

# SYDNEY BASIN KOALA NETWORK

## KOALAS IN SUTHERLAND - UPDATE

### Dharawal Land



Fact sheet based on SBKN, Biolink, EDO and TEC reports [2023](#), [2024](#) and [2025](#).

### Koalas in Sutherland

Sutherland Shire local council area (LGA) supports koalas, including areas where **koalas have been found for at least 3 generations (18 years)<sup>1</sup>. This persistence over generations tells us koalas are breeding in Sutherland.**

Koalas have been sighted from Barden Ridge to Loftus, Worona, Heathcote and Engadine and in the Heathcote and Royal National Parks. Areas of long standing breeding koalas are concentrated in the north west of the LGA.

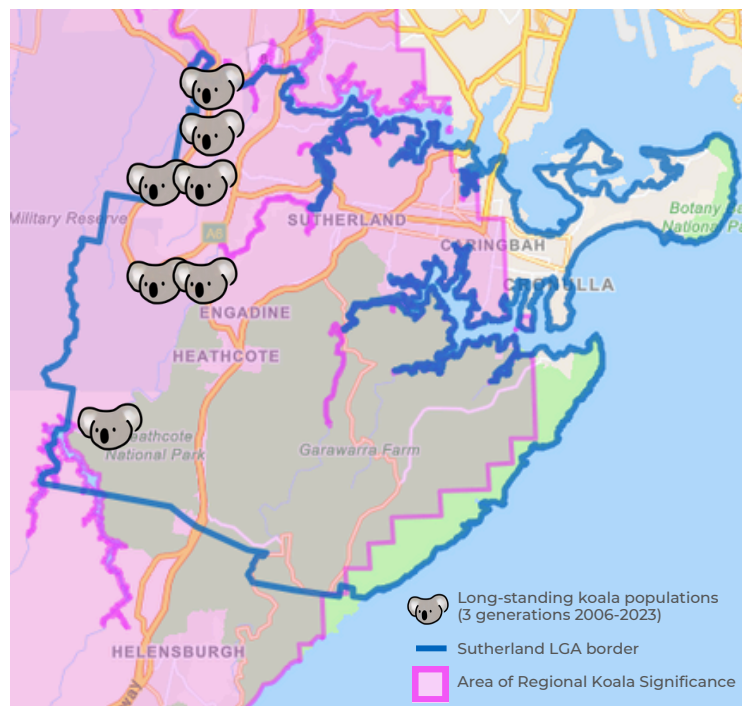
Between 2021 - 2023 there was no significant change in the area where koalas are found in Sutherland Shire<sup>2</sup>. **This indicates that the Sutherland koala population is currently stable.**

2,295 ha (6.5%) of the vegetation in Sutherland Shire is Preferred Koala Habitat<sup>1</sup>. Mapped koala habitat is contiguous between Sutherland and Campbelltown LGAs. The Sutherland koalas are connected to the expanding koalas in Campbelltown, shown by genetic analysis.

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 their habitat is critical to koala survival.**

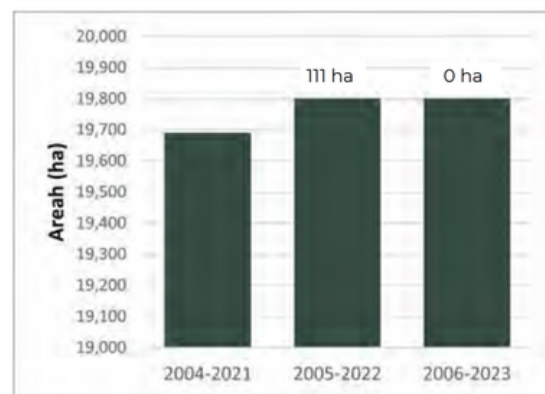


Mother and Joey at Bardens Creek in 2023 by Mel Clarke

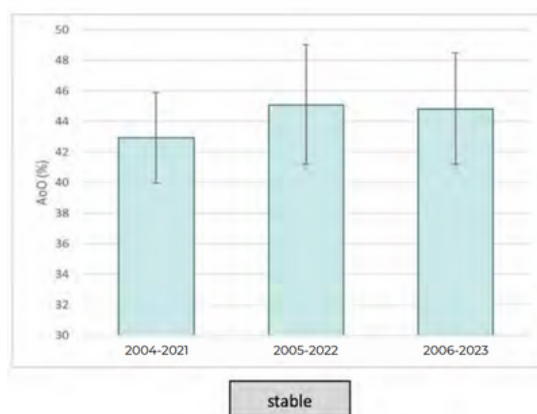


This is a simplified version of maps from Biolink (2023) and (2024).

### Extent of Occurrence - Sutherland



### Area of Occupancy - Sutherland



There is a tiny increase of 0.56% in the Geographic Range of koalas (top) and no significant change in the area where koalas are found (bottom) in Sutherland when comparing the time frames 2004-2021 to 2006-2023. Indicating the population is currently stable. From *Biolink* (2024)

## Koalas Need Connected Habitat

Koalas need to move to access resources and find new mates - This is especially urgent in Sutherland, where genetic diversity is very low<sup>3</sup>.

**Connected habitat and unimpeded movement across roads, is key for resilient koala populations and essential for koala survival.** Currently, habitat loss and fragmentation pose the greatest threat to koalas.

Roads and development will continue to fragment habitat unless measures are put in place to prevent further fragmentation and restore lost connectivity. **Habitat must be properly mapped and protected, with connectivity and safe road crossings made a priority.**



Mother and Joey (Bobby and Austin) on a proposed development site in Lucas Heights. Photo by Mel Clarke

### Case Study - Council Action: Sutherland CKPoM

Sutherland Shire Council is pushing forward with a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM), despite the state government failing to add Sutherland Shire to the Koala SEPP.

Council is taking proactive steps by undertaking vegetation mapping and developing a CKPoM under alternative legislation. This demonstrates that local councils can advance koala protections even as the state government lags behind.

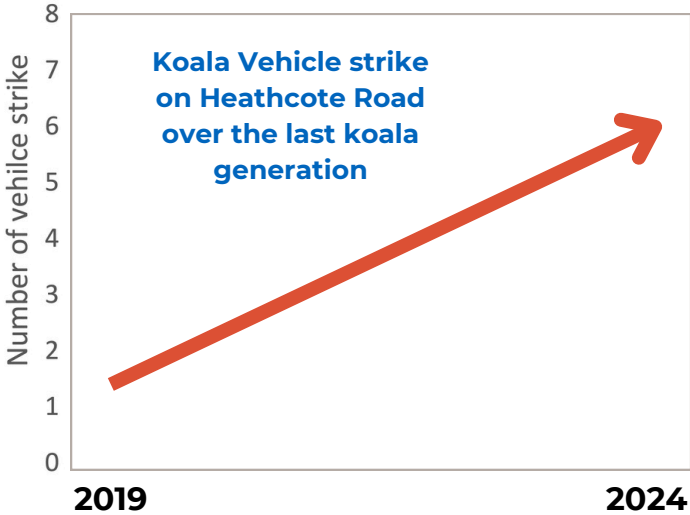
While the absence of a SEPP means the plan won't function exactly as a CKPoM, the council's commitment is a significant step forward for Sutherland's koalas and this groundwork will allow for a much smoother transition to a fully recognised CKPoM once the state government addresses the SEPP.

## Vehicle Strike Snapshot

30% of Sutherland's Koalas have been impacted by vehicle strike since 2019

Vehicle Strikes are increasing along Heathcote Road

Proposed measures at Deadmans Creek are sub-standard



### Threats to Koalas

Koalas in Sutherland are vulnerable to the challenges of living near urban areas including **habitat loss and fragmentation** by development and roads and associated risks of **vehicle strike** and dog attack.

Recorded vehicle strikes have been increasing over the last three koala generations., with **41 strikes recorded in the most recent koala generation (2019-2024)<sup>4</sup>**. This vehicle strike rate is unsustainable and threatens the persistence of local populations.

**Koala deaths continue to rise on Heathcote Road**, despite being in a priority area for the NSW Koala Strategy and claims that threat management is “on track”<sup>5</sup>.

**The proposed solutions at Deadmans Creek are demonstrably sub-standard**, including fences which do not support the exclusion principal, underpasses which are too small and a lack of effective monitoring.



Koala at Sandy Point, 2024. Photo by Mel Clarke





SBKN Citizen Science Training Day in Heathcote

## How the Law is Failing Koalas

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:**

- Sutherland Shire is **not listed in the Koala SEPP** (however, the local Council is proceeding with a Koala Plan of Management - see case study)
- **Offsets are overused and not ecologically robust:** offsets allow proponents to set aside existing habitat or pay money into a fund in exchange for destroying koala habitat.
- **Safeguards are failing:** Important legal safeguards aimed at protecting threatened species from high-impact development, are poorly implemented or under-utilised.
- **Decision-making is overly discretionary:** Decision makers have significant discretion for State Significant Projects, meaning development can 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.

**Koalas are classified as endangered in NSW. Our reports do not indicate that the situation will change and is indeed likely to get worse unless serious action is taken.**

**Read the full report here**



## Legal Reform Needed

Legislation and policy has continued to allow the decline of koalas, but there is an opportunity for local state and federal governments to create immediate impact and halt the decline of koala populations.

**Local Level:** Finalise the Sutherland Shire Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM) including corridor mapping.

**State Level:** Insert Sutherland Shire Council into the Koala SEPP so that the CKPoM is recognised in full

**State Level:** Ensure laws apply to all koala habitat by adopting consistent, comprehensive mapping across NSW as a matter of urgency, to identify key areas for conservation.

**State Level:** Reform state laws to deliver certain protection and strong safeguards for koalas in all environmental, planning and land clearing legislation.

**Federal Level:** Urgently reform the EPBC Act to strengthen laws to protect Koalas.

## Community Action for a Positive Future

The stability of the Sutherland koala population is threatened by urban sprawl, road strikes, and other pressures. However, **with priority action to address these threats, Sutherland's koalas could expand and thrive.**

You can **get involved by joining a local community group, advocating to government and reporting koalas (including roadkill)** that you see on I Spy Koala app.

**If you see injured or sick wildlife please call WIRES 1300 094 737**

## Local Advocacy

Thank you to local collaborators for their advocacy:

- [Sutherland Shire Environment Centre](#)
- [Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society](#)

If your group would like to join the Network, please contact us:

[info@sydneybasinkoalanetwork.org.au](mailto:info@sydneybasinkoalanetwork.org.au)

# Distribution of Koalas in Sutherland



## References

- 1 Biolink, 2023: [Sydney Basin Bioregion: Koala habitat and population assessment](#)
- 2 SBKN, EDO, Biolink and TEC, 2024: [State of Koalas in the Sydney Basin. First Annual Assessment](#)
- 3 McLennan et al., 2025 [Low genetic diversity and high inbreeding in one of the last chlamydia-free strongholds for New South Wales koalas](#)
- 4 Biolink, 2025: [Vehicle Strike and Koala Populations in the Sydney Basin Bioregion](#)
- 5 NSW Saving Our Species, 2022: [Koala: 2021-2022 annual report card](#).