



Koala Management Plan

Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade Richmond River to Coolgardie Road

Progress update – August 2017

The Australian and NSW governments are jointly funding the \$4.36 billion Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade. The project was approved by the NSW Minister for Planning in June 2014 and the Federal Minister for the Environment in August 2014. The approvals come with strict conditions about managing the project's impact on the environment, including the koala and other threatened species.

Woolgoolga to Ballina upgrade



Background

The Koala Management Plan and Ballina Koala Plan has been approved to set out Roads and Maritime Services' mitigation and monitoring actions for the upgrade. In the Richmond River to Coolgardie Road section near Wardell, a Population Viability Analysis also modelled the Ballina Koala population for the next 50 years.

The Koala Expert Advisory Committee, chaired by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer Mary O'Kane, has guided the process of preparing the plan. Independent members of the Committee have endorsed the Ballina Koala Plan following extensive input and advice from 15 independent scientific experts.

This update informs the community and stakeholders about our progress on implementing the Koala Management Plan and other initiatives from Richmond River to Coolgardie Road. It will be distributed on a quarterly basis.

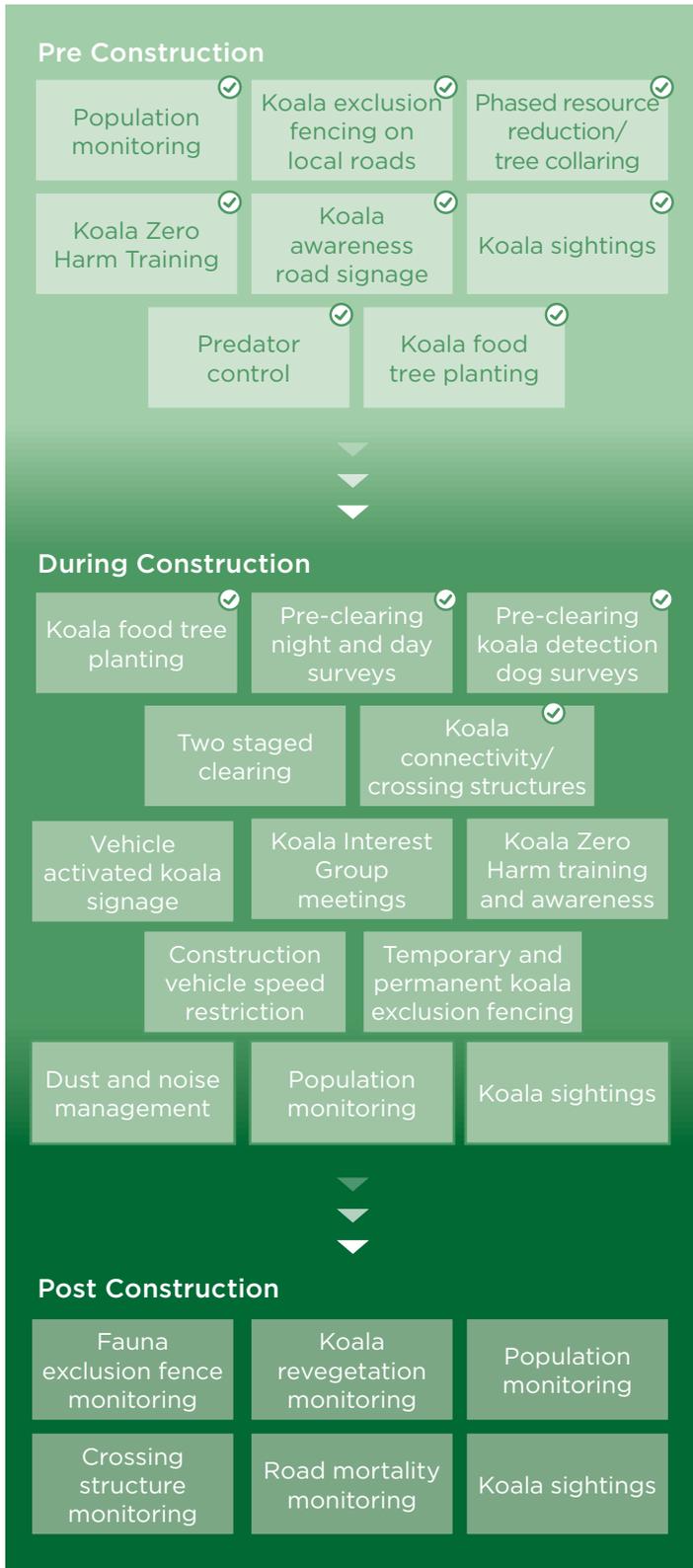
PROGRESS SNAPSHOT:

- Installed fencing and koala grids on Old Bagotville and Wardell Roads
- Reduced speed limits and installed koala signs on Old Bagotville Road
- Planted around 50,000 koala feed trees
- Trained 2300 workers in koala zero harm strategies
- Worked with Friends of the Koala to spot and capture an injured koala
- Trapped a wild dog and three foxes found in koala habitat
- Started a koala stress study with University of Sydney.

Koala Management Plan

The Koala Management Plan incorporates pre-construction, during construction, and post-construction koala management strategies, as required under the project's condition of approval.

The image below shows the type of work we will be doing to ensure koala populations are protected, that the impact to koalas of the approved route through this section is minimised, and connectivity between existing and new koala habitats is improved.



Progress report

Koala exclusion fencing and grids

Temporary koala exclusion fencing and koala grids have been installed on Old Bagotville Road. Koala grids prevent koalas from accessing the road at driveways and other locations. Escape ramps are also in place to allow any animal in the road corridor to leave unharmed. Permanent fencing has already started on Wardell Road to help protect koalas from road strike. When the upgrade is complete, permanent fencing and 26 dedicated fauna crossing structures will be in place to help koalas safely cross under the highway.

Next steps:

- Complete permanent fencing at Wardell Road and then existing Pacific Highway
- Install temporary fencing around project's site compound, batch plant and borrow site to keep koalas out during construction
- Ongoing monitoring to assess effectiveness of fauna fencing.

Phased resource reduction



Collared trees, Laws Point

To minimise impact on koalas, we are taking a new approach by phasing the removal of food trees rather than clearing them all at the same time. All food trees at Laws Point have been collared or ringbarked which slowly reduces the habitat value of trees over a 12 week period so that koalas are encouraged to move to new habitat. We are monitoring koalas to ensure they have access to food and water.

Surveys done before and after phased resource reduction have found koalas are outside the clearing footprint. Survey reports will be published on our website.

Next steps:

- Continue phased resource reduction near Wardell Road
- Publish survey reports on Roads and Maritime website
- Use the koala clearing protocols during clearing phases
- Continue koala stress study to monitor stress hormone levels.



Permanent fauna exclusion fencing



Koala food tree planting, near Wardell

Koala feed tree planting

Trees have been planted on 65 hectares of Roads and Maritime owned land in the project area. The revegetation sites are on both sides of the new highway and will connect already existing koala habitat. During June the project team worked with 35 students from Evans Head pre-school to plant over 300 food trees near Wardell.

This work is part of a revegetation strategy designed to improve habitat connectivity and provide new koala food trees on land that has been previously cleared. We are committed to replanting 130 hectares of koala food trees.

Next steps:

- Plant a further 40,000 koala food trees
- Ensure newly planted food trees thrive.

Koala population monitoring near Wardell

On 23 June 2017 we released an open tender to ecological consultants for a program of koala population and mitigation monitoring for the entire upgrade, including Section 10. This monitoring is in addition to that underway for the phased resource reduction. The population monitoring will help us to measure the effectiveness of our mitigation measures, including the koala exclusion fencing, food tree plantings and connectivity structures. The program will also track the local koala population against the population projections in the population viability assessment.

Next steps:

- Tenders closed on 20 July 2017 and are being considered for the program to start in Spring 2017.

Predator control

Wild dogs, foxes and cats contribute to koala deaths. So far, three foxes and a wild dog have been captured as part of our predator control program on Roads and Maritime and privately owned land. A soft claw trapping method is being used so that any non-targeted animal can be released without harm. Baiting is not being used.

Next steps:

- Continue predator control on all our biodiversity offset properties and nearby private properties.



Koala Zero harm

Every construction worker on the Woolgoolga to Ballina upgrade project will undergo induction training to ensure a zero harm approach to koalas is in place on every site. So far, 2300 workers have been inducted. The training identifies areas of koala habitat, key threats, mitigation strategies and most importantly, the protocols to be used if a koala is spotted.

Koala first aid kits have been provided by the project ecologist and environmental advisors. The kits contain a laundry basket, large blanket or towel, detailed rescue procedure and contact list. This includes a mandatory stop work procedure and contact details for Friends of the Koala.

There is also a 'koala spotters award' for construction workers and one award has already been given.

Next steps:

- Induct all remaining construction workers
- Continue to induct all new workers.

Koala sightings

We work closely with Friends of the Koala when diseased or injured koalas are spotted. If possible they are captured and taken to a veterinarian to be assessed. The veterinarian decides if the koala can be treated or if they are too badly diseased and suffering and need to be euthanised.

- Friends of the Koala captured two diseased koala in July and the vet made a decision to euthanise.

Koala road safety

Six vehicle message signs have been installed on local roads from Richmond River to Coolgardie Road. The signs flash "Watch out koalas about" and are designed to increase driver awareness of koalas on local roads. We are also procuring vehicle activated signs which flash when drivers exceed the speed limit.

A construction speed limit for all vehicles has been placed on local roads west of the existing Pacific Highway. This is being monitored and aims to reduce koala road strikes and improve professional driver behaviour.

Speed alarms have been installed in construction vehicles to remind drivers they are in a reduced speed zone where koalas may be.

Next steps:

- Install six vehicle activated signs and six fixed koala signs on local roads in consultation with Ballina Shire Council and Friends of the Koala
- Reduce speed limit on Wardell Road to 80km/hr.

New initiatives

Koala stress study

We are working with University of Sydney to study the stress of koalas in habitats from Richmond River to Coolgardie Road.

Scats (koala droppings) are being collected in areas where phased resource reduction is happening and from a reference site in a nearby nature reserve. The scats will be analysed for the stress hormone cortisol before, during and after the phased resource reduction process.

It is hoped that the study will improve our understanding of the physiological impacts of phased resource reduction on individual koalas. The study will be completed by June 2018 and the results will be published on our website.

Other news

Long nosed potoroo

A long nosed potoroo population live in the heathlands west of Wardell and the new highway route was designed to avoid the majority of this habitat. So, koala's are not the only animals to benefit from the fencing and connectivity structures as part of the upgrade. Previous monitoring of connectivity underpass structures, including at Tugan bypass, show that they are also used by potoroos.

The temporary fauna exclusion fencing on Old Bagotville Road will also protect potoroos from entering the road corridor. We are closely monitoring how effective the fencing, koala grids and fauna escape ramps are for potoroos and other native fauna. There have been no animals killed on this road since the fence was installed.

Contact us - Woolgoolga to Ballina



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This document contains important information about road projects in your area. If you require the services of an interpreter, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask them to call the project team on 1800 778 900. The interpreter will then assist you with translation.

Jet, a koala's best friend

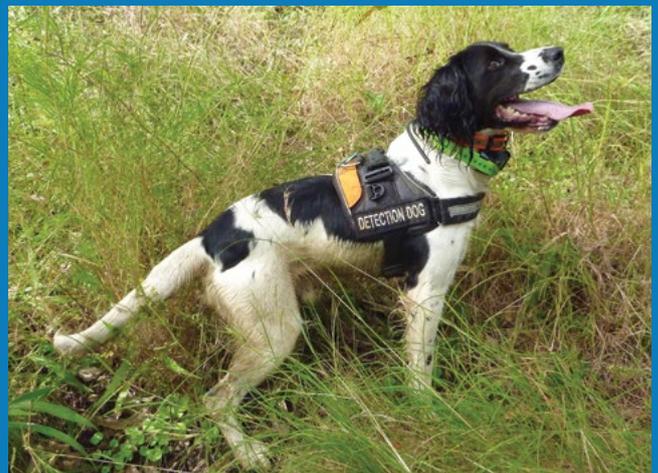
Meet Jet the koala detection dog. Jet is a Field Springer Spaniel trained by Steve Austin, a world-renowned conservation dog trainer. As part of Roads and Maritime's pre-clearing surveys the contractor is required to have the nominated clearing area surveyed by a koala detection dog and handler. Jet's detective work is needed on the morning of scheduled clearing to check for evidence of fresh koala activity.

Jet wears a GPS collar so his movements can be tracked and downloaded to report the search parameters and fresh koala activity locations. A dog is able to detect a scent 1000 times better than humans and cover more land more efficiently to determine recent koala activity in the area.

When Jet finds koala activity he sits, helping his handler to locate the koala that may be present in the area. What does Jet get as a reward? He gets to chase his favourite ball before getting back to work. Jet is also trained to work quietly without barking, to avoid snakes and chasing native fauna and never takes food from the ground (in case it is a bait).

A koala was recently detected at Broadwater during pre-clearing surveys. The koala detection dog identified fresh koala scats in a nearby feed tree. A buffer zone was then established around the koala so it could safely relocate in its own time.

The koala detection dog, trainer and handlers are appropriately certified and have relevant licenses, permits and approvals to conduct koala surveys with a detection dog in NSW.



Jet at work looking for koalas



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