

Koalas at Cape Otway

Cape Otway Koalas - Timeline

Koala overabundance at Cape Otway Timeline of events

- 1920s-1980s – koalas translocated across Victoria.
- 1981 – Koalas introduced to Cape Otway area, which had preferred habitat for koalas. Manna Gum woodland on private land covered approximately 450 hectares.
- Mid 2000s habitat started to become over-browsed by koalas. A lack of predation or hunting pressure also contributes to the increase in population density.
- Late 2000s – Concerns raised by local community about koala numbers, over-browsing and tree impacts.
- 2013 – Reports indicate poor koala health at Cape Otway. Population densities reached up to 20 koalas per hectare. The Koala Technical Advisory Committee and Independent Panel of Experts considered the situation and the Department prepared emergency welfare plans.
- 2013-2014 – Three emergency welfare interventions conducted. Healthy koalas tagged and released, unhealthy koalas euthanized to prevent suffering, healthy females fertility controlled. Over-browsing by koalas had significantly reduced the condition and amount of Manna Gum habitat.
- 2014-2015 – Slight recovery of habitat post welfare interventions, however koala density remains high.
- March 2015 – State Government pledged to proactively manage koala density issues and be open and transparent with community.
- March 2015 – Expert panel of scientists established by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water Lisa Neville.
- April 2015 – Cape Otway Koala Management Actions developed and released.
- May 2015 – First recommended action, a koala health assessment was completed and results confirmed further action required to manage the welfare of koalas.
- July 2015 – Consultation with the panel of expert scientists on the next management actions.
- August 2015 – Suitable site for a trial translocation located following habitat modelling as per the Management Actions.
- September 2015 – Welfare actions undertaken with 395 koalas assessed, 341 released, 166 females fertility controlled, 36 koalas translocated with radio collars, 24 released to capture location as a control group with radio collars. Unfortunately, 54 koalas humanely euthanized due to ill-health.
- October 2015 – Initial results of the trial translocation are positive indicating the translocation area in the Great Otway National Park is suitable for Cape Otway koalas.
- November/December 2015 – A large-scale translocation of 448 healthy koalas from Cape Otway to the Great Otway National Park. Monitoring of the trial translocation group and control group until the end of August 2016.
- December 2015 – Fortnightly surveillance monitoring of the large scale translocated koalas undertaken until February 2016.
- February 2016 – Comprehensive ARI monitoring and recapture of trial translocation group and the control group undertaken after release for four months.
- May 2016 – A two-week fertility control and health check program undertaken with 259 koalas captured and assessed. 246 were female, 184 healthy females fertility controlled. Ten koalas were in poor health and these were humanely euthanized to prevent further suffering. 249 healthy koalas released at site of capture.
- June 2016 – Additional location survey of trial translocation koalas conducted by ARI to assess survival and broader koala management.
- August/December 2016 – continued monitoring of trial translocated koalas.
- November/December, 2016 – A two-week fertility control and health check program undertaken with 343 koalas captured and assessed. 95 healthy females were fertility controlled and 236 koalas and 54 back young were translocated from Cape Otway to the Great Otway National Park. 28 koalas were humanely euthanised due to significant health issues and genetic abnormalities There were no orphaned back young during the delivery of the program.