



Koala News



Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Bayside Branch

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KOALA ROAD CROSSING INFRASTRUCTURE

THE MAINTENANCE ISSUE

At last! The Queensland Main Roads Department has budget to create fauna crossings and erect fauna guide fencing on busy state roads in South East Queensland. There is always a catch though – it appears that the Queensland Main Roads Department does **not** have budget for fauna infrastructure maintenance. It has to be accepted that the cost of the actual construction of these crossings will eventually be dwarfed by the cost of their maintenance in perpetuity, and yet this is the commitment that must be made. Fauna infrastructure should be treated no differently than any other type of road infrastructure that requires specific maintenance actions on a regular basis.

As an example, the consequences of poor maintenance at the reasonably new fauna underpass on Redland Bay Road near its intersection with Boundary Road are obvious.

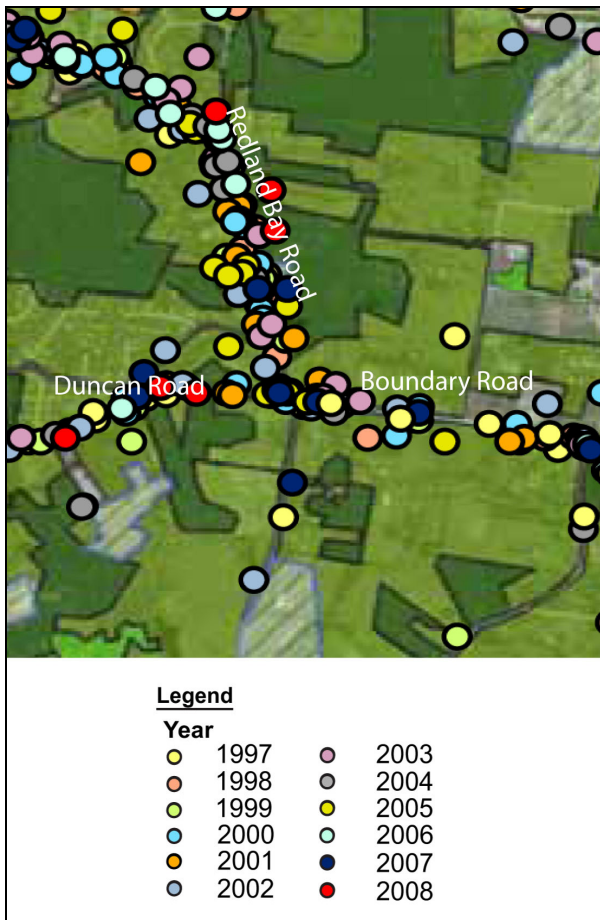


This fauna underpass was created by retrofitting an existing drainage culvert and installing guide fencing. Instead of facilitating safe and effective Koala movement, the underpass on Redland Bay Road is a small, wet, culvert with inadequate fencing and no maintenance. The entrance areas are wet and surrounded by rushes and long, rank grasses. Koalas being semi-arboreal rather than semi-aquatic will not use the underpass. Koalas also do not like travelling through dense ground cover and would prefer to find a way to access the nice, dry, clear road surface to reach the other side.

To make this underpass effective, the approaches to the underpass location must be dry and clear of weeds. The vegetation here should be slashed regularly, weeds should be managed and silt build-up that causes water ponding needs to be removed.

DERM's Koala Safety Fencing and Measures Guideline states that for underpasses "*vegetation is retained up to the entrance/exit of the underpass but does not obstruct the access to the structure or the view to habitat beyond the underpass by animals entering the structure*". However, it is not certain how this requirement is to be enforced over time.

The importance of providing safe and effective crossing points for Koalas in the Redland Bay/Boundary Road area cannot be understated. This is the location that links the northern high-nutrient, alluvial Koala habitats in the Redlands to the extensive continuous bushland habitats in the south-west of the city. The high number of Koalas that have traditionally resided in and/or moved through this area is demonstrated by the appalling Koala road death statistics for Redland Bay, Boundary and Duncan Roads shown on the following Figure for the period 1997 and 2008 (as presented in the Redland City Koalas and Roads Action Plan Version 1.1).



There is a real problem here for us all to be wary of.

Impact assessment studies for developments and road upgrades often affirm that the installation of a fauna crossing will reduce the potential impacts of the proposal on native animals, and particularly on Koalas, to acceptable levels. Where developments are assessed and approved on this basis, the regulatory authority needs to ensure that provision has been made for their maintenance.

It is not enough to install the infrastructure and walk away. The infrastructure will not be effective without maintenance and wildlife **will** be adversely affected.

KOALAS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A University of Queensland School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management PhD student, Christine Adams-Hosking, presented her research on the potential impacts of climate change on Koala populations to the Senate Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's Koalas in May. Her research has modelled the optimal areas for Koalas under future climate change predictions, and it is not great news.

As inland areas heat and dry, the cooler and wetter coastal habitats of eastern Australia will gain importance for Koalas, increasing competition for these highly valued habitats with a group of notorious coast-hogs – US!



WATCH OUT

As you drive around the shire over the next few months keep a sharp eye out for koalas. It is breeding season and koalas are on the move seeking to mate.

Residents also need to control dogs particularly at night to allow the koalas to move freely.

If you would like to contribute to future editions of the Koala News, please contact Paulette Jones paulette@biodiversity.tv

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and/or contributors and are not necessarily those of the Society.