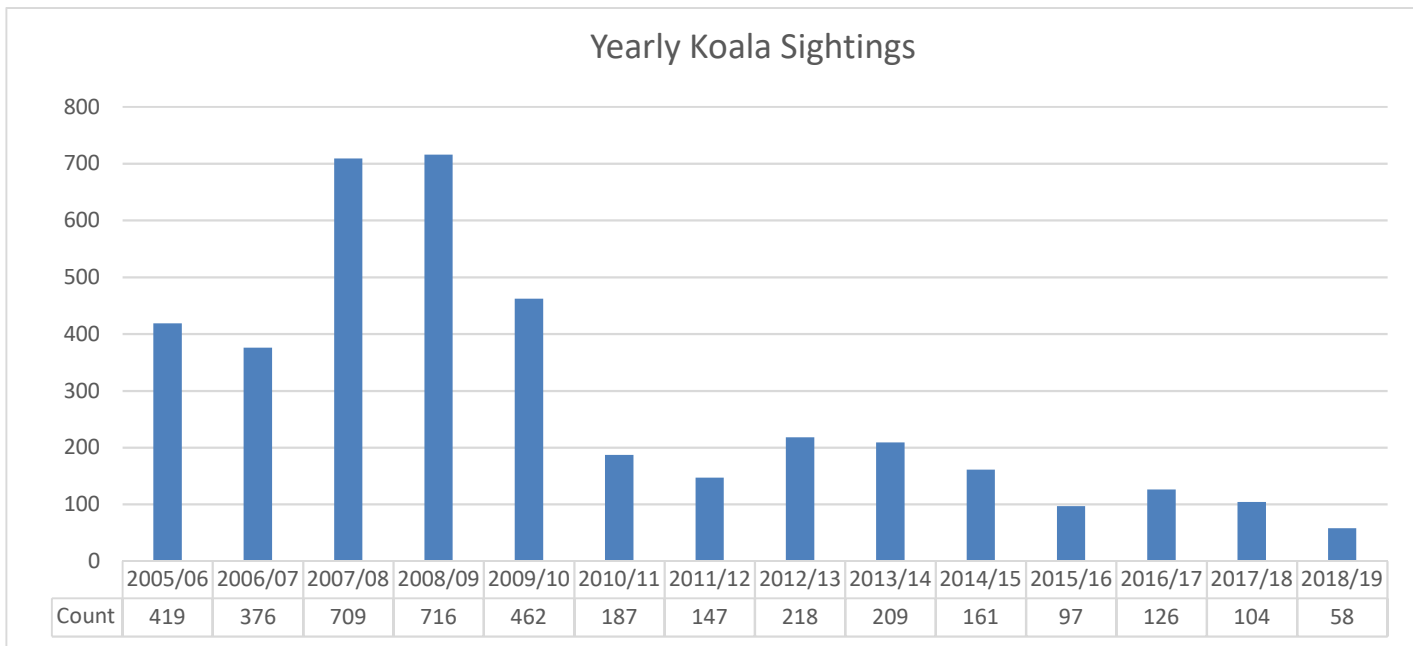


Annual Koala Report - May 2019

Myall Koala & Environment Group



We are at a Crossroads

This is one of the most difficult Koala Reports we have had to write in our fifteen years as Koala Coordinators. For a number of years now we have recorded lower numbers of koala sightings in Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens reported to us. Up until now we have been hoping that this was just natural fluctuations. However, as the trend has continued, we have to accept the reality that koala activity in the townships has dropped significantly over time.

We think there are a myriad of reasons for this. Some years back we had a lady who walked the streets of Hawks Nest every day reporting large numbers of koala sightings – she no longer does this. In 2014, the Rural Fire Service introduced the 10-50 Rule which permitted the removal of trees within 10 metres of any house without any approvals – we estimate 15-20% of trees were removed in Hawks Nest, particularly a number of important koala “home” trees, until the rule was modified to make it less all-encompassing. The number of sightings on our Koala Hotline (4997 0878) have dropped dramatically – perhaps fewer people are aware of the phone number or many younger people prefer to snap photos on their phones and post them to friends on social media instead. There have, of course, been some new buildings erected necessitating the removal of trees. There has been some land clearing in North Hawks Nest impacting the movement corridor between the township and the national park. There continue to be large scale developments in Tea Gardens reducing the number of wildlife corridors in and out of the town. These include intensive housing in Palm Lake Resort and removal of hundreds of Swamp Mahoganies to create an “Asset Protection Zone”, additional housing construction in the Grange, earthworks related to Riverside at Tea Gardens and the soon to commence North Shearwater development.

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Is there anything that can be done to reverse this trend? The Koala Group can continue to fight for the protection of existing habitat and corridors and rehabilitate where possible. Although sightings data helps understand koala existence, we don't really know how many koalas there are on the Myall Coast – we can continue to press for further investigations into our koala population.

However, we believe that now is the time for a complete rethink on what the Koala Group wants to achieve and how it can be done. Should we continue to try to save koala habitat in the urban areas or should we focus on large scale habitat projects and wildlife corridors creation and preservation? Can we do this with our current membership or should we seek new (and younger) members? Should we get the local community involved? Can we do this on our own or do we need to get more powerful organisations involved such as Council, Office of Environment and Heritage and the Australian Koala Foundation? Would more money help and if so, how do we get it?

We would like to propose that in this our 30th year, we embark on a new era developing a whole new strategy for koala preservation on the Myall Coast.

Koala Sightings

PLEASE everyone, we still want to receive your koala sighting reports on our Hotline answering machine at 4997 0878.

Gail & Ian Morphett (4997 1550)