

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT CONSENTS IN NSW

Organisation: Friends of the Koala Inc.

Date Received: 3 June 2024

Submission for Zombie DA's

I am writing on behalf of Friends of the Koala (FOK), a not-for profit organisation founded in 1996 committed to conserving koalas, preserving their habitat, increasing awareness and advocating for koalas. FOK is the primary licensed koala rescue and rehabilitation organisation, and only dedicated koala hospital in the NSW Northern Rivers.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a submission on the Historical Development Consents NSW on behalf of Friends of the Koala.

Koalas are already facing various threats, such as habitat loss, disease and climate change. Further development in their habitat exacerbates these threats and could lead to a decline in what is a low density population, with numbers constrained by habitat available and ongoing losses from threats.

A key concern for Friends of the Koala is the impact that zombie DA's have on existing koala habitat in the Northern Rivers, and, in fact, anywhere else that Zombie Developments affect koala populations.

Of major concern is the effect on koalas in the proposed Wallum Estate development at Brunswick Heads. The proponent, Clarence Properties, intends to completely remove 103 critical koala food trees and intend to replace these with 54 saplings. These saplings would take at least 20-30 years to reach a point where they could provide sufficient habitat and food source for the existing koalas that use the Wallum heathland either as a home ground or a corridor to reach other areas of habitation.

Koalas are seen as an umbrella species, so it follows that protecting this habitat for the koalas also protects other vulnerable and endangered fauna and flora.

Recent bushfires and continuing habitat loss has had a huge deficit impact on the nation's koala populations, rendering them to be officially listed as an Endangered Species.

The situation for koalas in the area is now made even more dire by the extensive bushfire (730 ha) in the Tyagarah Nature Reserve in late 2023, which has burnt the majority of koala habitat in the Reserve and adjacent burnt areas. This fire has burnt from Byron Bay north into the proposed development area of Wallum Estate close to Brunswick Heads.

In fact, there was an official sighting of a koala moving slowly from nearby bushland in this area on 19/10/23 late at night. This koala was likely displaced or escaping from the bushfire in the Nature Reserve.

The majority of these DA's would likely not meet the current planning laws under the EP & A Act and I believe that changes could be made to the law to address these problems by clarifying the circumstances in which a historical development is considered to have lapsed requiring the Development Application to be reviewed for current approval.

Environment and planning laws in NSW should be improved to ensure that the environment is given protection and to ensure that environmental assessment addresses the cumulative impacts of biodiversity loss associated with all developments.

An urgent moratorium is called for now on all zombie DA's as it is too late to reverse the biodiversity loss after the development has been allowed to proceed.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to make this submission on behalf of Friends of the Koala. We hope that a moratorium can be achieved to enable local matters of national environmental significance to be considered before the loss to diversity is too great.

Dale Viola
Area Coordinator Byron Shire