

29 January, 2020

Re: The management of the Inland Rail project by the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) and the Commonwealth Government. **Border to Gowrie (B2G) Section**

Good afternoon, my name is Theresa Tickell and I have been a resident of the Southbrook and Umbiram districts for the last 25 years.

As a community member of the area impacted by the Brookstead to Gowrie alignment, I am deeply concerned for the area's Native Koala Habitats. The largest threat to Koalas is habitat loss. Based on findings from two decades of research from the Australia Koala Foundation (published in 2017), it is estimated that only 20.8% of essential habitat remains in the Groom electorate. It is clear that Koalas are no longer vulnerable in this region, they are endangered.

For at least 25 years, there have been active koala support groups operating in the Eastern Darling Downs, caring for injured animals and creating new habitat by planting appropriate vegetation. Our local Landcare group has an annual distribution of trees for koala habitat and restoration. Many residents have purposely planted trees for a koala corridor to maintain and progress the region's population. This work is now in jeopardy!

Currently, the ARTC recognises koala habitats as identified by the Queensland Government's biodiversity and protected areas database called Wildnet. This database is significantly populated by the detailed on-ground study conducted in South East Queensland by Uniquist.¹ However, our area does not fall within the survey site locations, therefore, it is believed that the records in the Wildnet database for this region are scarce and resemble a brief desktop study.

Many residents have sighted Koalas at locations outside of those recorded on WildNet. Concerned members of the community have been trained by the respected Lockyer Community Action Inc. to conduct thorough surveys of Koala Scats in the region. The survey process is currently being conducted and numerous scat locations have been recorded for verification and entry into WildNet.

From our initial investigation, it is believed that a significant corridor may exist between Yarranlea and Athol. As per Queensland Globe database, it was confirmed that there are essential habitats at Yarranlea and Southbrook, with other areas also recognised as Matters of State Environmental Significance. So far, we have findings on both private properties and roadside verges at Yarranlea, Pittsworth, Paint Mine Road, Lintthorpe Road, Gietz Rd, Bushy lane, Purcell Rd and Athol School road, and I'm sure that there are many others that have been reported to the Landcare group. The current alignment significantly disrupts this habitat and corridor which leaves the Koalas at risk. With cuttings of 20 or more metres deep and embankments just as high gives the Koalas no chance of moving through their natural corridor, to their food and water sources. There is significant separation from their water source at Westbrook Creek.

A common solution to loss of essential Koala Habitat is relocation and offsets. These should not be considered an option due to the high mortality rates associated with this action. It has recently

¹ https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/88913/seq-koala-population-modelling-study.pdf

been reported that there has been a loss of more than 40% of the Koalas that were relocated at the Gold Coast due to development. Koalas are territorial and will always try to return to their home patch where they believe their food source remains.

A better alternative would be to align the rail through the Cypress Pine forestry where our Koalas do not live!

What proposal is in place for the protection of existing essential Koala Habitats and corridors?

In light of the recent catastrophic events of our bushfires, our Koala Habitats and Corridors must now be maintained to give the species a chance of avoiding local and possibly global extinction.

We are now on an international stage. With this heightened level of awareness, **everyone must do all they can** to sustain them. Generosity and compassion has come from all parts of the world, with children, adults and celebrities donating to the cause to save our wildlife.

The koala is officially Queensland's animal emblem, and it would be **IRRESPONSIBLE** of any government, government agency or developer to deliberately destroy the habitats.

There cannot be wanton destruction of Koala habitat in Queensland when the rest of Australia is desperately trying to save their populations. ARTC will risk **international condemnation** if they go ahead and destroy this essential koala area.

It seems hypocritical that our government has set up funds to support the care and rehabilitation of our koalas , and yet here, they have endorsed the destruction of it!

As you have heard today, this route was chosen in haste by a desktop analogy and provided a line on a map that was no better than a two year olds crayon drawing.

As this route is still in the feasibility stage, when will the costs be so great to the tax payer that it will not be feasible?

How much proof is needed to support a change of route to an area with more suitable soil and less impact on the people, lives, livelihoods, agricultural businesses and the environment?

Pittsworth was not given the opportunity of a public meeting prior to the announcement, but now we are collateral damage!

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 1 – Existing Essential Habitats

Essential habitat as per Queensland Globe can be seen in the blue shaded area on the right. The area to the left has also proven to be habitat for koalas with the recent collection of scats.



Figure 1, Recognised Koala Essential Habitat

This is the same area from ARTC website showing the destruction of the Koala Habitat due to the proposed corridor. A cutting of 20m or more is planned for this area, thus severing a significant portion of the Habitat.

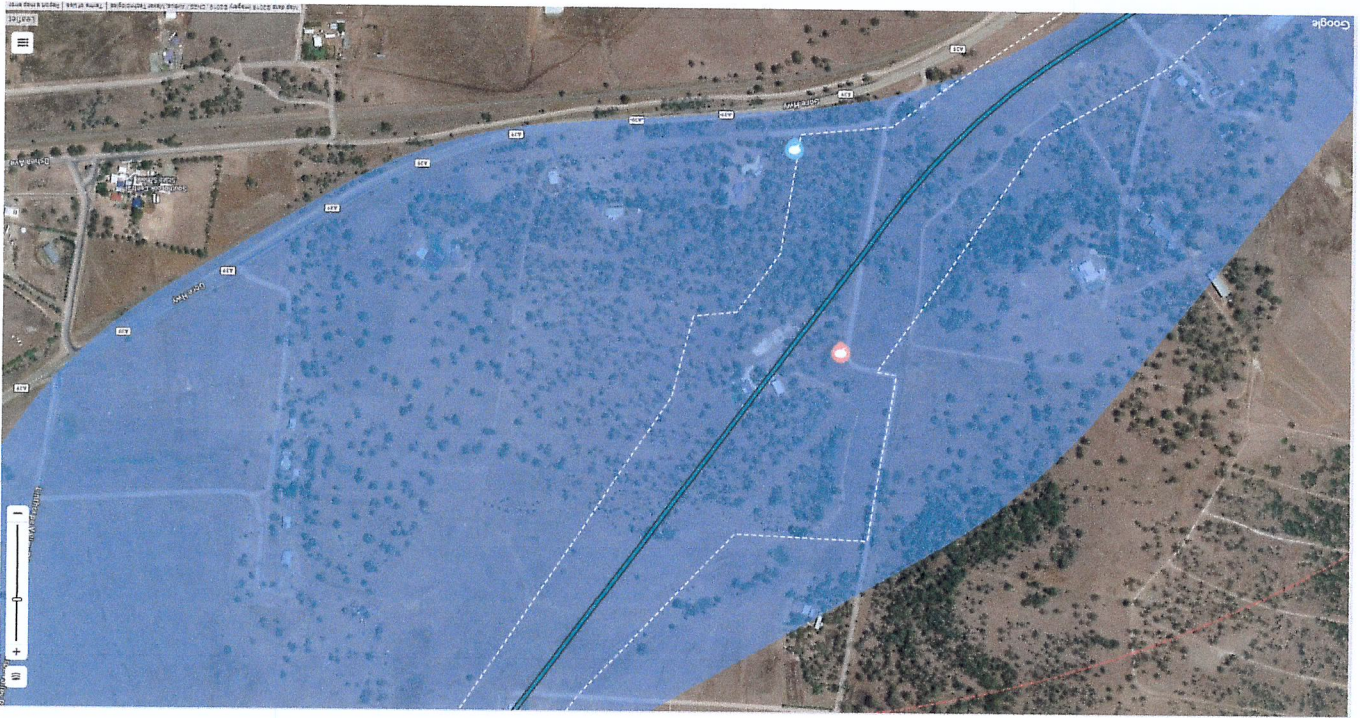


Figure 2, Proposed Inland Rail Corridor

Furthermore, the image below shows an Aerial View of Essential Habitat as identified in Figure 1.



Figure 3, Aerial View of Essential Habitat

The severe disruption to the habitat as shown in Figure 2 is further reinforced from the Artistic Impression of the final product displayed below.



Figure 4, Artistic Impression of Alignment

Koala sightings

Spot the koala scat ... (left) Lockyer Community Action secretary Hanneke Nooren explains how to recognise the difference between koala, possum and wallaby scats at the Yarranlea workshop.



Who's there? ... From the safety of its mother's arms and the comfort of a river red gum fork, a curious joey stares down at the humans below.

Reports of koala sightings have increased in recent months, presumably a combination of the dry conditions and greater public awareness.

The drought has significantly reduced the nutrition available to koalas in the leaves of their favoured eucalypt trees.

They appear to be concentrating in locations where trees are in better condition, such as in and around homestead gardens and on the edge of townships.

Pittsworth residents walking along Boundary Road on Sunday afternoon, for example, were able to offer water to a thirsty koala.

The koala, sitting at head height in one of the Landcare greenbelt trees planted in 2000, was desperate enough to come lower down the trunk and accept water offered to it by hand.

A workshop held at Yarranlea on Sunday November 3 found five koalas, including one joey, within 100 metres of the homestead.

Fencing at the Yarranlea solar farms may also be impacting on the movement and location of the local koalas.

On that day, Lockyer Community Action committee members Gordon Claridge and Hanneke Nooren shared their knowledge and experience of koala surveying over the past five years with the landholders, particularly those concerned with the potential impacts of the Inland Rail route through the Pittsworth district.

Koala sightings can be logged on the Pittsworth Landcare website or by using the app attached to the webpage.

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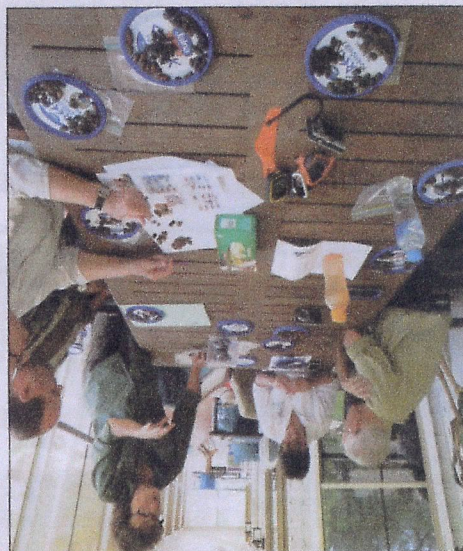


Figure 5, Pittsworth Sentinel Article Regarding Koala Scat Surveying

Appendix 3 – Koala Sightings

Below are examples to support the claims of Koala essential habitats at the specified coordinates as shown below.



Figure 6, Sighting of a Koala with Recorded Date and Coordinates



Figure 7, Sighting of Koala with Recorded Date and Coordinates