Areas
- Sydney Basin bioregion



Each dot represents a recorded koala sighting. The colours indicate when the record was made, with starts and blue dots representing the most recent sightings.

February 2023 fact sheet prepared from:
Biolink. (2023). Sydney Basin Bioregion: Koala habitat and population assessment. Report for Total Environment Centre by Biolink Ecological Consultants.
EDO Report - Protecting koalas in the Sydney Basin Bioregion - February 2023.
Full reports can be viewed at https://www.sydneybasinkoalanetwork.org.au/policy_and_research