

# Sandy Point Koala Action Plan (Feb 2019) – Summary

## Sandy Point Koala Project

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

- citizen science surveys and other assessments (population numbers, genetics, health) to better understand the issues facing koalas
- developing a community action plan for practical strategies to improve the health and long term sustainability of the Sandy Point koala population
- doing on-ground actions to protect existing vegetation and plant new vegetation
- community awareness raising and education to promote actions to protect koalas



## What we know about history and genetics of koalas in Sandy Point



Historical information has been collected from community members, reports and records to try to understand the origins of the Sandy Point koala population and their genetic health and diversity, to help to inform management decisions. The population is known to have ebbed and flowed over the years in response to environmental and population pressures and changes, at some times booming and other times dropping low. Some koalas may have been brought into Sandy Point from other areas / island populations 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. Because the Sandy Point koala population has been isolated for a long time, it suffers from a low level of genetic diversity.

A population count in September 2017 counted 31 koalas, although the population is likely to be much higher. Evidence of koalas (scats) have also been found across a wide range of sites across town and the rural areas surrounding it.

## Koala habitat assessment and recommendations

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. The four main recommendations from the habitat assessment are to:

1. Protect 'mother' trees in the reserve from koala browsing and collect seed for propagation
2. Do revegetation projects to provide wildlife corridors and food sources / habitat – in the coastal reserve, on private land, and encourage landholders to plant trees. Consider landscape-scale habitat connections in the future.
3. Scope out and plan for future maintenance requirements of plantings to maximise the likelihood of success of revegetation projects
4. Plan for monitoring the health of trees for signs of overbrowsing



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## Sandy Point Koalas Action Plan

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

Table 1. Summary of Koala Action Plan actions

	Done or underway / ongoing	Future actions
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community koala count 2017</li> <li>Look up historical records on koalas</li> <li>Genetic study of scats (Fed Uni)</li> <li>Map habitat and plan for revegetation</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community koala count (repeat)</li> <li>Get advice on how to manage &amp; monitor population change / risk of overbrowsing</li> <li>Work with other agencies / Council (refencing, veg clearing)</li> <li>More work to understand genetics, and investigate options for improving gene-flow with other koala populations</li> </ol>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create koala info brochure</li> <li>Collect names of interested volunteers</li> <li>Promote koala awareness/projects at community events / markets</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate property owners about tree planting: what, when, how</li> <li>“Adopt a tree” program to water for people who don’t live here</li> <li>Dog control, especially at night</li> <li>Road signs</li> <li>Info / interpretive signs about koalas / wildlife at Sandy Point</li> </ol>
Wildlife care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise money to support wildlife carers</li> <li>Raise awareness of wildlife carers &amp; their contact details</li> <li>Injured wildlife response: set up a “phone tree”, train volunteers</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit more local volunteers to be involved in wildlife rescue / care</li> <li>Monitor wombat mange issues</li> <li>Develop information point to record injured / dead koalas</li> </ol>
Reveg and on-ground works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor and protect mother trees</li> <li>Design and build tree guards for reserve planting</li> <li>Give away trees to town residents</li> <li>Offer funding for planting habitat corridors</li> <li>Collect and grow seed for planting projects</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community volunteers collect and grow seed for future plantings</li> <li>Make a maintenance plan for planting sites</li> <li>Managing reserve rather than letting coastal ti-tree take over</li> <li>Investigate using fire as a management tool</li> </ol>