

SYDNEY BASIN KOALA NETWORK

KOALAS IN HAWKESBURY - UPDATE

Dharug and Darkinung Lands



Update based on [Progress Report](#) by SBKN, EDO, Biolink and TEC. March 2024

Koalas are classified as endangered in NSW. Our report does not indicate that the situation will change and is indeed likely to get worse.

Koalas in Hawkesbury

The geographic range and areas of koala persistence have remained relatively stable between 2021 and 2023 with slight increase in the area occupied by koalas across the LGA. (1). This suggests **the Koala population is currently stable in Hawkesbury**. However with less than one koala generation (6 years) since the black summer fires, it is likely we are not seeing the full extent of the effects yet.



Future in Jeopardy

This positive news of stability in the Hawkesbury Koala population is foreshadowed by **lack of protection on private land, continued indiscriminate clearing under the RBCC (see case study), cumulative impacts of development and loss to vehicle strikes**. Their future is uncertain.

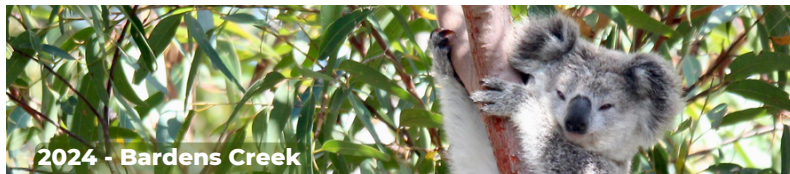
The community reported several koala vehicle strikes on Bells Line of Road in the last 12 months. This vehicle hotspot indicates the koala population is not coping with existing development and traffic volume in this area (2), which is a concern for this stable population. **Lack of habitat protection and continued pressure of habitat loss and vehicle strike could push them into decline (3) unless urgent action is taken.**

Local Advocacy

Thank you to local collaborators for their advocacy:

- [Hawkesbury Environment Network](#)
- [Blue Mountains Conservation Society](#)
- [Valley for Wildlife, MacDonald Valley Association](#)
- [Hills-Hornsby Rural Koala Project](#)
- [Lithgow Environment Group](#)
- [Science for Wildlife](#)

If your group would like to join the Network, please contact us: info@sydneybasinkoalanetwork.org.au



Rural Boundary Clearing Code places Hawkesbury's koalas at risk

The Rural Boundary Clearing Code (RBCC) (4), was introduced by the NSW Government following the Black Summer bushfires, permitting rural landholders to clear 25m of bushland along their property borders. The RBCC was not recommended in the bushfire inquiry (5), with no evidence it reduces fire risk, but does have a significant impact on biodiversity. The clearing of koala habitat by the RBCC is only prevented in LGAs with a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM) in place. Hawkesbury does not have a CKPoM in place, leaving Koala habitat vulnerable.

Hawkesbury Council is the only peri-urban council to 'opt-in' to the RBCC and the community has since raised concerns of its misuse for urban planning and fragmentation of core koala habitat. In May 2023, a motion by Hawkesbury Councillors to opt-out of the RBCC was narrowly defeated. After community outrage, Hawkesbury Council committed to undertake Koala Habitat mapping, with the eventual (but as yet unfunded) aim of implementing a CKPoM. Meanwhile, habitat loss via the RBCC continues.

This case underscores the risks posed to koalas due to voluntary mapping and implementation of CKPoMs by councils. Immediate action is necessary at a State level, including scrapping the RBCC and funding councils with koalas to rapidly implement CKPoMs.

Koalas Need Connected Habitat

Koalas must move to access resources and find new mates. **Habitat loss and fragmentation pose the greatest threat to their survival and will continue unless protection and connectivity are made a priority.**

Lack of protections in Hawkesbury means developments are assessed individually leaving koala habitat vulnerable to cumulative impacts. **Implementing a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM) can protect against cumulative impacts and safeguard habitat connectivity** at the landscape level, essential for koalas to recover and get off the endangered list.

Legal Reform Needed

- 1** Support the development of a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for Hawkesbury LGA.
- 2** Reverse the decision to 'opt-in' to the Rural Boundary Clearing Code.
- 3** Reform state laws to deliver certain protection and strong safeguards for koalas in all environmental, planning, forestry and land clearing legislation (1).

Legend

Year

- 2023 (67)
- 2022 (70)
- 2021 (60)
- pre2021 (717)

EoO (2005-2022)

EoO (2024-2021)

Local Government Area

Scale: 0 2 4 6 8 10 km

Inset Map: Sydney region highlighted in New South Wales.

Map Labels: Putty, Laguna, Bucketty, Melfong, Perry's Crossing, St Aldans, Wisemans Ferry, Greengrove, Wheeny Creek, Upper Colo, Colo Heights, Bilpin, Kurrajong Heights, Freemans Reach, Wilberforce, Richmond Lowlands, Pitt Town, Windsor, Yarrawundi, Bligh Park, Winmalee, Riverstone, Rouse Hill, Kenthurst, Hornsby, The Ponds, Parkleaood, Cherrybrook, Cranebrook, Jordan Springs, Lawson, Faulconbridge.

Project Imagery: GDA2020 zone 56, Esri World Imagery 2022

Disclaimer: 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.

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References

- (1) SBKN, EDO, Biolink and TEC, 2024: [State of Koalas in the Sydney Basin. First Annual Assessment](#), March 2024.
- (2) C. E. Dexter, J. Scott, A. R. F. Blacker, R. G. Appleby, D. H. Kerlin, D. N. Jones (2023) [Koalas in space and time](#): Lessons from 20 years of vehicle-strike trends and hot spots in South East Queensland
- (3) Biolink, 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
- (4) [Rural Boundary Clearing Code for NSW](#), 26 August 2021
- (5) [Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry](#), 31 July 2020