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Submission: Koala Habitat at Heatherbrae and Raymond Terrace impacted by the M1 extension to Raymond Terrace

This submission makes specific suggestions for additional measures to support the local Koala population.

Modelling used by the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) states that the extension on the proposed route would involve the loss of 56.3 hectares of koala habitat at Heatherbrae. The DoE (2013a) koala assessment tool determined that the M1 construction footprint would remove *“habitat critical to the survival of the koala”* in the Heatherbrae area (EIS Chapter 9, p.57).

While we would prefer to see no loss of habitat, we accept that some loss is inevitable from this important and long-awaited infrastructure project. However, everything possible should be done to minimise the adverse impact on the local koala population.

To compensate, it is proposed to use biodiversity offsets but these are all in areas many kilometres away from the subject site, or in the case of two parcels of land acquired by Transport for NSW are in unspecified locations. The locations of the land acquired by Transport for NSW should be disclosed and its biodiversity value stated, however, this approach is unacceptable in any case.

There is no indication, therefore, that any koala habitat will be secured that will directly compensate for the loss, in the immediate area, and help to ensure the survival of the local koala population. The maintenance of a sustainable koala population in the local area should be a key objective of the project.

We submit that Transport for NSW should secure suitable land in the immediate vicinity of the proposed route near Raymond Terrace as protected koala habitat and corridor to compensate for the impacts. We are aware that a significant land holding already owned by ‘Transport’ already compensates for biodiversity impacts associated with the current Raymond Terrace bypass (so should not be used as compensation for this project). We are also aware that a parcel of land nearby is currently on the commercial market and could be acquired for compensatory purposes. These parcels are described below and shown in Attachments 1 & 2.

If appropriately protected, these parcels, together with additional land, can help to maintain some plant community types that will be lost in the construction footprint. In addition, the two sites are connected to corridors known to have been used by the local koala population.

Land at Raymond Terrace east of the Pacific Highway (Lot14, DP846612 & Lots 14&15, DP840996)

An aerial photograph in Chapter 14 page 28 of the EIS includes an area of land (comprising one large and two small lots) that is adjacent to the existing Pacific Highway between Heatherbrae and

Raymond Terrace marked with diagonal lines (see Attachment 1 below). This property has been labelled '*project land owned by Transport*'. We understand that this land was secured as part of the Raymond Terrace bypass project and compensates for biodiversity impacts associated with the existing road. There is no mention of any proposals for this property, which is zoned RU2 – Rural Landscape.

Given the location and circumstances of this land, it is possible that Transport has a conservation plan for it. However, if there is no conservation plan, then one should be implemented to protect habitat. This should be clarified in the EIS process and the land should be appropriately protected. The Australian Koala Foundation Vegetation Map (Attachment3) shows this land as "*having important supplementary koala habitat such as habitat linking areas*". Most of the larger lot is shown on Figure 2-3, Map 2 in the Biodiversity Assessment Report at Appendix I (p30) as 'Fauna key habitat'.

The eastern boundary of the property owned by Transport adjoins the Tilligerry State Conservation Area. This Conservation Area extends from Raymond Terrace to Tanilba Bay. It is inhabited by koalas and contains their preferred food trees and is recognised as a significant regional biodiversity corridor.

The northwest corner of the land owned by Transport leads to a main fauna underpass for the Pacific Highway where it crosses the Grahamstown Canal. According to the Australian Koala Foundation Koala Habitat mapping (Attachment 3), this underpass connects primary koala habitat on both the west and east sides of the proposed M1 extension.

Land at 6c Elizabeth Ave, Raymond Terrace (Lot 42 DP853008)

There is land currently on the commercial market at 6c Elizabeth Avenue, Raymond Terrace This land (shown in Attachment 2) contains preferred koala habitat and is strategically located for corridor value. It is a single triangular lot of 8.44 hectares and is zoned as RU2- Rural Landscape. The south-eastern boundary side abuts the Pacific Highway and leads into areas of primary koala habitat that follows Windeyer's Creek to Heatherbrae and back to Raymond Terrace. The northern side abuts the Elizabeth Reserve which in turn adjoins Muree Golf Course and Boomerang Park – all of which are known koala habitat. The north-east corner of the property is within a few metres of the Pacific Highway fauna underpass for the Grahamstown Canal. (see Attachments 3 & 4)

Additional land to be secured for compensatory purposes

In addition to the compensatory offset land from the existing Raymond Terrace bypass and suggested land acquisition, additional local land should be acquired to satisfactorily compensate for the impacts associated with the proposed new road corridor.

Outcome

The preservation of native vegetation on the existing properties along with securing suitable additional land will ensure koalas have a corridor into Raymond Terrace. If the corridor associated with the existing properties owned by Transport are not protected, then a major link to and from Tilligerry State Conservation Area will be lost.

Wider connectivity and fauna protection

The Biodiversity Assessment Report at Appendix I includes proposals for connectivity and fauna protection. However, at the northern end of the proposed extension, there is only one new overhead fauna crossing – well south of Masonite Road, and a major gap in the proposed fauna

fencing north of Masonite Road until a short length along the eastern side of the new slip road (see Attachment 4).

The M1 extension construction footprint from Tomago to the Hunter Botanical Gardens at Heatherbrae is adjacent to an identified fauna corridor (EIS, Appendix I, pp28-30 inc. Figure 2-3). This corridor moves away from the M1 towards the north-east to where it is traversed by Masonite Road and includes sections of both primary and secondary koala habitat.

It is essential that both during construction and in the longer term, native wildlife is not forced by physical disturbance, noise and lighting onto Masonite Road where they may become victims of vehicle strike.

We submit that a fauna protection fence should be installed from the proposed Masonite Bridge site to the far side of the fauna corridor. Escape structures such as log posts could be installed along the road and near any fauna crossing to help koalas avoid predators.

In addition to fencing, a wildlife crossing should be installed over or under Masonite Road where it traverses the identified fauna corridor.

Conclusion

The measures we have suggested in this submission will be more much more likely to adequately compensate for the impact of the construction footprint on the local koala population than biodiversity offsets in remote distant locations.

Preserving native vegetation on the existing parcels of land described above in association with additional land will ensure there are corridors to preferred habitat in the future. Koalas depend on corridors for their genetic diversity, which then ensures their resilience and ability to reproduce. Implementation of these measures will contribute to the recovery of the declining koala population in the Port Stephens Area.

Attachment 1 – Transport owned land at the northern end of the proposed M1 extension

Attachment 2 – extract from NSW government SIXMAPS showing lots in vicinity of the northern end of the proposed M1 extension, including land currently for sale

Attachment 3: Australian Koala Foundation 2021 – NSW government vegetation mapping overlaid with proposed route of M1 extension

Attachment 4 – Fauna connectivity and protection measures at the northern end of the proposed M1 extension

Attachment 5 – Who is KKEPS?

Attachment 1 – Transport owned land at the northern end of the proposed M1 extension (Source: EIS Chapter 14, p28)

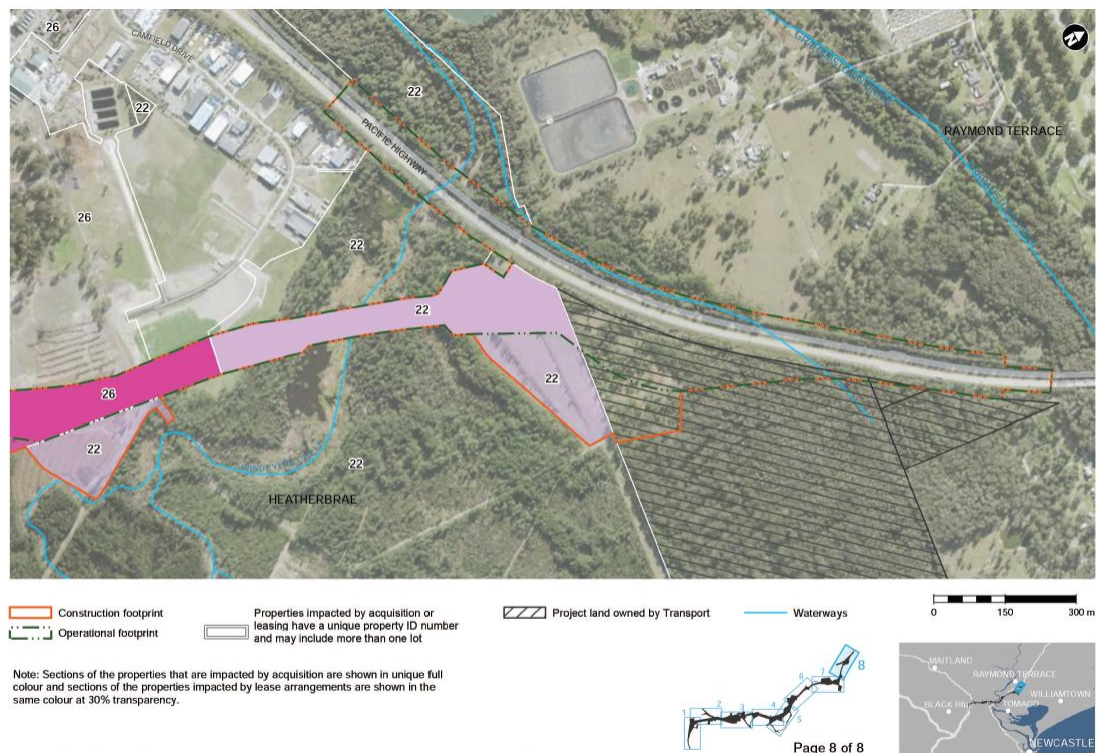
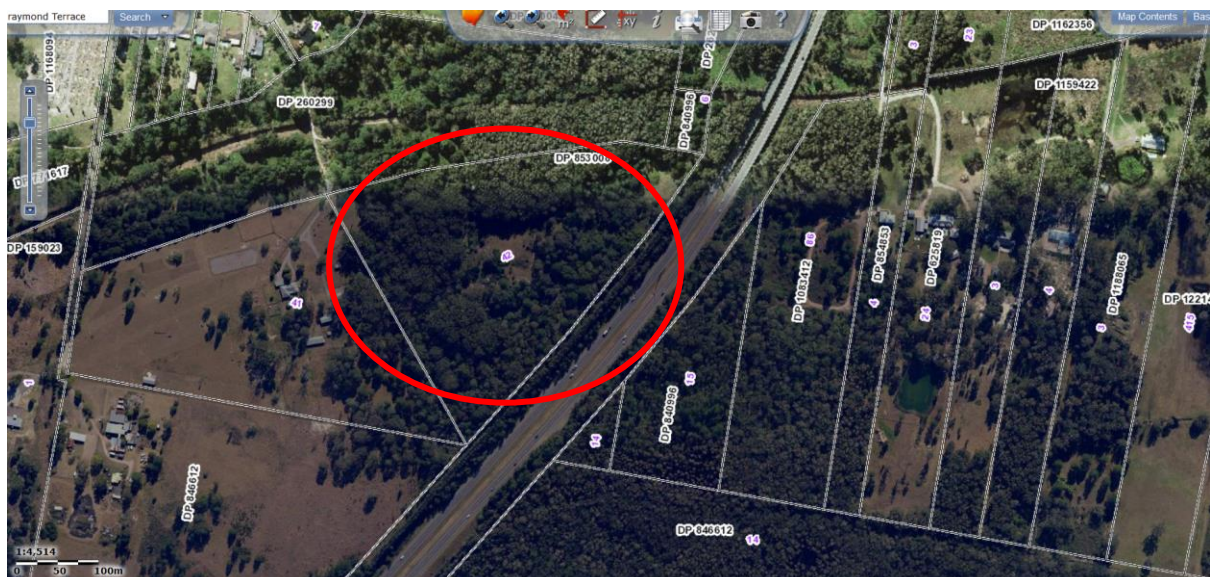


Figure 14-6 Properties impacted by acquisition or temporary lease (map 8 of 8)

M1 Pacific Motorway extension to Raymond Terrace
Environmental impact statement – Chapter 14: Land use and property

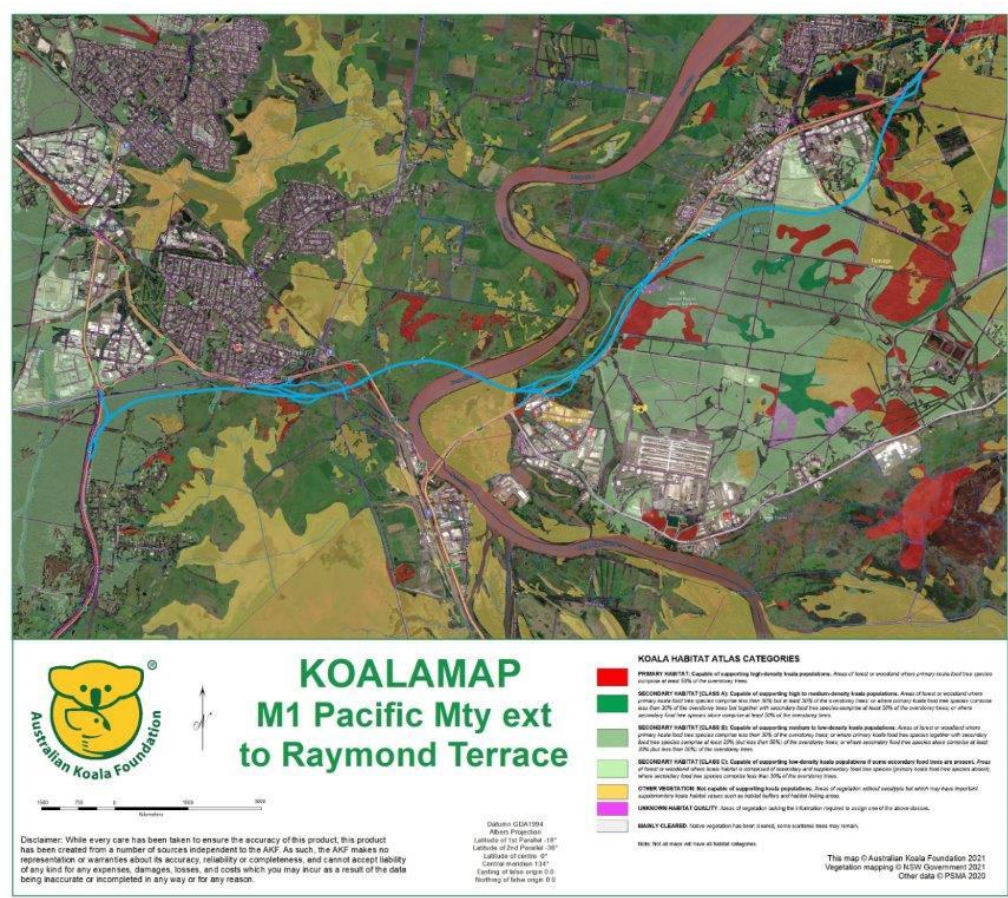
14-28

Attachment 2: Land parcels at Heatherbrae-Raymond Terrace SE of Boomerang Park, and at northern end of the proposed M1 extension (Source: NSW SIXMAPS). Land currently for sale circled in red



Orientation – north up

Attachment 3 : Australian Koala Foundation 2021 – NSW government vegetation mapping overlaid with proposed route of M1 extension



Attachment 4 – Fauna connectivity and protection measures at the northern end of the proposed M1 extension (Source: EIS Appendix I)

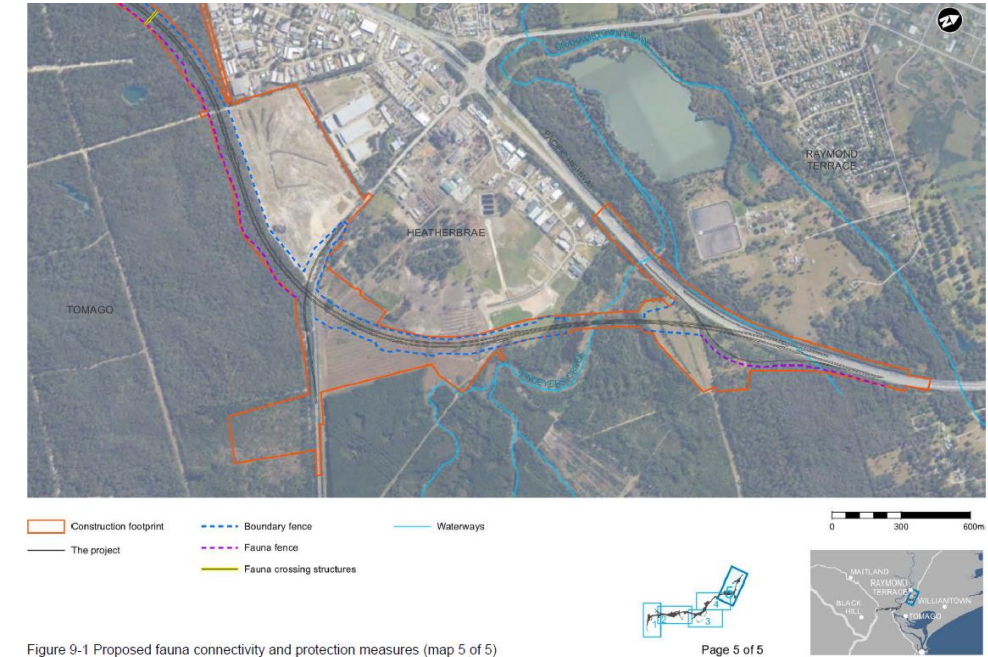


Figure 9-1 Proposed fauna connectivity and protection measures (map 5 of 5)

Attachment 5



EcoNetwork Port Stephens now has a special interest group, Koala Koalition EcoNetwork Port Stephens or KKEPS.

In June this year EcoNetwork Port Stephens held a meeting of Affiliates and Members and one of the biggest concerns was the survival of the koala in Port Stephens. Out of this came a determination to pool resources and work together to have a positive impact on the plight of the koala.

Groups represented by Koala Koalition Econetwork Port Stephens (KKEPS) include the Myall Koala & Environmental Support Group, Tilligerry Habitat, the Hunter Botanic Gardens, the Boomerang Park Preservation Group, the National Parks Association and Voices of Woodford and Wallalong, VoWW, which includes the Save Port Stephens Koalas group from Brandy Hill, and individual members. Many have been members of environmental groups for over 20 years and have a broad range of experience and qualifications.

The Group recognises the koala as an iconic and keystone species. Our biodiversity and environmental balance are endangered by their demise.

KKEPS objectives include -

- collation of information and data on koala habitat
- identification and protection of vital koala corridors
- using this information to work with all levels of government and government agencies to ensure the survival of koalas in Port Stephens.

KKEPS strongly supports the view that Port Stephens Council and the NSW State Government must realise that destruction of koala habitat is inconsistent with saving koalas in the wild.