

BALLINA SHIRE COUNCIL – MEMORANDUM

MEMO TO: Executive Management Team
COPY: Andrew Smith
TRIM REF: 2016/58408
MEMO FROM: Ian Gaskell
DATE: 1 July 2016
SUBJECT: Technical assessment Notes

RMS Ballina Koala Plan, Section 10 Pacific Highway Upgrade.

1. Planning Issues:

- A number of properties nominated for restoration have existing dwellings and/or have an existing dwelling entitlement. The draft revegetation plans depict a number of properties are to be fully revegetated (e.g. Planting Areas 5-8). Council queries whether the subject properties are to retain their dwelling entitlements? If so, a range of issues need to be considered, e.g. Planning for bushfire legislation (which will restrict planting), domestic dog restriction, easements for power supplies etc
- The erection of the koala fencing along Wardell Road and the existing Pacific Highway are located outside of the Project Approval boundary. Legislatively how will this issue be addressed?
- Which Government Agency will have the responsibility of ensuring the rehabilitated lands are managed in perpetuity?

2. Environmental Issues

- It appears that the fenced section of the future local road network (Wardell Road and existing Pacific Highway) do not include any dedicated fauna crossing structures.

This will have a number of environmental impacts:

- (a) isolation of ground fauna on each side of Wardell Road and the existing Pacific Highway
- (b) as the only viable crossing point (the end of the fence) on the existing Pacific Highway is located in close proximity to the township of Wardell, fauna moving into this environment will be susceptible to domestic dog attacks
- (c) As is demonstrated by Figure 1, existing koala habitat occurs to the north of Buckombil Mountain Road. Based on the population predictions contained within the RMS's Ballina Koala Plan, an additional 20 koalas could be expected to occupy the planted koala habitat

8.4 Pacific Highway Upgrade - Erection of Fauna (Koala) Fencing.DOC

Due to this increase in population and the lack of fauna crossing structures, road kills to the north of the proposed fencing would be expected to increase. Such an outcome would be a major issue for Council, and

(d) Council's koala habitat mapping (Figure 2) confirms that a large area of the existing Pacific Highway, between Coolgardie and Wardell, does not contain the species habitat. Consequently, the justification for fencing the entire length of the road remains unclear.

- The environmental impact of establishing Koala fencing remains unknown. However, site inspections, when considering road safety, have confirmed it will require the removal of threatened species habitat and Endangered Ecological Communities.
- The existing culvert structure along the existing Pacific Highway does not provide an all-weather and safe passage for Koalas and other ground mammals, as it is located within a defined creek system. The system will require retro fitting prior to the handover of the road to Council.
- The vegetation mapping contained within the RMS Ballina Koala Plan is inconsistent with Council's vegetation mapping layer, the Koala mapping layer prepared by Steve Phillips and the RMS's previous vegetation mapping of the Study Area, undertaken by EcoSense Consulting (2007). This has direct implications for Koala movement corridors, the location of fauna crossing points etc.
- The RMS Ballina Koala Plan predicts the carrying capacity of planted Koala habitat equates to 1 koala per 3.17ha. This is in direct conflict with the estimation from Steve Phillips as to the carrying capacity of the landscape, which identifies a carrying capacity of 1 koala per 7.3 to 11.0 ha. The RMS Ballina Koala Plan does not explain this inconsistency.

3. **Civil Services Maintenance Issues**

- Although the RMS will construct the nominated koala exclusion fencing, it will be Council's responsibility to ensure the fencing and dropdown (escape structures) are maintained. This includes the provision for a 2 metre exclusion zone around the established fence.
- While the Koala fencing, inclusive of fauna crossing structures along Wardell Road, may be justified, the erection of the fencing is subject to landholder negotiations. If these negotiations are unsuccessful, and the exclusion fencing is not erected but the highway still proceeds, it is likely that Koala road strikes along Wardell will increase. Consequently, post construction, Council is likely to inherit a major management issue to then provide fencing or the like
- Council has recently adopted the Ballina Shire Koala Management Strategy. Under the Strategy, the geographic areas of Wardell, Coolgardie, Bagotville etc. are deemed to satisfy the Core Koala habitat criteria under the provisions of State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) No. 44. As a consequence, future Council infrastructure projects will be required to abide by the Strategy and SEPP No. 44.

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Therefore, the erection of koala proof fencing and fauna underpasses, associated with the current proposal, may set a precedence for future Council infrastructure projects.

Ian Gaskell
Environmental Officer

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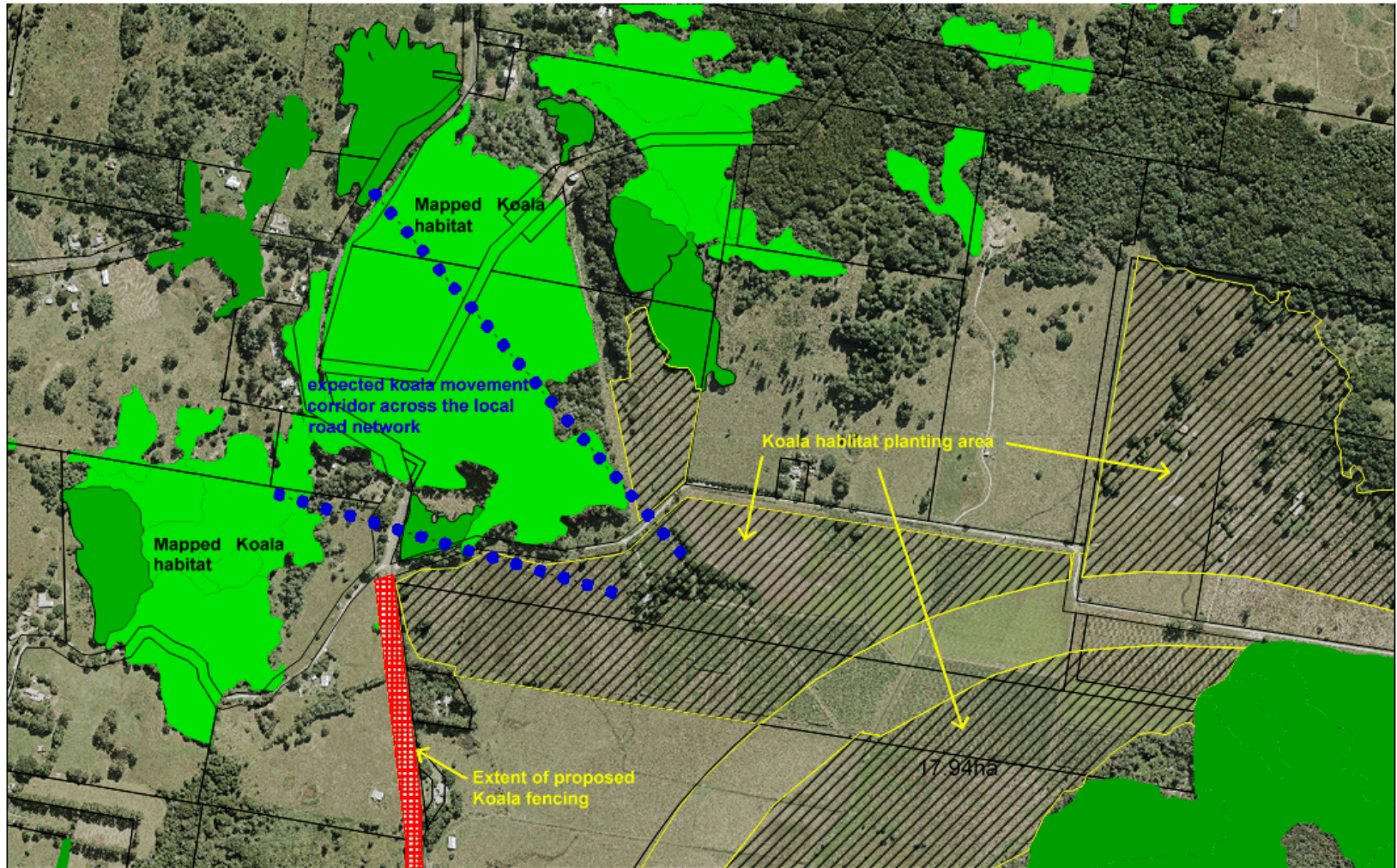


Figure 1: Highlights the extent of existing and future koala habitat to be located to the north of the proposed koala fence.

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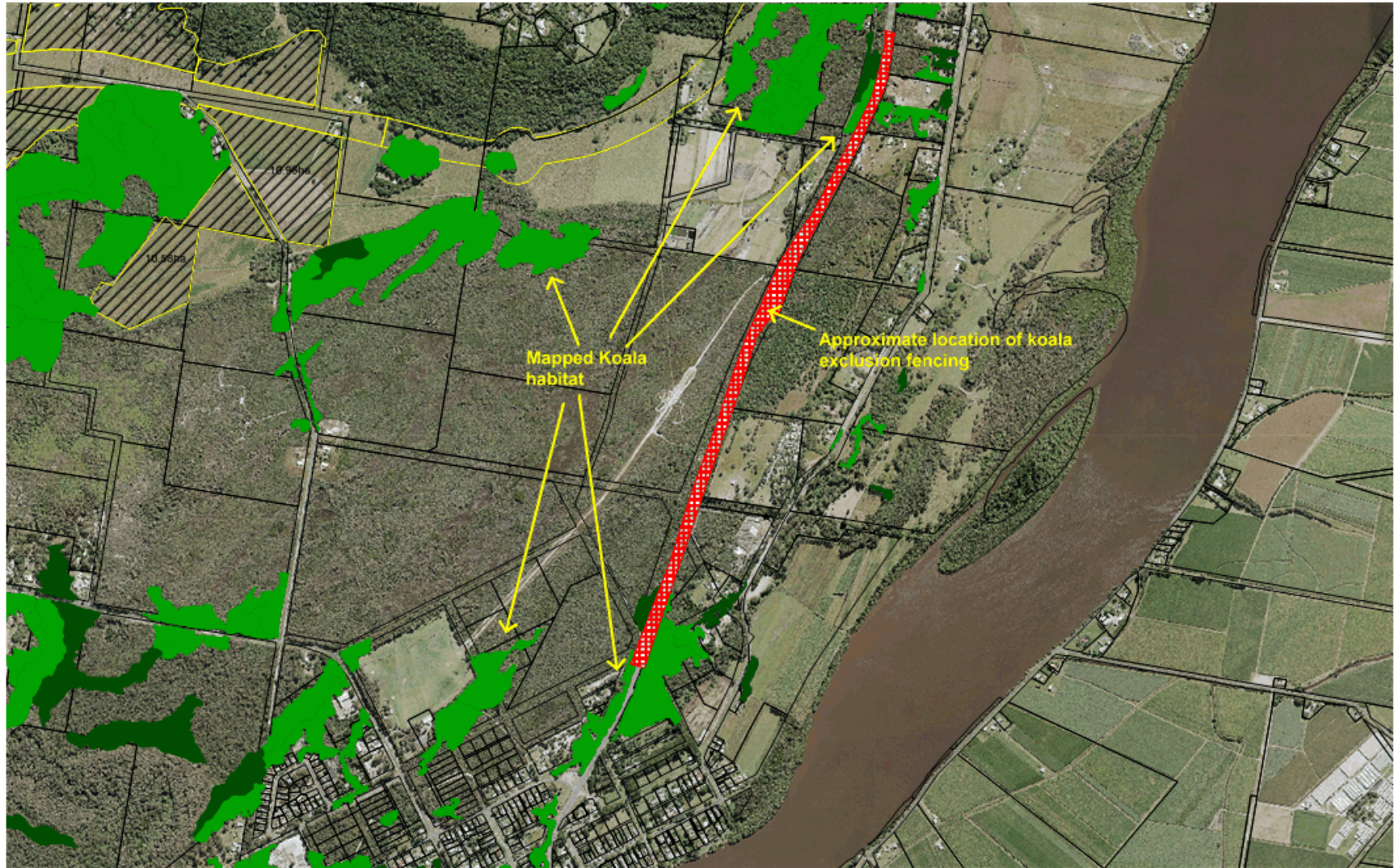


Figure 2: Highlighting the lack of mapped koala habitat associated with the existing Pacific Highway.