

Sandy Point Koala Action Project

Sandy Point's *Koala Action Project* is part of WHiSPA (Wildlife and Habitat in Sandy Point Action) Project, which is about protecting our native wildlife and improving their natural habitat in and around Sandy Point.

The Sandy Point Koala Action Project, through support from the Victorian Government, aims to address issues facing the local koala population through:

1. Collecting information to help understand the situation of our koalas
2. Involving the community in looking after koalas
3. Restoring and revegetating areas for healthy and connected koala habitat
4. Creating a community action plan for managing koalas long term



Koalas in Sandy Point then and now – what we know



Historical information has been collected from community members, reports and records to try to understand the origins of the Sandy Point koala population and its genetic health and diversity. The population is known to have ebbed and flowed over the years in response to environmental and population pressures and changes, at times booming and at other times dropping low. Some koalas may have been brought into Sandy Point from other areas in the past.

Genetic research on 11 individuals (in 2018) suggests that the Sandy Point koalas are likely to be a remnant population of the larger South Gippsland koala population, which is a population with important conservation significance. But because the Sandy Point koala population has been isolated for a long time, it suffers from a low level of genetic diversity.

Population counts in September 2017 and October 2019 counted around 30 koalas each, although the population is likely to be much higher (estimated at 50). Koala scats have also been found across a wide range of sites across town and surrounding rural areas.

Koala habitat was mapped across the town and rural areas over 2017/18. Habitat was found to be overall in fairly good condition with little sign of overbrowsing occurring currently. There are good patches of habitat but connectivity is low with animals travelling across farmland and on roads to move between patches of bush.



Recommendations for the koala project

Recommendations from the assessment and the genetic study were:

1. Protect 'mother' trees in the reserve from koala browsing and collect seed from them for propagation
2. Plant trees to provide wildlife corridors and food sources / habitat
3. Monitor koala population numbers and the health of trees for signs of overbrowsing and population changes
4. Do more investigation on genetics to gather more data
5. Look at options to increase genetic diversity of the koalas (e.g. such as connecting to other populations through revegetation corridors, assisted koala migration)
6. Monitor and maintain the existing habitat and new plantings to ensure they are successful

Sandy Point Koalas Action Plan Summary

A Koala Action Plan was developed, capturing community input from workshops and recommendations from the investigations. The Action Plan (summary below, and full version in the report) can be used by the community and updated periodically to track koala actions.

	Done or underway / ongoing	Future actions
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community koala count 2017 and 2019 Look up historical records on koalas Genetic study of scats (Fed Uni) Map habitat and plan for revegetation 	<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Contact agencies, experts and koala managers to share findings of the project and ask for assistance with next steps Connect with local groups (Waratah / Walkerville) and find out about other local koala populations. More work to understand genetics, health & options for future management Seek advice on how to manage & monitor population change and risk of overbrowsing Community koala count (repeat biannually) Apply for grants to fund ongoing work <p>Ideas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Work with other agencies / Council (re fencing, veg clearing) Seek advice on genetic diversity of local coast manna gums
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create koala info brochure Interpretive signs about koalas / wildlife Collect names of interested volunteers Promote koala awareness/ projects at community events / markets Educate about tree planting: what, when, how 	<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Wildlife road signs (underway) Include koalas and other wildlife in broader Sandy Point signage project <p>Ideas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> “Adopt a tree” program to water trees for people who don’t live here permanently / for weeding / maintenance of reserve sites Encourage dog awareness and control, especially at night (broader issue linked to other SP groups as well)
Wildlife care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise money to support wildlife carers Raise awareness of wildlife carers & their contact details Injured wildlife response: set up a “phone tree”, train volunteers 	<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit and train more local volunteers to be involved in wildlife rescue, care and transport Continue to fundraise to support local wildlife carers Monitor / manage wombat mange issues (Di Cooper has offered to coordinate this) <p>Ideas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop information point to record injured / dead koalas (Di Cornwell has started this) Idea to promote & fundraise for wildlife carers by offering visits to their shelter (with donation) e.g. on one day in school holidays
Reveg and on-ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and protect mother trees Design and build tree guards for reserve planting Give away trees to town residents Offer funding for planting habitat corridors Collect and grow seed for planting projects 	<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Make a maintenance plan for planting sites (underway) <p>Ideas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community volunteers collect and grow seed for future plantings Managing reserve rather than letting coastal tea-tree take over Investigate using fire as a management tool & explore partnerships for cultural burning

These actions belong to the Sandy Point community, and they will only happen where people are willing to get involved and make things happen!