



Submission to Sutherland Shire Council: Draft Koala Management Plan 2026–2031

To Sutherland Shire Council,

The Sydney Basin Koala Network (SBKN) is a project of Total Environment Centre and works closely with community groups across the Sydney Basin Bioregion, including in the Sutherland Shire, who are deeply concerned about the impacts to Koalas from development such as urban and industrial sprawl.

We welcome the Draft Koala Management Plan 2026–2031 and commend Council's effort to protect koalas, retain habitat, and improve connectivity across the Shire. We also support the recognised need for practical management of vehicle strike, fragmentation, and development pressure.

As the Sutherland is not listed in the Koala SEPP 2021 it faces a critical local planning gap with mapped habitat and corridors lacking automatic state-level protections available to neighbouring LGAs. Council currently relies on discretionary Greenweb mapping, which is not enough to prevent incremental fragmentation.

To fill this gap, Council must create a formal Koala Habitat/Corridor Overlay in the LEP/DCP requiring mandatory habitat assessment for any development within 100m of mapped habitat or corridors. This would give mapped areas enforceable status rather than advisory status.

The Plan should explicitly adopt the NSW Chief Scientist's advice on koala corridor widths (OSCE, 2020). Corridors should generally be planned to achieve an average minimum width of 390–425 metres, with at least 30 metres of buffer on either side where fencing or other interface infrastructure is present. Where existing development, roads, or other constraints prevent that standard being met, Council should require widening, restoration, or alternative connectivity measures so that corridor function is maintained rather than allowing incursions into optimal widths.

Council should further recognise that Sutherland's koala habitat is part of a wider Sydney Basin network, not an isolated local population. The Shire functions as a connector between surrounding habitat areas, and the draft plan would be stronger if it more explicitly committed to cross-boundary coordination with neighbouring councils, TfNSW, and NSW agencies to protect regional movement pathways, especially given the Sutherland Shire's unique ability to provide stronger connections and growth into the Royal National Park where a large amount of koala habitat is present but without an established population due to barrier constraints from transport routes. Our Koala corridor map shows potential Koala corridors at Loftus and Heathcote which link the Royal NP with bushland to the west and northwest of the transport corridor which could be established if overpasses were built over the Princes Motorway and Illawarra Railway.



Sutherland Shire's key regional koala habitat connections include:

- **North/West: Heathcote National Park → Royal National Park** (critical east-west linkage via Heathcote Road/Princes Hwy corridor)
- **Northwest: Campbelltown** koala population via **Woronora Valley** and regional movement pathways
- **West/Northwest: Liverpool** populations through **Menai/Barden Ridge** connectivity zones
- **South: Wollondilly** via **Waterfall** and southern bushland interfaces.

We also recommend the following additional actions and strengthened commitments:

Backyard guidelines for ALL residences near Koala habitat: The plan should include specific community guidance on providing escape routes for koalas from backyard fences and swimming pools. While the draft addresses new development applications, it lacks guidelines for the vast majority of existing residential properties near koala habitat. Koalas frequently drown in pools and become trapped by fences during dispersal, particularly during heatwaves and the breeding season. Council should develop and distribute simple retrofit guides (escape poles, one-way gates, pool covers) and include these as enforceable conditions for properties abutting mapped habitat or corridors.

Adopt Cultural Cool Burns for Bushfire Management: Given the increasing impact of bushfires and the track record with backburning reaching canopies in the Sutherland Shire, the strategy should explicitly recommend cultural cool burn techniques to maintain habitat quality and reduce catastrophic fire risk. While discussed, this is not a clear action commitment. First Nations-led cool burns provide ecological benefits for eucalypt regeneration and understorey management that benefit koala food trees and movement corridors. The RFS should adopt this as standard protocol where endangered species are present.

First Nations perspectives: The plan should also strengthen inclusion of First Nations knowledge and Connecting with Country perspectives in general to add important ecological and cultural depth to the plan's implementation.

Support for wildlife carers: The draft recognises 40 vehicle strikes (2020-25) as a major threat but lacks support for local wildlife carers. Council should work with wildlife rescue groups to provide areas for browse collection and dedicated care facilities in areas appropriate for soft-release.

A stronger implementation focus in the final plan. Council should identify priority corridor and road-crossing sites, set timeframes and responsibilities for delivery, and commit to measurable targets for habitat retained, habitat restored, crossings upgraded, and community stewardship sites established. This would make the plan more transparent, accountable, and effective.



Offsets must be a genuine last resort and only used locally within the LGA to strengthen connectivity. Council should make clear that compensatory planting or offsets are a last resort only, and only where they can demonstrably improve local koala connectivity and habitat quality. The priority should be to protect existing habitat first, restore degraded links second, and use offsets only where they do not undermine the integrity of the corridor network. If offsets lead to a net-loss of habitat in the Sutherland Shire, the project should not proceed.

The Sydney Basin Koala Network's existing work in the Sutherland Shire may provide valuable supporting evidence and tools:

- **Vehicle Strike Analysis for Sutherland Shire** (pages 44–46):
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/sydneykoalanetwork/pages/29/attachments/original/1751267200/SBKN_2025_Progress_Report_updated.pdf?1751267200
- **Sutherland Shire Koala Corridor Fact Sheet:**
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/sydneykoalanetwork/pages/519/attachments/original/1764664152/Sutherland_Shire_Koala_Corridors.pdf?1764664152
- **Interactive Koala Corridor Map** (with address search and koala sightings layer):
https://www.sydneybasinkoalanetwork.org.au/greater_sydney_corridor_mapping

In conclusion, the final plan should require the following planning controls:

- A formal koala habitat and corridor overlay in Council planning instruments.
- Koala habitat assessment for development proposals within or near mapped habitat or corridors with habitat retention prioritised.
- Koala-sensitive road and fence design, including fauna passage, exclusion fencing and safe crossing measures at known and identified hotspots.
- Enforceable controls on existing backyards backing onto koala habitat.
- Long-term monitoring and maintenance for any approved restoration or road mitigation.
- Public reporting on corridor protection, habitat restoration, and koala road mortality.

Sutherland Shire has an opportunity to lead on koala conservation by moving from mapping alone to strong, enforceable corridor protection and community-wide action. A final plan that combines local habitat protection, corridor width standards, road mitigation, comprehensive backyard safety measures, cultural burning, and support for wildlife care will give koalas the best chance of persistence and recovery in the Shire. Ensuring that Sutherland Shire maintains and improves regional connectivity in South West Sydney, especially by providing better access to the Royal National Park, will ensure Sydney's Koalas persist for future generations.

Yours sincerely,
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References:

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NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer 2020, *Advice on the Protection of the Campbelltown Koala Population*, Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer, Sydney.

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Sydney Basin Koala Network 2025a, *Greater Sydney Habitat Corridor Report*, Sydney Basin Koala Network, Sydney.

Sydney Basin Koala Network 2025b, *SBKN 2025 Annual Progress Report*, Sydney Basin Koala Network, Sydney, pp. 44-46.

Sydney Basin Koala Network 2025c, *Sutherland Shire Koala Corridor Fact Sheet*, Sydney Basin Koala Network, Sydney.

Sydney Basin Koala Network 2026, *Greater Sydney Interactive Koala Corridor Map*.

Sutherland Shire Council 2024, *NSW Koala Strategy Submission*, Sutherland Shire Council, viewed via NSW DPE submissions portal.