



FoCC

Friends of Canadian Corridor
Incorporated



“Think globally act locally” - M McLuhan.

“The Koala Working Party Report”

Prepared by the

Friends of Canadian Corridor Incorporated

January 27th 2020



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An overview of the Ballarat City Council Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management.

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1. Summary

The question of whether “Koalas are still living in the Canadian Corridor” has been positively answered. The Friends of Canadian Corridor (FoCC) Citizen Science Program involved local residents sighting and recording the sparse koala population in the Corridor. There may be just a dozen in the corridor.

Our initial report to the City of Ballarat in June 2019 claimed just eight Koalas in the Corridor. Subsequent sightings suggest a few more in the south, west and north of the City. The FoCC Citizen Science approach has successfully encouraged many local residents to report Koala sightings, and has generated renewed interest in koala wellbeing as an icon for the local natural environment.

The sightings show koalas in urban areas such as the Yarrowee River Valley in Brown Hill, the Canadian Creek and other creeks in the Corridor, the Woowookarung Regional Park, Buninyong township and the more traditional Koala sighting place at Mt Buninyong. Other koalas have been found in Sebastopol and at Sovereign Hill.

The City of Ballarat Koala Plan of Management identifies koala monitoring as a key factor in keeping koalas in the corridor. A University of Melbourne student and the Australian Koala Foundation are collaborating with FoCC to conduct Koala monitoring in Woowookarung Regional Park and Union Jack Reserve and adjacent watercourses in April and October this year. The opportunity to have koala monitoring undertaken in 2020 is an important next step. Permission from Parks Victoria and land owners is required where the monitoring crosses their respective land. The FoCC will also be seeking support from the City of Ballarat with assistance and permission from Council Officers for the monitoring.

The Koala plan of Management has an objective “To incorporate the restoration of koala habitat as a component of developments.....” (C137 22.04-2) however nowhere over the past ten years has this been achieved only ongoing loss of Koala habitat in Council controlled areas such as Geelong Road Mt Clear.

The FoCC lead revegetation of the ex-plantation land in Woowookarung Regional Park is the only koala habitat improvement in the Corridor. The FoCC has planted over 1600 koala trees over the past 3 years and more are planned for future years.

The Midlands Highway upgrade by Rural Roads Victoria hopefully contains measures which may reduce koala deaths on the road. The opportunity exists for other roads in the corridor to be considered from a koala safety aspect with works and speed reduction.

The decision to not proceed with the Warrenheip Growth Zone is a major boost to the conservation of the Canadian Corridor. The mosaic of native vegetation and small rural properties will allow koalas and other wildlife to maintain the north south links. The associated Living Corridors and Ballarat East Plan have the potential to make the Ballarat Planning Scheme more responsive to biodiversity and koala habitat retention and improvement.

The Citizen Science koala sightings highlighted a problem of where to go when a koala is found in an inappropriate place or with injuries. The COB Koala Plan of Management had plans for a coordinated approach but it has not been implemented. The FoCC supports the creation of a “Koala and Wildlife’ guide including a response site on the COB website” with the support from local wildlife shelters to assist corridor residents to know where to go for assistance.

The City of Ballarat, FoCC and the community, DELWP, Rural Roads Victoria and other agencies should work together to reenergise and continue the implementation of the Koala Plan of Management and give our Koalas the best chance we can!

2. Context - FoCC General Meeting 2018

On August 15th 2018 the FoCC held a general meeting titled “Koalas - Where have they gone?”

“Koalas - Where have they gone?” focus for August General Meeting

1. Koalas are the Icon species of the Park



File image

During the 2000's the City of Ballarat undertook the development of a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management which was promulgated in March 2010.

Yet in recent conversations with friends along the Corridor all are asking “Koalas, where have they gone?”

To help unravel the question Mr Sean O'Keefe former COB Strategic Planning Manager who was responsible for the development of the Ballarat Planning Scheme “Koala Planning Amendment C137 will be our guest speaker. Sean will outline and explain how the plan was developed and how it was expected to work.

Source: FoCC News Update June 2018

The meeting was inspired by conversations with friends along the Corridor over the past years, asking “Koalas, where have they gone?”

To start the search for an answer FoCC asked Mr Sean O'Keefe to be our guest speaker at the August 2018 general meeting. Mr O'Keefe was the former City of Ballarat Strategic Planning Manager responsible for the development of the Ballarat Planning Scheme “Koala Planning Amendment C137 in the 2009 period.

3. Koala Working party formed

A result of the meeting was the setting up of a “Koala working party”. The table below outlines the party’s work.

Item	Date	Outcome
Koala Plan of Management Presentation - S O’Keefe	August 15 th 2018	Well attended general meeting. Working party set up
Koala Working Party no 1	Aug 26 th 2018	First meeting with 13 participants
Koala Counting	September 2018 to Jan 2020	47 reported sightings. Suggesting around 12 Koalas resident.
Koala Forum	June 19 th 2019	Karen Pohlner from WALA Animal Sanctuary and Dave Mitchell, Landscape ecologist for the Australian Koala Foundation. 60 attendees
Koala Working Party No 2	July 3 2019	Meeting reviewed progress and set up next steps.
Koala Tree planting	July 21 st 2019	Monster Tree Planting with 149 participants planting 1100 trees.
Koala working party roads group – Analysis and report. Tracey	July 2019 ongoing	In progress
Quiet Koala Publicity - Joel	Ongoing	In progress
Koala working party No 3	Late 2019 (part of Annual Meeting)	Report to annual meeting
Koala Monitoring Processes Parks Vic and COB	July to October 2019	Meetings with PV and report to COB.
Koala Monitoring actual – D Mitchell and J Ellis	Late 2019	Monitoring opportunity for Feb 2020 with AKF and Uni of Melbourne in discussion.
Possible meeting with AKF President Deborah Tabbart	Oct Nov 2020	Held over until monitoring occurs
Strengthening the Koala Corridor	2020 -25	Identification of wildlife corridor across Midlands Highway at Buninyong progressing. COB living corridor planning process offers opportunity for strengthening the Koala Corridor

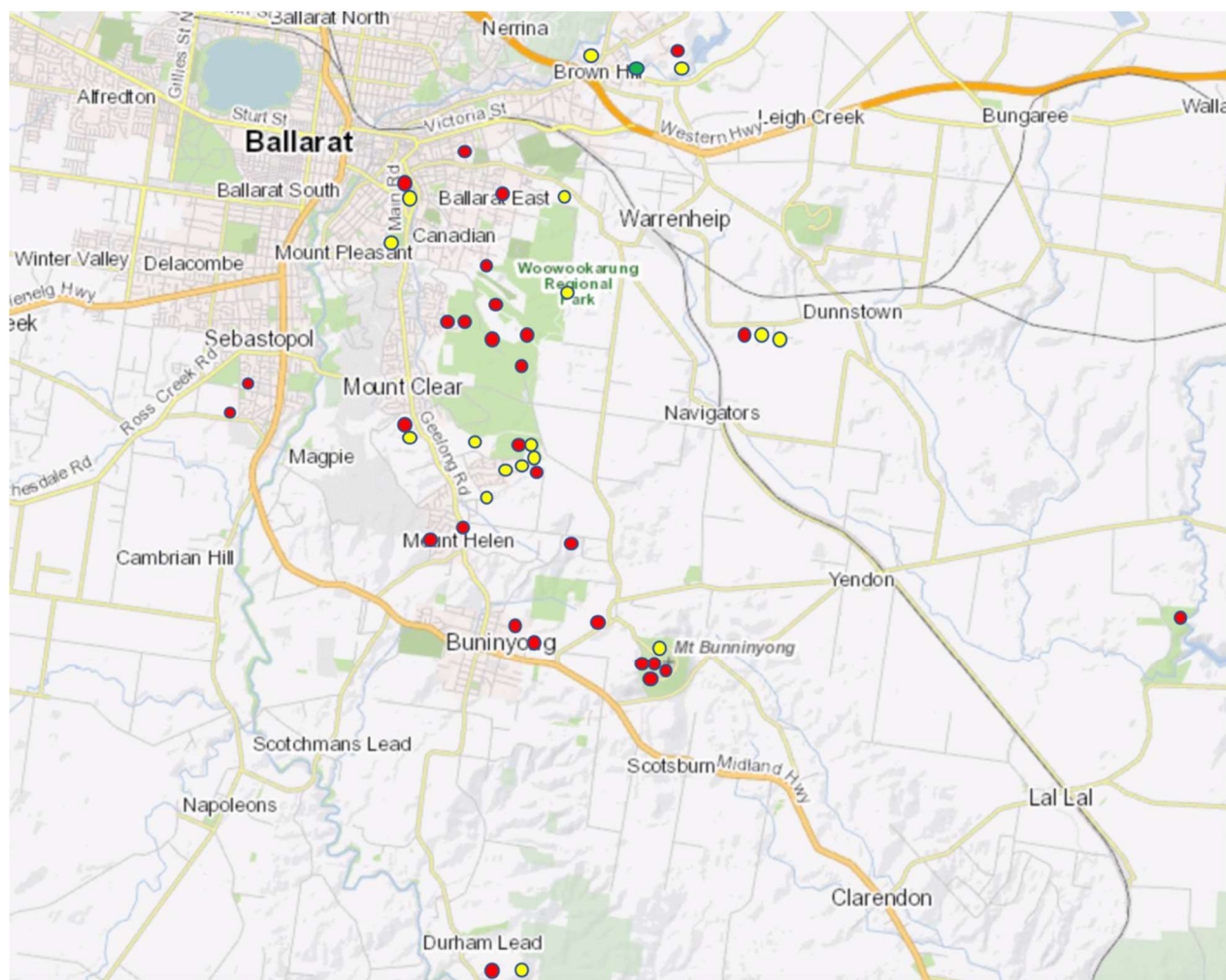
4. Citizen Science Koala Sightings August 2019 to Jan 2020

	Date	Location	Address	Image Y/N	Observer
1	August 10	Damascus College	Geelong Rd	N	Bill
2	September 19	Dunnstown	Ti Tree Rd	N	Phil
3	September 21	Springs Rd	Brown Hill	N	Ray
4	October 28	Sailors Gully	Mt Clear	Y	Rob
5	October 29	Sailors Gully	Mt Clear	Y	Shane
6	October 29	Mt Buninyong	Yendon No 1 Rd	Y	Ben
7	November 14	Green Hill Rd	Green Hill	Y	Sheila
8	November 23	Ti Tree Rd	Dunnstown	Y	Phil
9	November 24	Damascus College	Mt Clear	Y	Linda
10	December 6	Katy Ryans Rd	Mt Clear	Y	Rob
11	December 11	Dementia Trail	Mt Clear	Y	Chris and Karen
12	December 20	Bakers Rd	Mt Clear	Y	Chris and Karen
13	January 10	Gong Gong Rd	Brown Hill	Y	Stephanie
14	January 19	The Gorge	Green Hill	Y	Peter
15	February 14	Foos Lane	Warrenheip	N	Maggie
16	March 26	Katy Ryans Rd	Mt Clear	Y	Chris and Karen
17	April 1	Durham Lead	Durham Lead	N	Jeanette
18	April 6	The Gorge	Green Hill	N	Peter
19	April 30	Geelong Rd	Mt Helen	Y	Linda
20	May 12	The Gorge	Mt Helen	N	Bob
21	May 27	Ramada Inn	Sebastopol	Y	Carol
22	July 9	The Gong	Brown Hill	N	John
24	July 10	Mt Buninyong	Buninyong	Y	Pierre
23	July 11	Forest St	Buninyong	Y	Rita
25	July 16	Mt Buninyong	Mt Buninyong	Y	Bianca
26	July 16	Lal Lal	Lal Lal	Y	Bianca
27	July 21	Eureka St	Ballarat East	N	Mattius
28	July 24	The Gong	Brown Hill	N	Roger
29	July 29	York St	Ballarat East	Y	Cr Jim
30	August 7	Mt Buninyong	Buninyong	Y	Tanielle
31	August 11	Jenkins Drive	Sebastopol	Y	Naomi
32	September 8	George St	Ballarat East	Y	Jack
33	September 30	University Drive	Mt Helen	N	Kevin
34	October 18	Pioneer Rd	Durham Lead	Y	Jeanette
35	October 21	The Gorge	Green Hill	N	Peter
36	October 24	Timbertop Drive	Mt Helen	N	Joan
37	October 25	Sovereign St	Mt Pleasant	N	Chris
38	October 27	Poverty Point	Mt Pleasant	Y	Stephen
39	October 28	Mt Buninyong Summit	Buninyong	N	Penny
40	October 30	Timbertop Drive & Greenhill Rd	Mt Helen	N	c/- Joan
41	November 3	Mt Buninyong	Buninyong	Y	Marlene c/- Pierre
42	November 21	Gear Avenue	Mt Helen	Y	Peter

43	November 24	Mt Buninyong Summit	Buninyong	Y	Casey
44	November 25	Mt Buninyong	Buninyong	Y	Joel
45	November 28	Clayton St	Canadian	Y	Rob
46	December 2	Ti Tree Rd	Dunnstown	Y	Phil
47	December 4	The Gorge	Mt Helen	Y	Peter
48	December 15	The Sanctuary	Mt Helen	Y	Kent
49	January 10	Sovereign Hill staff car park	Mt Pleasant	N	Jessica

5. Koala sighting mapping

The sightings were transferred to a locality map.



Koala observations: August 2018 to January 2020

Red Dot
Yellow Dot
Green Dot

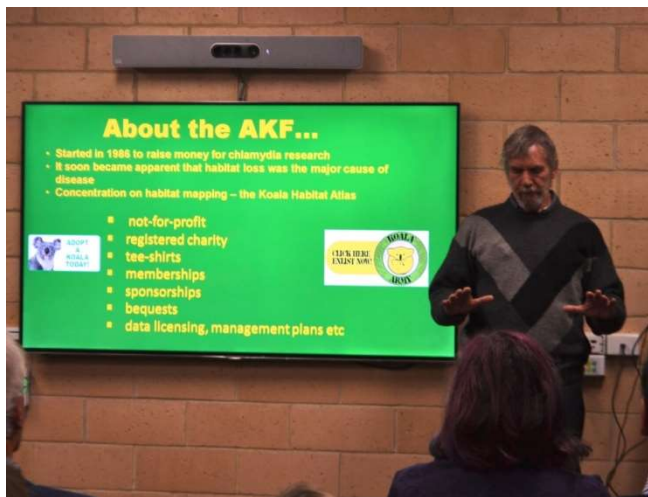
Image of Koala
Observed Koala
Deceased Koala

6. Koala Forum 2019

The Koala Forum was held on June 19th at Earth Ed featuring Karen Pohlner from WALA Animal Sanctuary and Dave Mitchell, Landscape ecologist for the Australian Koala Foundation.



Karen Pohlner



Dave Mitchell



Forum audience

"Do Ballarat's Koalas have a future" was the focus of the Koala Forum held at Earth Ed Centre Olympic Avenue Mt Clear Wednesday June 19th by the Friends of Canadian Corridor.

Karen Pohlner from the WALA Animal Sanctuary with over 30 years of Koala experience in the Ballarat and district said "Over my time I have observed the large drop in Koala numbers."

She said "If we do not act now, Ballarat will become an area without Koalas."

Ms Pohlner identified three key factors causing Koala deaths: “being hit by vehicles, dog attacks and habitat loss”.

Dave Mitchell, Landscape Ecologist with the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF), told the large audience that the only way to keep Koalas in Ballarat was to “protect their habitat”.

Mr Mitchell said the AKF had worked with the City of Ballarat in the 2000’s to create the award-winning Koala Plan of Management and that the City should actively:

- Enforce the aims of Koala Plan of Management and resolve conflicts with other Overlays
- Enforce the Dog Regulations
- Educate the community
- Support an ongoing Koala monitoring program
- Work with Parks Victoria to support revegetation of Canadian Forest (Woowookarung)
- Work with the City of Ballarat and Parks Victoria to support wider revegetation projects to reduce fragmentation and provide habitat connectivity
- Work with Vic Roads to provide underpasses or similar to allow free movement of Koalas

“To keep Koalas in Ballarat the Koala Plan needs to be re-energised” was the message FoCC President Mr Bob Hartmann emphasised. Eight Koalas was the tally of the Friends of Canadian Corridor’s Citizen Science count taken between August 2018 and now. Mr Hartmann said “these very low numbers are indicative of the trouble Ballarat’s Koalas are in.”

The City of Ballarat did the hard work in creating the Koala Plan in the 2000’s. At that time there was strong community support from the then-Mayor down. Even tourists were brought into the act of planting Koala trees in Ballarat East’s gullies.

Mr Hartmann said the key components of the Koala Plan: Revegetation, Protection, Monitoring and Education need to be understood, then refocused and supported by the City of Ballarat and the community. For instance, the City’s “Your guide to living with koalas” advice to home owners was recently withdrawn and not replaced. It should be updated.

The forum ended with the clear message that to KEEP KOALAS IN BALLARAT’S FUTURE, the community and the City of Ballarat must re-energise the protection of Ballarat’s dwindling number of Koalas now.



The Courier June 15th 2019

City of Ballarat Council meeting told there is only eight Koalas in the corridor

“Of Canadian Corridor koala sightings around Woowookarung since last August, in total, they believe they have seen eight individual koalas, a figure greeted by shock when mentioned at last week’s full council meeting,” You mean 80?” asked one councillor “No, eight,” replied Bob Hartmann of FoCC. He freely admits there are limitations to their “citizen science”. But as an engaged and serious local community group, they may well have the best picture of the existential threat facing koalas in the area.

The Courier Sat June 15th 2019

ABC local radio features Koalas

The FoCC's Koala advocacy was the focus of the local ABC morning program on Tuesday June 17th 2019 with presenter Gavan McGrath. The interview can be heard at:

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/ballarat/programs/mornings/koalas-in-canadian/11221588>

7. Koala Monitoring 2020

A University of Melbourne student and the Australian Koala Foundation are collaborating with FoCC to conduct koala surveys in Woowookarung and Union Jack Reserve and adjacent watercourses in April and October this year.

To enable the monitoring, support from the City of Ballarat, Parks Victoria and land owners will be required where the monitoring crosses their respective land.

Further support will be required in terms of: identification of a senior City officer responsible for the Koala Plan of Management, and some support for the establishment of survey transects.

The monitoring may provide an opportunity for koala numbers to be an indicator in the City of Ballarat annual environment report along with koala habitat changes, either increase or decrease.

This is an opportunity to go beyond rhetoric into genuine accountability utilising the koala as an icon species.

8. Midlands Highway and the corridor roads.

The Midlands Highway runs through the Canadian wildlife corridor as it traverses Mt Buninyong.

The highway has been identified for a safety upgrade with upgraded intersections, passing lanes and safety barriers. Approximately 300 native trees will need to be removed to achieve the safety improvements.

The FoCC saw the upgrade as an opportunity to reduce Koala road deaths on the highway. The FoCC has participated in the Regional Roads Victoria "Midlands Highway Upgrade" working party. The FoCC has advocated for the highway to be designated a wildlife corridor crossing between Scotsburn Hall and Buninyong with:

- Appropriate signage
- The provision of wildlife barriers beside the highway on steep slopes to reduce wildlife entry to the highway
- The provision of overhead animal crossings
- Application of white road topping to increase night visibility of animal to road users.

Many of the Corridor's roads such as Recreation Rd have 100 kph speed limits. Future work should involve a koala and wildlife friendly approach to all speed limits in the Corridor.

The Woodmans Hill Precinct Plan adopted in 2015 also identifies the wildlife corridor and contains suggested wildlife crossing works for when the Western Highway is reconstructed in years to come.

9. Habitat restoration

The FoCC began koala habitat restoration in the centre of Woowookarung Regional Park in 2017 by planting Koala friendly trees to restore the linkages between isolated pockets of koala habitat. In 2019 a monster tree planting was held with 149 community tree planters planting 1100 trees.

JULY 21, 2019 - 3:00PM

Digging deep to help reinvigorate Ballarat's koala corridor



Ashleigh McMillan

Community

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Digger's It: Three-year-old Mason Hutchin at the Friends of Canadian Corridor monster tree planting in Woowookarung Regional Park on Sunday. Picture: Adam Traffant

One thousand new eucalypts were planted over the weekend, to help Ballarat's koalas turn over a new leaf.

More than 80 enthusiastic volunteers got dirty for a major tree planting operation with the Friends of the Canadian Corridor (FoCC) on Sunday.

The area at Woowookarung Regional Park was previously covered in bluegums and pine plantations. But the trees planted over the weekend will now create a corridor for koalas to roam between re-vegetated land.

FoCC secretary Jeff Rootes said many volunteers lived nearby and the event was creating community "ownership of the park".

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10. Warrenheip Growth Zone

The recent decision by the City of Ballarat not to designate the Warrenheip escarpment as a growth zone is welcome news for the Canadian Corridor and the wildlife that depend on it. The Warrenheip escarpment contains significant koala habitat and is the connecting link between the Creswick Forest, Pryor Park and Woowookarung Regional Park.

11. Living Corridors and Ballarat East Plan

The City of Ballarat "Living Corridors and Ballarat East Plan" present the opportunity to bring the Ballarat Planning Scheme into line with the Koala Plan and to clarify and codify protection of: koala habitat, waterways and the natural environment.

FoCC hopes that the Living Corridors Plan will protect the natural values that exist on the Warrenheip escarpment. The future management of Pryor Park and the associated open space of Mt Xavier Reserve should be recognised in the corridor plan. The koala habitat that exists on unused government roads in the area is a significant biodiverse asset, and should be subject to careful consideration for future enhancement of Koala habitat.

12. Appendix 1

An overview of the Ballarat City Council

Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management.

The Purpose of the City of Ballarat Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management is
“To provide for the long-term survival of koala populations within the City of Ballarat through the implementation of actions aimed at safeguarding the koala within its natural range within the City.”

The Koala Plan of Management was developed over a number of years with a community wide survey in 2002 and significant consultation and investigation leading to the release of the:

BALLARAT CITY COUNCIL COMPREHENSIVE KOALA PLAN OF MANAGEMENT (KPM), a joint initiative of the City of Ballarat, the then Department of Sustainability and Environment, Vic Roads, Ballarat Environment Network (BEN) and the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF).

Actions undertaken by the City of Ballarat that occurred before and after the release of the 2010 Plan have included:

- In 2008 a base line Koala Monitoring count was conducted.
- Ongoing support for COB indigenous tree nursery
- C137 VPO1 and ES05 Overlays implemented into Ballarat Planning Scheme (gazetted 2010)
- “Living with Koalas” pamphlet produced (award winning)
- Koala fencing rules enforced most of the time
- Applied dog rules – e.g. Jenola Court

Actions that are in the Plan and not yet enacted are:

- Habitat expansion
- Road signs and speed restrictions
- Environmental COB staff trained to capture treat Koalas
- Regular koala number monitoring
- 5-year agreement with AKF enabled
- KPM implementation committee enabled
- KPM Executive Officer funded and enabled
- Senior COB officer appointed with responsibility for KPM.

Implementation of the Plan has stalled since 2011 and has not received Council attention since.

The reasons for this stalling are several:

- One reason was the loss of koala-friendly active Councillors and of senior Council personnel with knowledge of the plan.
- Second, but not least was the then Department of Environment and Primary Industry losing its Koala focus as a result of budget cuts and a new Government focusing on Black Saturday recommendations requiring large-scale fuel reduction burns.
- Third, another koala plan partner Vic Roads was also impacted with budget cuts regionally and lost capacity.
- Fourth, involved the community organisation, Ballarat Environment Network being affected by direction and personnel change.
- In essence the 2011-14 period was characterised by environmental issues such as Koalas being sidelined within Koala Plans key stakeholders due to changes in those organisations’ priorities.

Around this time, as the Koala Plan was being quietly forgotten, many people on Ballarat’s east side became involved in another just-in-time rescue.

The proposal to sell off the Canadian Forest ex-plantation land had been made in by Department of Environment and Primary Industry in late 2012.

History now records that the FoCC campaign to establish a Multi-Use Forest Park was successful resulting in the establishment of the Woowookarung Regional Park.

The Park is in fact the biggest rescue of Koala habitat in recent local history. (Note of course the ex-plantation land needs to be replanted and to grow to provide the koala habitat of the future. That is occurring both naturally and with targeted tree-planting.)

The task for COB and FoCC is to bring those key organisations back to the table and implement the rest of the Koala Plan of Management!

