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**KINGS FOREST RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISION – KOALA PLAN OF MANAGEMENT
ADDRESS – SUSIE HEARDER, ANIMAL JUSTICE PARTY CANDIDATE, TWEED**

As the Animal Justice Party candidate for Tweed, I am delighted to be here today and thank the organisers for this opportunity to present my views about the Kings Forest Residential Sub-division.

My name is Susie Header and I have lived in the Northern Rivers area for 25 years and have been actively involved with a number of animal and environmental organisations for several decades.

In preparing for my talk today, I have spoken with a number of concerned stakeholders and I have spent time reviewing the related and documented history surrounding this proposed sub-division which dates back many years, and from the outset included mapping area errors.

I have noted that during the public exhibition of the modification request between June and August 2017, 1,647 of the 1,664 submissions lodged, were in fact objections. This is a very strong result. Tweed council also objected and OEH also raised valid and legitimate concerns.

The requests for modification and supporting information submitted by the applicant raises many concerns and still does not instil adequate or sufficient confidence, although some progress has been made in achieving environmental protections.

This site includes approximately 32 ha of primary and 181 ha of secondary koala habitat including support for the Tweed and Brunswick Rivers Endangered koala population, as listed under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and comprises 144 individuals across 4 discrete sub-populations.

The NSW Recovery Plan confirms the loss and degradation of habitat as the most significant threat facing koala populations.

It is apparent that the main areas of concerns revolve around three key areas and I would add my own voice to these concerns.

- It is very obvious that the offset planting of 27 ha of koala food trees is unclear and un-resolved. Legally binding agreements which satisfy all stakeholders must be secured.
- Prior to the commencement of any construction, all entrance roads through environmental protection zones must have under-passes. If fencing only is installed, koalas and other wildlife will be cut off from their natural corridor for many years.
- The Cudgen Paddock (golf course), was always intended to form part of the wildlife corridor. Fencing this golf course would prevent koalas from accessing their food trees. Fencing should instead be secured around the urban areas which abut the golf course to enable unimpeded access for koalas and native wildlife. This has been a condition of approval from the earliest Director Generals Environmental Assessments.

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Environmental management plans must be approved before any vegetation clearing occurs and the approval of the Koala Plan of Management does not override this requirement.

The offsets are to be provided OFFSITE, specifically, the 27 ha of koala food trees to be originally planted in Cudgen Nature Reserve. The applicant has however still not approached either council or other relevant authorities to discuss any alternative site as a contingency in the event the site does not suit all of the 27 ha offset. It is imperative that a site is secured for this 27ha offset before any construction commences. This condition of approval has been in place since the earliest approvals for the project, which required dedication of lands to TSC and OEH from 2011 / 2013.

In planning matters the onus must be on the applicant to provide sufficient information to demonstrate how they would monitor, avoid, minimise, mitigate and manage all identified/known, and all potential risks and impacts.

When considering any development or modification where nature, natural resources or animals are likely to be impacted, we should always be guided by the 'Precautionary Principle' and ere on the side of caution.

In the case of the Kings Forest Sub-division, a cautionary approach is essential. The area has suffered two fires destroying large areas of habitat and so koala numbers at this point in time are best guess. Our threatened, endangered and seriously at risk koalas and other wildlife cannot afford for us to get this wrong. Soon, their depleted populations will fall below a threshold which will not enable us to sustain any populations. We simply can't afford to lose any more of these precious and unique species or their habitat on which they are totally dependent.

Like many, I look forward to the day when animals, and environmental entities like Australian forests and water catchments are granted the legal status of 'personhood' in their own right, affording them legal rights as a 'person' and 'individual'.

Until then, we must remain united and use the laws we have, as inadequate as they are, to protect our environment and animals for current and future generations, against inappropriate developments, the most damaging of which involves the destruction of forests and habitat, and land clearing with deforestation and logging.