



NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure
Major Project Assessment
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

email: Plan_comment@planning.nsw.gov.au

Proposed Pacific Highway Upgrade Woolgoolga to Ballina Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) - Objection

Attention: Michael Young

Dear Sir

Friends of the Koala welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Proposed Pacific Highway Upgrade Woolgoolga to Ballina EIS

Friends of the Koala is the lead koala conservation group in the Northern Rivers, representing the views of 370 members and countless supporters throughout the region. We are licensed by the Office of Environment and Heritage to rescue, rehabilitate and release koalas in five local government areas traversed by the Pacific Highway, Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Richmond Valley and the very northern part of Clarence Valley. Our mission, which we have pursued for some 27 years is *conserving koalas, particularly in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales, in recognition of the contribution the species makes to Australia's biodiversity.*

Our group has had a long-standing concern for the impact of the Pacific Highway upgrade on the Region's koala populations. Koalas are present in low density in the southern part of our licensed area however it is the Broadwater to Coolgardie sections (9,10,11) which are of particular concern to us in this project.

The Lower Richmond Valley supports an acknowledged important, high-density, and relatively healthy resident population of koalas between the Richmond River, the Blackwall Range, the southern slopes of the Alstonville Plateau and Lismore.

The fragility of the nation's koala population is a matter of documented fact. Only last year the combined populations of Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory were listed *vulnerable* under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* 1999. We note that the entire Woolgoolga to Ballina project is a controlled action under the Act.

The proposed route between Broadwater and Coolgardie is at least 2.5kms longer than the existing Pacific Highway. It will, if constructed, destroy, fragment and isolate the largest and most significant areas of native vegetation in the Lower Richmond Valley thereby generating significant adverse impacts on the koalas by:

Koala Rescue and Information
6622 1233

PO Box 5034
East Lismore NSW 2480
info@friendsofthekoala.org
www.friendsofthekoala.org

*Volunteers working for koala conservation on the Northern Rivers.
Friends of the Koala services the local government areas of Ballina, Byron, Kyogle,
Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed.*

**The Nature Conservation Council of NSW's 2012 Outstanding Environment Group
Lismore City Council's 2013 Sustainable Environment Award Winner**

- Clearing primary habitat with a high-density koala population;
- Fragmenting areas of connected habitat and isolating viable breeding koala populations;
- Degrading primary koala habitat through increased weed invasion and contributing to increases in populations of foxes and other vertebrate predators and pests; and
- Degrading habitat through extensive landform and hydrological modification.

In addition the project's considerable construction phase can be expected to account for incidental koala injuries and mortalities which will directly affect the stability of local sub-populations.

While the EIS identifies to some extent the significance of the koala population and the dire impacts that the proposed upgrade will have, far more work needs to be done.

In particular the assessment and consideration of known koala populations has not taken into account current work such as the koala habitat study commissioned by Ballina Shire Council. This study will inform preparation of a shire-wide Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management. Its results, particularly in the south where the upgrade is proposed must demand considered attention. Landholders who report long-term koala occupation on their properties also need to be consulted.

We have long argued that conservation of the Lower Richmond Valley koalas is dependent on the Pacific Highway upgrade being based on the existing route between Broadwater and Coolgardie.

We stand by this view and totally reject the route under consideration.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and for your consideration of our concerns.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Vass
President
18 February 2013

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