



## **Frequently asked questions – Ballina Koala Plan and Koala Management Plan approval**

**The NSW and Australian governments are jointly funding the Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade. As part of the project's Conditions of Approval, the Ballina Koala Plan and the Koala Management Plan have been approved. This document aims to answer frequently asked questions about implementation of the plans in the area known as section 10 between the Richmond River at Broadwater and Coolgardie.**

### **What is the relationship between the Ballina Koala Plan and the Koala Management Plan?**

The Ballina Koala Plan consists of the Population Viability Analysis (PVA) as well as a range of management scenarios to minimise and mitigate any potential impacts of the Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade in section 10.

The Koala Management Plan has also been developed for the project. It sets out a monitoring and management plan for mitigating any potential impacts on the koala populations along all sections of the highway upgrade project. The plan draws on the information from the Ballina Koala Plan using the PVA and management actions for section 10.

### **How will you protect the koala population?**

We have committed to a number of measures to mitigate and monitor the impact on the koala population during building and operation of the highway upgrade:

- Planting 130 hectares of new koala habitat adjacent to the highway to improve habitat linkages between west Wardell and the Blackwall Range
- Installing 26 wildlife connectivity structures in section 10 – which equals about one structure every 500 metres
- Installing completely closed fencing along the new highway and additional fencing on the existing highway and Wardell Road
- Conducting comprehensive pre-clearing surveys to identify koalas within the construction corridor
- Using a staged approach to vegetation clearing by collaring trees to encourage safe and voluntary movement of koalas into adjacent habitat before clearing starts. This is referred to as 'phased resource reduction'
- Implementing predator control programs
- Training construction workers in koala requirements
- Having an experienced and licensed wildlife carer/ecologist on site to supervise clearing activities
- Installing koala awareness signage on local roads in koala hotspots during major work
- Implementing a comprehensive monitoring program.

### **How much koala habitat will be removed for the project?**

About 34 hectares of native vegetation will be cleared along the section 10 area, 17 hectares of which has been assessed as good quality koala habitat. This will be offset and protected through conservation agreements at minimum 4:1 ratio. This means the 34 hectares to be cleared will be offset with about 136 hectares. In addition to this requirement, we will also rehabilitate 130 hectares of previously cleared land providing total offset of 236 hectares for section 10.

### **How will koalas cross the highway?**

A number of dedicated and combined fauna/drainage connectivity structures will be installed to maintain existing levels of landscape connectivity for all wildlife, including the koala. About 133 combined and dedicated structures for the koala are proposed for the 155km project, 26 of which are located in section 10.

Structures include: bridges with wildlife underpasses, drainage/fauna culverts in wet areas and dedicated culverts for wildlife. 'Fauna furniture' will be included within dedicated koala underpasses and in some combined wildlife crossing structures. This includes hardwood, horizontal and vertical logs inside and outside the culvert to provide koalas and other wildlife with dry passage and refuge from predators.

### **How do you know that koalas will use the connectivity structures?**

Roads and Maritime has carried out more than 20 separate fauna studies over 15 years which focused on use of structures by native animals. We found koalas use a range of structures to make successful crossings of the highway, often within months of opening the project to traffic. One of the most important things we have learned from these studies is that Koalas can and do maintain home-ranges right to the edge of the highway and use fauna connectivity structures.

The fauna connectivity structures to be installed in section 10 meet the condition of approval requirements and have proved effective in allowing koala movement under highways.

### **What kind of fencing will you use while building the highway?**

Fencing was chosen in consultation with biodiversity specialists from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Permanent fauna exclusion fencing, using a range of designs, will be installed along most of the Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway alignment. Koala specific fauna fencing will be installed on both sides of the highway at key koala population areas. Permanent koala fencing will be installed on other roads within section 10 in line with the Ballina Koala Plan. Grids will also be installed near the intersections with other roads creating a fully closed system in section 10.

### **How will koalas be protected during clearing activities?**

Vegetation clearing along the highway will be undertaken in stages to make sure koalas living in or near the clearing area have enough time to move to adjacent habitat without human intervention. If a koala is spotted during strict pre-clearing surveys, all work in the vicinity will be immediately stopped for 48 hours to allow the koala time to move off the site. If after 48 hours the koala has not moved off the site a suitably qualified person, under supervision by an ecologist, will capture and relocate the koala into nearby habitat.

In section 10, phased resource reduction will be used to facilitate the safe and voluntary movement of koalas into nearby habitat. This involves the gradual reduction of food resources within the clearing area by ringbarking and/or collaring trees, allowing koalas to move in their own time without human intervention before clearing starts.

### **What is collaring and ringbarking'?**

Collaring is used to encourage koalas to move from the clearing area of their own accord. Hard plastic, polycarbonate or metal sheeting will be placed as a sleeve (or 'collar') around the lower trunk of koala

food trees and other significant shelter and resting trees to prevent koalas from using these resources and discouraging them from re-entering the clearing area. This process will be used in locations that have been identified as koala 'hot-spots' in section 10.

Ring-barking is the complete removal of a section of the bark around the circumference of the tree trunk near the ground to induce de-foliation. A percentage of trees will be ringbarked in addition to collaring as a trial to assess the rate of de-foliation, in an effort to stop koalas using these trees. For more information see section 6.3.5 of the Koala Management Plan.

### **What are the next steps?**

Following the recent approval of the Ballina Koala Plan and the Koala Management Plan, early work will start in section 10. This includes completing detailed design, geotechnical activities, and utility relocations as well as installing fauna fencing along Wardell road adjacent to the new alignment and part of the existing Pacific Highway between Wardell and Coolgardie.

The phased resource reduction strategy will also be implemented along with predator control work.

Procurement activities for the Richmond River Bridge and major building contracts in section 10 are also proceeding.

The Woolgoolga to Ballina project team will continue to keep the community and stakeholders informed as work on the highway upgrade progresses.

[The Ballina Koala Plan](#) and the [Koala Management Plan](#) can be found at: [www.rms.nsw.gov.au/koala](http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/koala)

Information about the highway upgrade can be found at: <http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/w2b>

### **Contact us**

For more information please contact us on 1800 778 900, email [W2B@pacificcomplete.com.au](mailto:W2B@pacificcomplete.com.au) or visit the project website at [www.rms.nsw.gov.au/W2B](http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/W2B)



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