**All Things Must Come to an End Some Time**

This will be our last Koala Report. Gail and I joined MKEG three months after we retired to Hawks Nest in December 2002. We attended our first meeting in February 2003 and, because the Secretary at the time no longer wanted the job, I put my hand up and have been Secretary ever since. Together, Gail and I took on the role of Koala Rescuers in 2004 after being trained by Jean Shaw, the famous “Koala Lady”. We continued rescuing duties until 2016 when we passed the batten on to Glen and Lynda Stevenson. I have outlasted three wonderful Koala Group Presidents in Kevin Haskew, Helen Dauncey, Jill Madden and we now have Richard Streamer.

After 20 years it is more than time that someone new take on the key role of Secretary in this wonderful environment group when it needs it most. Someone younger who has similar energy, enthusiasm and ideas that I came with back in 2003.

The koala population on the Myall Coast, which was officially declared “endangered” in 1999, is now at an absolutely critical stage. There has not been a reported koala sighting in Hawks Nest since December 2021 and only one in Tea Gardens in the last year. There have been a few sightings in Pindimar and Bundabah recently and a couple in the Myall Lakes National Park. MidCoast Council are soon going to conduct some surveys in the Pindimar area using scat sniffing dogs. Hopefully this survey will confirm the sightings and find even more Koalas in the area.

Our oldest known Koala, Princess, is still in care at Port Stephens Koala Hospital where she will live out her life. We get frequent videos of Princess and she is certainly enjoying her life there despite being almost blind and unable to climb trees.

It will take a major change in strategy and enormous effort if our local koala population is to ever recover.

I still plan to be involved in the Koala Group but in a less frontline role.

**MidCoast Regional Koala Partnership (MRP)**

Midcoast Council has recently entered into a four-year partnership with the State Government as part of the NSW Koala Strategy which aims to double the koala population by 2050 which the NSW Government has committed over $193 million in funding to meet this goal. As part of this partnership, Council is establishing the MidCoast Koala Reference Group. The Reference Group will consist of representatives from Council, various State Government Departments, representatives from farmers, traditional owners, koala carers, environment groups, rural landholders, and planning or development industries. The MRP has already employed Caitlin Orr as Koala Project Manager. I have nominated to be a member of the Reference Group and, although my nomination has not yet been confirmed, Council has indicated it is being favourably considered.

The MRP is intended to include:

* Management and linkage of koala habitat and corridors
* Elimination, reduction or management of priority threats to koalas
* Community empowerment, education and engagement
* Partnering with landholders to protect and restore koala habitat on private land
* Research to fill applied knowledge gaps, including – population dynamics, disease, genetic fitness and threat severity and management
* Vehicle strike mitigation

**Ryan Witt presentation**

Last September, Newcastle Uni scientist Dr Ryan Witt and his assistant, PhD-student Shelby Ryan, presented their interim findings from their recent drone surveys carried in the Myall Coast region.

After publicity in the Myall Coast Nota, facebook and email, the presentation was very well attended. There were about 50 people in the Silver Dolphin Room at the TG Pub with ultimately standing room only at the back.

Their research has been on optimising the use of drones to locate and identify wildlife, particularly koalas. They use a drone with specialist thermal sensors, very hi-res camera and spotlight. The camera and spotlight are on a gimbal enabling zooming in on specific targets. They use thermal sensors on the drone to identify animals in the tree canopy and then zoom in to confirm if it is a koala and then record video.

They showed video when they switched on the spotlight and zoomed the camera in on the “hot spot”. We could actually see the koala moving and they even zoomed in on the animal’s nose.

The nearest koalas spotted to us were at Brambles Green (a mother and baby). When they zoomed in on the Brambles Green koala, it could be clearly seen that there were two koalas (mum and juvenile)

They also showed a video of a thermal image of a dingo prowling through the bush (near Big Gibber). They flew the drone to follow the dingo’s path for quite some time.

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