

SBKN Submission: Heathcote Road overtaking lane

The Sydney Basin Koala Network is a project of Total Environment Centre and works closely with environment groups across the Sydney Basin who are deeply concerned about the impacts to Koalas of urban sprawl in Sydney and the associated impacts of new roads and road widenings bisecting Koala habitat, particularly in South-West Sydney where roads are the biggest cause of Koala deaths, with over 140 Koala killed in just over three years (Bionet 2025).

There have been 34 recorded vehicle strikes of Koalas on Heathcote Road since July 2022. This includes 8 recorded vehicle strikes of Koalas this year including one on 5th November in close proximity to the proposed site, which is yet to be reported in Bionet. We are therefore very concerned about the impact of construction on this Koala population, given recent road-widening projects undertaken on Appin Road have seen many Koalas trapped, killed, and isolated despite TFNSW insisting at the proposal stage it would not have a significant impact. We are also concerned about an increase in speed in this area either legally or illegally due to improved driver conditions.

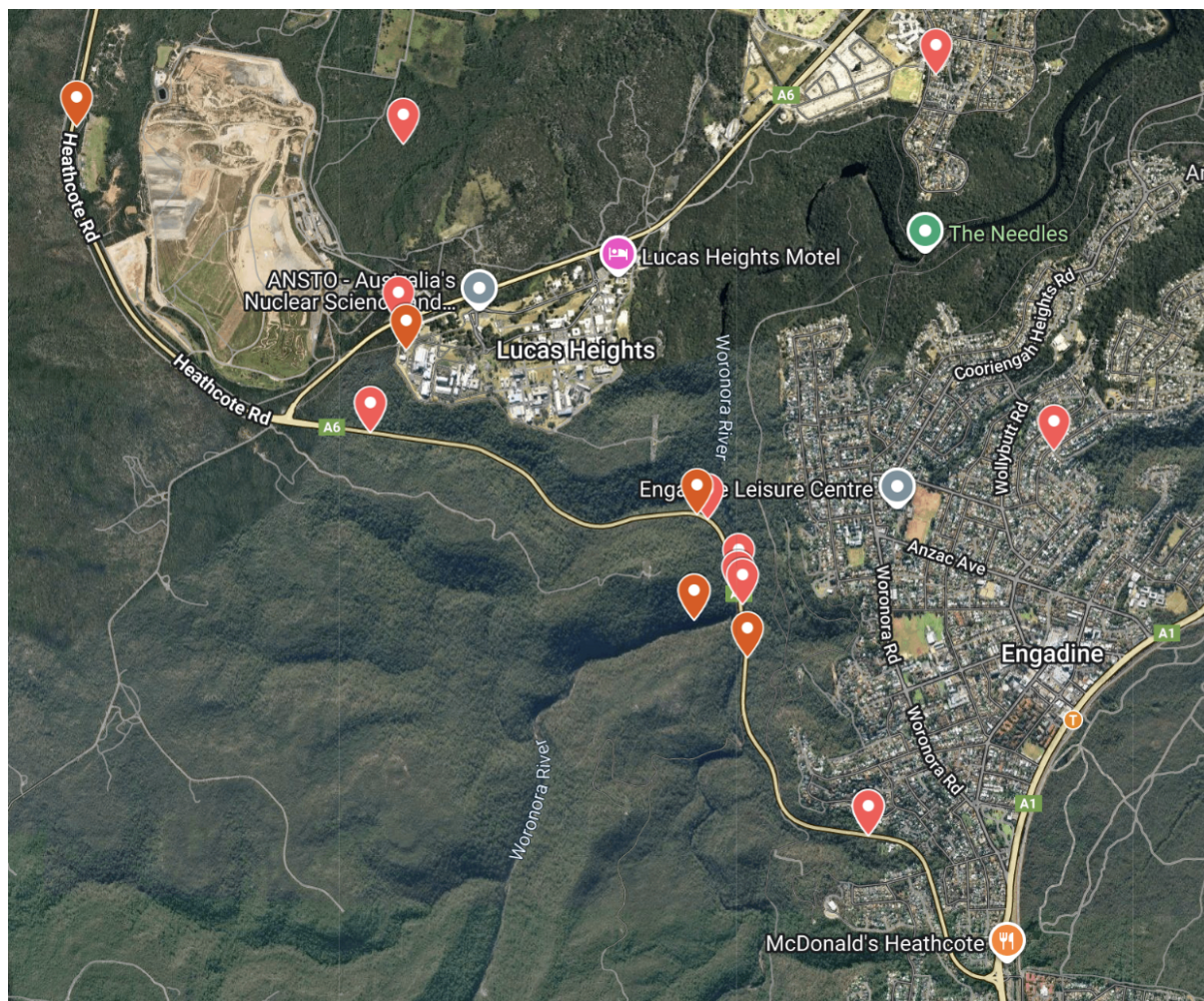


Image 1: Locations of Vehicle Strike in this section of Heathcote Road since 2021

We also note were it not for the special concessions given to State Roads, this project would need to be federally referred as it is over the threshold that does have an impact on Koalas. As outlined, the proposed removal of approximately 2.87 hectares of native vegetation is likely to cause significant impacts to habitat for at least eleven threatened fauna species, including Koalas and other hollow-dependent wildlife. The loss of seventeen hollow-bearing trees is also a legislatively recognised Key Threatening Process under the Biodiversity Conservation Act, with serious ramifications for arboreal fauna. We would encourage any additional measures available to TFNSW to be deployed to reduce environmental impact beyond what is necessary.

Our key recommendations are as follows:

1. Construction must not endanger Koalas

- Clearing must be carried out in stages, not all at once, to ensure koalas have enough time to safely move out of the clearing site without human intervention.
- Fencing should be erected to prevent spooked wildlife running onto the road during clearing.
- The impacts of sandstone blasting is likely to further spook wildlife. Qualified fauna spotters should be present to safely relocate wildlife.
- Implement robust traffic management (lower speed limits, signage, night-time bans on heavy traffic) to reduce strike risk during both construction and during periods of downtime.
- Enforce regular, independent monitoring of fauna outcomes during and after work, with transparent reporting.

2. Speed Limits Must Not be Increased and a speed limit camera should be installed.

We are concerned about an expectation from some in the community that a road widening may lead to an increase in the speed limit. **WE STRONGLY OBJECT** to any such suggestion in an area that bisects Koala habitat. Increased speed limits elevate the risk of koala mortality by reducing driver reaction time and increasing the force of any collision.

- Impact energy increases with the square of vehicle speed, which means collisions at 80 km/h transfer much more force to koalas than at 60 km/h, making death almost certain at higher speed.
- at 80 km/h, drivers have insufficient time to react and avoid koalas, while at 60 km/h, reaction windows improve and collisions are more often survivable for the animal.
- Scenario modelling demonstrates that at 80 km/h, a driver cannot stop for a koala spotted even 40 metres ahead, but at 60 km/h there is a much better chance to brake or swerve, minimizing injury or avoiding impact.
- We note 40km is the safest speed to protect Koalas.

That such a high number of Koalas are already dying on Heathcote Road, including in this location, suggest drivers are likely already speeding in this location. **TFNSW must make it explicit that an increased speed limit will not occur and install a speed limit camera to ensure speed is not increased by default.**

3. Install large permanent signage to warn road users of Koalas, as well as variable variable messaging during Koala breeding season.

While signage is best used in combination with speed limit reductions, it is nevertheless important that the public is aware that although road conditions have changed, the threat to Koalas has increased due to a wider road should they try to cross it.

While the Woronora River acts as a natural underpass, Koalas are still crossing Heathcote Road and being killed in the area. We urge TFNSW to undertake robust studies to understand why they are still choosing to cross the road **prior** to construction.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these important points.

Yours sincerely,

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