



## AUSTRALIAN KOALA FOUNDATION

*The international organisation dedicated to saving the koala and its habitat*

*Conservation of the wild koala and its habitat is of global significance*

10 August 2009

Lord Mayor Campbell Newman  
Office of the Lord Mayor  
GPO Box 2287  
Brisbane QLD 4001

Dear Lord Mayor Newman,

RE: KOALA CONSERVATION IN BRISBANE

On behalf of the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF), I write to you in the spirit of koala conservation and I do so most honestly because of the death of a tiny koala named Kuta who died on Friday last week.

I enclose her photo when she was alive and also in her post mortem. She was found by a resident of Kookaburra Street, off Gap Creek Road while he was walking on Mt. Coot-tha. She was named Kuta – the aboriginal word for Mt. Coot-tha. She is probably the progeny of the koala recently sighted on Gap Creek Road by the community but that Council's environmental consultants failed to find.

Coincidentally, I was looking at the number of koala trees that are going to be removed from the intersection of Kookaburra Street and Gap Creek Road at the time Kuta died. I write this letter in the hope that I can re-educate you on the environment and what is needed for the future of protecting it.

So you understand what's gone on here, let us get some history on the table:

**11 August 2006:** Letter from Cr. de Wit acknowledging my letter to the then Minister for the Environment, Ms. Desley Boyle regarding the impact of the upgrading of Gap Creek Road on koalas.

**1 September 2006:** Letter from Minister Boyle stating the road is "outside the mapped koala habitat areas that will be subject to specific conservation measures for koalas under the Koala Plan. It is also outside the koala habitat areas identified in the Interim Guidelines," she goes on, "Despite not being subject to assessment under the Koala Plan or the Interim Guideline, a best practice approach is strongly advocated in the Koala Plan where new roads or upgrades to existing roads are planned to occur within koala habitat.

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Undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment will enable the Brisbane City Council to assess the potential impact on the road on any koalas that reside in the area and take the appropriate action to avoid, minimise or mitigate these impacts". The Minister suggested that AKF contact Ms. Louise Smyth who subsequently did nothing.

**2 November 2006:** Email from me to Ms. Donna Marshall introducing her to Mr. Geoff Clare of the EPA on the advice of Mr. Ross MacLeod, Minister Boyle's advisor. Mr. Clare advised that the "Beattie Government has funds for mapping". Mr. Clare also advised that no decision should be made until the maps have been updated "because currently it may be inadequate and that will lead to a less than satisfactory decision."

**6 November 2006:** Report on the meeting with BCC Feasibility Team where the community outlined their concerns for koalas, other wildlife and tree removal.

**17 July 2007:** Letter from me to the Police Commissioner suggesting a permanent speed camera on Gap Creek Road. His reply basically saying "No" to that idea.

**10 April 2007:** Letter from me to you, and your reply (dated 13 June 2007). You acknowledge AKF's help and support, "The data and mapping the AKF has provided to the feasibility study team is certainly appreciated and is being reviewed. The environmental study will aim to further confirm and add to the data of the AKF."

**January 2008:** Gap Creek Road newsletter stating that 70% of the community surveyed support "a moderate upgrade". Key recommendations were "protect and rehabilitate habitat" and a reduction in the risk of road fauna mortality.

**March 2009:** Cr. de Wit's Pullenvale Perspective stating the project is now in Stage 1 and Stage 2 and a budget of \$14 million has been allocated. This is the first time the community has heard of this and it would appear the project has gone from modest to something more than modest.

**June 2009:** Gap Creek Road Community Newsletter stating that regarding Fauna Protection, "Discussions are continuing with key environmental organisations and the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to determine final fauna protection measures."

**23 June 2009:** Letter from me to Minister Kate Jones asking her what involvement the EPA now has in Gap Creek Road upgrade.

**4 August 2009:** Minister Jones replies, stating that the "comments in the Gap Creek Road Community Consultant Update ....are not correct.. While individual DERM officers may have been contracted, DERM has had no formal involvement with the Gap Creek Road project." Minister Jones also goes on to say, "I understand that safe fauna crossings and speed control devices are a design feature of the Gap Creek Road project." What she doesn't know is that these will only apply to the Brisbane Forest Park section of the upgrade.

Tonight, there is a community meeting in Brookfield regarding Gap Creek Road and I understand Councillor de Wit will be there. I usually go, but this time, I am not sure I can stand to attend one more meeting where the community is treated with impunity, just like the trees that are planned for removal.

The community's frustration levels are high. When I visited many residents in the area last Friday, they said they feel "powerless" to do anything about this upgrade. As a visionary Lord

Mayor, why is this so? Perhaps because their feeling, like mine during this community consultation, has been one of dismay: minutes are inaccurate, never taken or given to the community at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour (like today); information requested is never given. Tonight the community will insist that their involvement be respected but I expect this too will be ignored.

One member of the community wrote to me this morning regarding the tree removal on Kookaburra Street. "The proposed design is only marginally more safe than the existing road layout, with right-turning traffic out of Kookaburra Street having poor visibility to the left."

I think you would feel the same. Will you, as a matter of urgency Lord Mayor, bring your engineering eye to this section of the road. I think you will be absolutely shocked at its ineptness.

I also wish to draw your attention to the tree removal and the cost to the city in matters of carbon sequestration.

AKF's Chief Ecologist Dr. Douglas Kerlin wrote this for me this morning:

"The AKF has taken measurements of five of the trees around Kookaburra Street. On average, each of these five trees contains the equivalent of 3.75 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. If the carbon in these trees was to be offset by planting tube stock, a single, newly planted tree would require 80-100 years to sequester an equivalent amount of CO<sub>2</sub>. If council wished to replace this carbon tomorrow, 7500 saplings are required to replace just a single tree earmarked for removal. Offsetting approximately 20 trees (considered significant) due to be removed at Kookaburra Street would require planting 150,000 tube stock saplings!"

In fact approximately 50 trees are due for removal on this one section alone. In short, replacing these trees means planting in excess of 300,000 saplings on top of your promised 2 million. Are you prepared to guarantee to me that this will happen?

Dr. Kerlin has just completed his Ph.D in Europe and had the opportunity to visit the Eden Project as I will later in the year when we both attend the next Kyoto Protocol conference in Copenhagen. Here we will present our data on carbon storage in koala trees. The AKF has been gathering case studies for a side event in Copenhagen where we will highlight the need to protect existing trees rather than the 'easy option' of replanting, and Kookaburra Street is a classic example. If only we could highlight Brisbane City Council's commitment to the protection of koala trees, particularly when little Kuta has suffered so much (the post mortem said her stomach was empty).

The Eden Project in Cornwall, UK, is a fantastic example of revegetating and rejuvenating a decrepit disused china clay pit. The Eden Project showcases the value of plants to humankind, and educates on the need to live sustainably. While it may be a great idea to rejuvenate the quarry site on Mt. Coot-tha, we must not lose sight of the fact that Brisbane Forest Park is already an area of tremendous environmental value. The destruction of Brisbane Forest Park does not hold with the ideals of the Eden Project. Bisecting Mt. Coot-tha for either short term gain of motorists or potential development at Dillon Road is short term thinking and I do hope we can encourage you to take a larger view.

I find it ironic that your Council is having "visioning" about Mt. Coot-tha and it is clear that there are moves afoot for a sustainable Eden-type project on the mountain. Many developers over the years have approached the AKF to be involved in such a vision and, by and large, we support the idea. What we say to these developers and to you now is that Mt.

Coot-tha is already a natural biosphere. The presence of Kuta shows that even koalas continue to inhabit this beautiful piece of bushland despite numerous challenges like cars, dogs and - the worst threat of all - lack of political acknowledgement. Lord Mayor you are on record that you do not believe koalas are on Mt. Coot-tha. Kuta must dispel that myth.

AKF is not actually against the upgrading of Gap Creek Road. We can understand the need to seal the road and reduce dust. We can see the need to upgrade the bridge. We can even see the need to make Kookaburra Street safe. What we cannot see, however, is the need for intense removal of trees (no matter how many advertisements Council puts in MX magazine with Mary saying she knows how to protect trees - the community and I have met with Mary on several occasions and how she could endorse the removal of these significant trees is just shocking to us all). I resent the comments from Ms. Donna Marshall that working with the AKF would be a conflict of interest. We have tried repeatedly to offer support, but it is received with defensiveness, lack of vision and a business as usual attitude.

I think it is also important in this very frank letter to send you an article regarding the lack of tender by the Queensland Government for the koala mapping in Southeast Queensland. Interestingly enough the same company who was the recipient of this tender were the consultants who did not find koalas in Gap Creek Road. Whilst I appreciate the population is small and discrete, the consultant's complete inability to acknowledge the community finding this koala is unacceptable.

I seek your intervention. I ask that you take the picture of Kuta home to Mrs. Newman and your family. I want you to understand why the community fights so hard to protect not only the koalas but all biodiversity in this area. Frankly, I do not understand why it is so hard.

You have the opportunity of working with the Australian Koala Foundation and the community to ensure that Mt. Coot-tha, Brisbane Forest Park and Gap Creek Road could be jewels in the crown for Brisbane tourism into the future.

Kuta is a godsend for those of us wanting to impress on you that koalas are in the vicinity.

I expect you to do more to support them.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Tabart OAM  
Chief Executive Officer