

Good evening, Mayor CEO and Councillors,

I speak tonight in favour of motion CCL012-26, the Draft Koala Plan of Management.

Firstly, congratulations to Sutherland Shire Council on your commitment to stabilise, protect, and connect our endangered furry friend — the koala, or “Gula” as First Nations people call it, meaning “water keeper”... an important totemic species.

I am speaking on behalf of the Woronora Valley Residents Association, WVRA Inc., to support and build upon the excellent work already undertaken by the steering committee and Council. This plan is an important step forward in protecting our unique native wildlife.

Our Community places high value on nature and wildlife in particular KOALAS.

I also wish to acknowledge that I previously addressed Council on issues on the KPOM, raising concerns about gaps in local treatment, hospital care, recovery, and long-term protection for koalas. While much progress has been made, some of those gaps still remain and I wish to draw attention to these for possible inclusion to strengthen the KPOM in the draft.

PAUSE

1. Within the objectives and purpose, the word **PROVISION** should be included primarily for local medical attention — including hospital care for short- and long-term recovery followed by monitored release after injury, back into the specific area where the koalas were rescued from, rather than **translocation**.

While key threats are identified — including dogs, disease, land clearing, fire, and swimming pools — there is currently no **local PROVISION** for rescue, treatment and **LONG TERM REHABILITATION**, inclusive of monitoring koala release after injury.

The nearest dedicated long term care facility is **Port Stevens 3 hours** drive north of Sydney providing 24/7 expert veterinary care, intensive care units and specialised long term rehabilitation enclosures designed to mimic a wild environment for potential release later if possible. A koala hospital capable of **PROVIDING** immediate attention and long-term specialised care is located hours away creating a significant gap in timely and effective care for survival of our injured local koala population.

While there is now a new Wildlife and Conservation Hospital at the University of Sydney's **CAMDEM CAMPUS Western Sydney serving the Macarther Region**. A different type of hospital to Port Stephens and is almost 2 hours away from Sutherland Shire and treats all types of wildlife. The NSW Minister for Climate Change and Environment announced a \$4.5mill grant to expand the hospital's capacity and upgrade clinical equipment and biodiversity via University of Sydney school of Veterinary Science.

Under section 2.3 of the draft, **education stakeholders such as the University of Wollongong and Loftus TAFE** must be included, particularly for koala health, disease management, and research. Having our own Shire Hospital, automatically invites the **Education Stakeholders** for which their veterinary courses, veterinary nurses, Indigenous Studies involving totemic Lore, and zoology students are all directly involved.

Importantly, Indigenous knowledge and consultation must also be embedded throughout this plan. First Nations people have cared for this land for tens of thousands of years, and their expertise in land management, wildlife behaviour, and fire practices is invaluable to the long-term survival of koalas.

A **LOCAL SHIRE koala hospital** and recovery facility would provide significant benefits such as emergency care, rehabilitation, education and monitored release after injury. It offers hands-on learning for veterinary, Indigenous and zoology students.

We must learn from the devastating bushfires of 2019-2020, which killed an estimated 500 million animals, and an estimated 500 species of plants and animals have become endangered or extinct due to the "black

Summer" as it is widely known. Coordination challenges between vets and shooters meant some injured animals could not be treated in time, and many were lost unnecessarily.

(Give example)

Improved local infrastructure and training between vets and shooters would ensure a faster and more effective response in future emergencies, together with a local hospital facility.

Diseases such as chlamydia, burns, and vehicle strike injuries require immediate and specialised care. Survival rates increase when koalas receive treatment quickly and locally followed by their release back to their original habitat.

Turning attention to section 2.6 — corridors and connectivity.

Wildlife corridors may also be fire trails, recognising that some fire trails function as important wildlife corridors must be acknowledged here. For example, the Crescent Fire Trail at Woronora provides a vital connection between Woronora Heights, Woronora Valley and Heathcote National Park. This should be recognised and clearly SIGNPOSTED as both WILDLIFE CORRIDOR and FIRE TRAIL and FORBIDDEN to any temporary OR private access under any circumstances other than what it is designed for EMERGENCIES. This needs to be clearly stated IN SECTION 2.6 CORRIDORS AND CONNECTIVITY.

Fire management strategies should include **fire-resistant native species and cultural burning practices**, developed in consultation with Indigenous communities. Low-intensity burns guided by Indigenous knowledge promote regeneration quickly for koala food, reduce fire severity allowing escape to higher parts of the tree.

Some fire resistant koala food and shelter trees are:

Lilly Pilly (syzygium smitti)

Illawarra Flame Tree (Brachychiton acerifollius)

Grey Gum

Tallowwood is a primary food tree for Koalas having a thick fibrous orange brown bark providing some insulation against heat.

Swamp Mahogany, Black She-oak, water gum.

Finally, koala habitat and colonies **MUST** be a key consideration in all development applications. Protecting habitat is fundamental to protecting the species.

“Healthy habitat, local care, and strong action — that’s how we secure a future for our koalas.

Let’s ensure the koala remains a living part of our landscape — not just a memory we failed to protect.

Let’s not be the generation that talked about saving koalas — but the one that actually did.”

WVRA Inc. supports the motion however recommends these vital additions.

Thank you.