

MEDIA RELEASE

Koala protection or mis-planned extinction? Council's last hooray!

Port Stephens Council has the power to protect a critical pinch point for koalas moving through the Tomaree Peninsula east to west, north of Nelson Bay Road; that is pending approval for the developer's bulldozer -- the decision will be made Tuesday 26th October. Local community groups, including Koala Koalition EcoNetwork Port Stephens and Tomaree Residents and Ratepayers Association, say this is a crucial decision for the last meeting of this Council.

We need to protect this koala corridor north of Nelson Bay Road to ensure koalas' unencumbered movement along the Tomaree Peninsula and not give way to developers' greed to gain a few more dollars at the cost of our wildlife.

At the corridor's neck at Bobs Farm, the multinational company Ingenia is seeking Council's approval to significantly change the previously approved 'Boardwalk' development. This will see the demise of a narrow band of Forest Red Gum and Swamp Mahogany between a dam and the proposed development, effectively preventing koala movement east-west.



The developer claims that Swamp Mahogany trees immediately north of the dam are a substitute corridor however they could not have ground-truthed their claim. Independent expert botanists have pushed their way through the dense wetland scrub, too dense and often too deep in water for koalas, and found no Swamp Mahogany. This is not a feasible corridor.

The proposed modified layout will reduce the corridor to just 5 metres wide between a dam on the Ingenia property and Tilligerry Creek. This narrow strip is under water during king tides and large rain events.

This is a critical 'pinch point' in the remaining east-west habitat corridor north of Nelson Bay Road. The extensive bushland south of Nelson Bay Road is too dry to be suitable for koala movement or habitat.

When The Boardwalk was first approved as a 'caravan park' in 2008, the Sunrise Village immediately to the south was not even proposed. Together these two developments now potentially create a fenced concrete jungle extending from Nelson Bay Road north to the wetlands of Tilligerry Creek, impossible for koalas to navigate -- unless the remaining corridor of koala-friendly trees is retained without barrier fencing.

We also call on the Council to investigate options with the State Government under the NSW Koala Strategy to work with the landholders to maximise their options for diversifying income while protecting koala habitat on their land, or alternatively compulsorily acquire the land.

This is Council's last opportunity to rectify the past inappropriate decisions permitted through a now rectified planning loop hole, which facilitated approval for a tourist park to morph into to a housing development on concrete slabs, with only two caravan spaces remaining to meet the planning requirements.

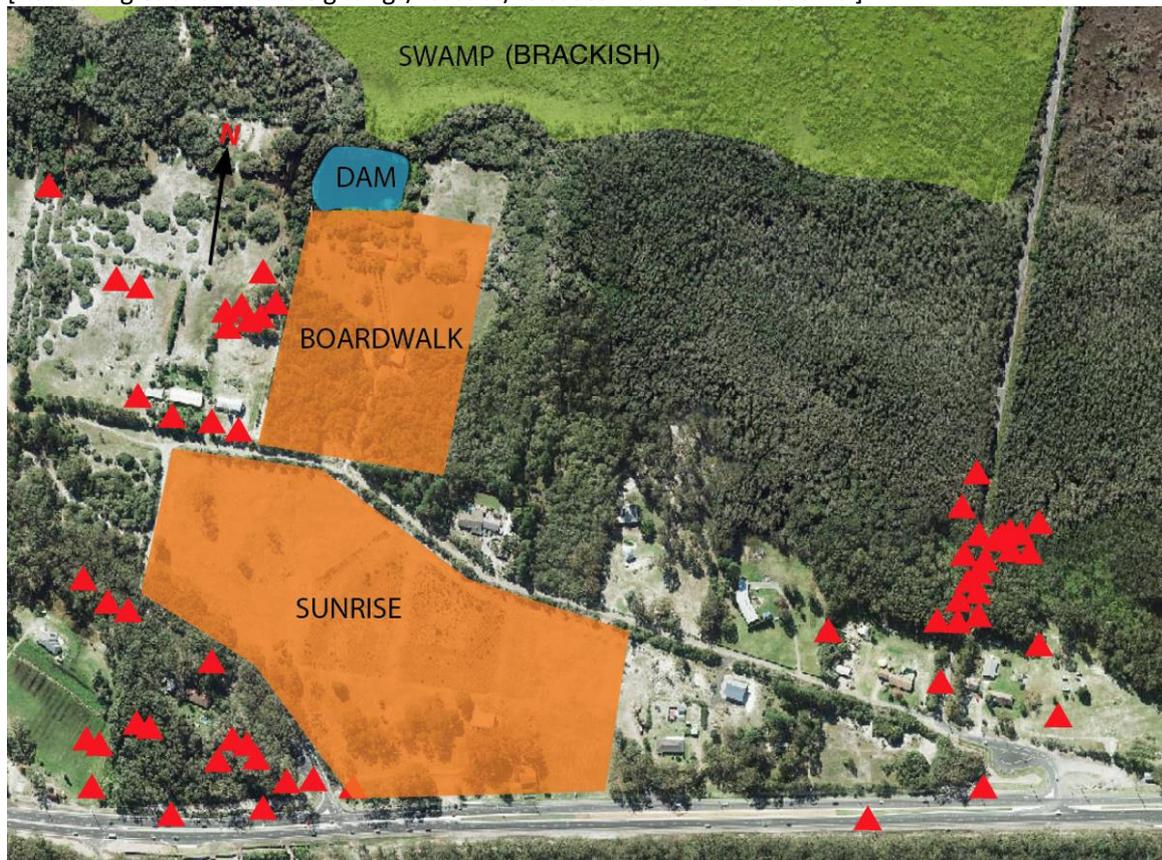
The people of Port Stephens appeal to Council to do right by koalas and reject Ingenia's proposed changes to The Boardwalk development, and to further consider retaining vital habitat to allow koalas and other wildlife to move freely between habitat to the east and west.

Ingenia's proposal seeks to convert approved short term caravan sites into lots for more permanent dwellings. We suggest that a reasonable 'trade off' for this would be for Ingenia to pull the development footprint back to the south to allow koalas and other native wildlife to move freely between habitat to the east and west.

Residents of 'The Boardwalk' would be able to enjoy the koalas using the corridor – surely a great marketing tool?

Aerial photo showing the position of The Boardwalk development, adjacent to the Sunrise Village with Nelson Bay Road immediately to the south.

[Red triangles show koala sightings/rescues/releases from BioNet records.]



North of The Boardwalk and its dam, a narrow impenetrable strip of bushes and trees, with no Swamp Mahogany, is being proposed as the koala corridor. It is impenetrable and often underwater. Further north brackish swamps and mangroves connect to Tilligerry Creek.

Concerned residents should make contact before Tuesday 26 October to:

PSC Mayor and Councillors on 02 4988 0255 or council@portstephens.nsw.gov.au – ask for your message or email to be forwarded to all Councillors.

Contact Ingenia - 1300 132 946 or use their contact form www.ingeniacommunities.com.au/contact/.

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