MKEG statement on Statewide Land and Tree Study

There is no doubt that there is wildlife decline on the Myall Coast and that this is due to destruction of habitat.  That is particularly true for koalas.

In 1999, the NSW Scientific Committee declared the Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens koala population “endangered”, only one of two in NSW (the other was Pittwater).  At that time the population was estimated to be about 10 animals. A Koala Recovery Plan was established in 2003 and over the next 10 years the Koala Group estimates that the population increased to about 22.

Sadly, the population has declined from that point.  There has not been a koala seen in Tea Gardens or Winda Woppa in eight years and there have only been a few sightings in Hawks Nest in the past year.  The decline is entirely due to habitat loss.  In the past 10-15 years, Tea Gardens has seen significant developments in Myall Quays, the Grange, Palm Lake Resort and Shearwater.  Then in 2016, the Rural Fire Service introduced the 10/50 Code which allowed property owners to remove any tree within 10 metres of any building in a “bushfire zone” without getting any approvals.  Initially, all of Hawks Nest was defined “bushfire zone” which resulted in unscrupulous tree cutters coming to town and about 20% of the trees were removed, many of them koala food or “home” trees.  Eventually the defined areas were reduced but by then, the damage had been done.

A related factor in the decline of the Myall Coast koala population is the fact that koalas need wildlife corridors to migrate for genetic diversity between urban areas and larger bushland, such as the National Park. Fame Cove and Monkey Jacket. The corridors to these areas are constantly under threat of development in localities such as North Hawks Nest, North Shearwater and Bundabah/Pindimar.

Unless the State Government dramatically changes rules on land clearing, particularly relating to retaining and enhancing wildlife corridors, koalas and other migratory animals will have no hope of recovery by 2050.

 Ian Morphett

Secretary Myall Koala and Environment Group

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