

_____Koala Koalition_____

_____EcoNetwork – Port Stephens Inc._____

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Martins Creek Railway Ballast Quarry Expansion

We write to object to the expansion of the Martins Creek Railway Ballast Quarry Expansion to Daracon's Amended Development Application, number SSD-6612.

The Koala Koalition EcoNetwork Port Stephens (KKEPS) has been formed very recently by individuals and representatives from around 30 local organisations interested in the environment in Port Stephens, and specifically to try to help to conserve koala habitat in Port Stephens. Many have been members of environmental groups for over 20 years and have a broad range of experience and qualifications.

All members are very aware of the decline of koala populations and threats to those remaining across Port Stephens. This extremely high risk of extinction was made abundantly clear in the NSW Parliamentary Enquiry into Koala Populations and their Habitat released in June 2020 after a year-long Inquiry. "It must be a gamechanger for the government to protect more koala habitat if they don't want to see the koala become extinct before 2050, said Committee Chair and Greens MP Cate Fahrman." [PC7 - Koala populations and habitat - Report 3 - 30 June 2020.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

We stand by local residents represented by MCQAG (<http://www.mcqag.org>) who will be impacted:

"if approved the hourly and daily scale of trucking operations proposed from the site will see a return of the trucking madness residents experienced between 2007 and 2019. Daracon and Umwelt are continuing to flagrantly ignore the amenity and social impacts that (if approved) will be imposed on residents who live adjacent to the site (from blasting, dust and industrial noise) and on residents whose villages and residential streets will be turned in to Daracon mining haul roads."

We are concerned that Daracon has been found to be acting illegally on that site already by extracting far more than their licence permits: <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6402560/daracon-shuts-martins-creek-quarry-amid-consent-stoush-after-court>. This imbues little confidence that they will abide by any restrictions imposed on them, including the tonnage, hours of operation, or having wildlife spotters on site during clearing. Daracon's clearly bad performance and the Land and Environment Court's decision and Dungog Council's stance should be taken into account as part of this decision process.

Furthermore, we object on the basis that continuing destruction of habitat currently occupied by koalas. We have only just completed a submission to the Federal Government to uplist koalas in NSW from merely Vulnerable to Endangered. The koala is under much more threat since so many thousands died in the Black Summer Fires. Every small breeding population is now vital to be conserved if they are to survive in the wild.

The [EIS](#) by Monteath and Powys clearly shows that wildlife corridors will be removed by the quarry expansion on figures 36 and 37 (pp 155-6) and that 51 hectares of habitat will be cleared.

The [Biodiversity report](#) by Conacher Consulting Pty Ltd records that koalas have been consistently found on the site and recorded from 2007 – 2020 (p99). It also records that suitable koala habitat containing koala preferred food trees “The Project Area is located within the Central Coast Koala Management Area (KMA) and the Barrington Area of Regional Koala Significance, identified in the Koala Habitat Information Base (NSW DPIE 2019).” (p. 100). “..the site is also likely to contain Core Koala Habitat as a resident population of the Koala is considered to be present, as evidenced by recent sightings and historical records of a Koala population (refer to Figure 4.8). While the requirements of this SEPP do not apply, as the proposal is a State Significant Development Application, should the project be approved, it is recommended that a Management Plan be prepared to provide measures for the management of Koalas on site, in keeping with the intent of the SEPP”.

It seems that the koala polygon overlaps the phascogale polygon and that these species are also present and will be impacted:

Little Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta pusilla*); • Speckled Warbler (*Pyrrholaemus sagittatus*); • Varied Sittella (*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*); • Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*); • Squirrel Glider (*Petaurus norfolcensis*); • Grey-headed Flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*); • Yellow-bellied Sheath-tail-bat (*Saccolaimus flaviventris*); • Eastern Coastal Free-tailed Bat (*Micronomus norfolkensis*); • Little Bent-winged Bat (*Miniopterus australis*); • Large Bent-winged Bat (*Miniopterus orianae oceanensis*); • Greater Broad-nosed Bat (*Scoteanax rueppellii*); and • Southern Myotis (*Myotis macropus*).

The koala occupancy polygon of 21.1 hectares should be conserved and not included in the extension of the quarry plans. A management plan must be prepared and threats mitigated for the entire site.

The Biodiversity Report relies on Steve Phillips Site Assessment Technique (SAT) to conclude that koala activity is low (p.100) but Witt_2020 “Real-time drone derived thermal imagery outperforms traditional survey methods for an arboreal forest mammal” argues that Drones are much more efficient and reliable than spotlighting and SAT. In fact, SAT rated the least reliable method. The most reliable method is scat sniffing dogs and DNA investigations to scientifically conclude how many koalas are there. <https://www.wwf.org.au/ArticleDocuments/353/pub-study-port-stephens-koala-population-18Jan21.pdf.aspx> This report identifies and there is a limited gene flow of koalas in Port Stephens due to living in isolated patches of habitat. In order to preserve allelic richness, corridors are essential.

Koala and other threatened species’ sightings by local residents seem to have been ignored by the expert that is used by the proponent. We find it very concerning that Steve Phillips (Biolink) seems to be the only expert used by every developer, government and council. His reports always conclude that while koalas have been passing through the “low activity” site, that they are not breeding there and that it won’t hurt to destroy that piece of habitat where koalas are clearly living (and feeding and breeding as they pass through) as it will be yet another insignificant impact. These continued impacts though do have a significant cumulative effect on the local koala populations that are understandably smaller in lower quality habitat suffering the effects of drought.

This is exactly happened with Sussan Ley’s consideration of his “independent” report on [Brandy Hill](#) even though there was photographic proof of hundreds of sightings from local residents, they were ignored. So was the truly independent report compiled by Ryan Witt et al from the University of Newcastle. It is extremely rare to spot koalas in the wild actually breeding, especially considering the investigations by researchers are done so spasmodically. There is no evidence left behind of the act,

apart from the clear evidence that there is a continuing population and sightings/photos of juveniles and mothers with back young.

The Port Stephens community is very passionate and outspoken about the environment. With another mine being proposed in Limeburners Creek to the east of Clarence Town, it is imperative that these mine extensions are not looked at in isolation, but in consideration of what else is happening around them in the local area. The NSW State Government must realise that destruction of koala habitat is inconsistent with saving koalas in the wild.

Under the NSW State Government's (weakened) biodiversity and conservation laws that were implemented in late 2017, it has been estimated that land clearing has jumped by a staggering 1,300 per cent, according to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) report released in April 2020. If this continues Koalas and many other species WILL be extinct as a direct result.

Every development/expansion decision like this is part of a cumulative effect - either a nail in the coffin or an opportunity to ensure the survival of our wildlife.

KKEPS have not received or made any political donations.

On behalf of KKEPS

Carmel Northwood

Convenor

31/7/21