

# Koalas take centre stage at Pottsville

Koalas took centre stage at Pottsville last Saturday at an information afternoon which was attended by more than 100 people including representatives of community groups and Pottsville residents.

Northern Rivers Guardians president Scott Sledge said: 'The purpose of this event was to empower the community with the facts surrounding the imminent extinction that Tweed Coast koalas face'.

In his talk, mayor Gary Bagnall read to the crowd the historical records of some of the koala hunts.

In 1924, 5,494 koalas per day were trapped or shot every day for the whole year on the east coast.

Another year 600,000 koalas were killed in Queensland, which is approximately equal to the total number of koalas left in Australia today.

'On our Tweed coast every single koala is now of great significance. We are fighting for remnants to keep them from the predicted extinction in around 10 years,' said mayor Bagnall.

Koala expert and leading ecologist Dr Steve Phillips was the keynote speaker. His focus was on the significance of the Black Rocks sports field and surrounding areas of habitat as the last stronghold for the Pottsville Wetlands-Black Rocks koala population cell.

Dr Phillips discussed the devastating effects of fires over the last decade which have been the major cause of a 50 per cent decline in koala numbers on the Tweed Coast.

Based on statistics available from previous fires of a similar intensity, he expects that between 33-60 per cent of koalas may have perished in the Christmas Day 2014 Pottsville Wetlands fire.

With an estimated 35 koalas in this area prior to the fire, Dr Phillips emphasised that strong assertive action is essential for the recovery of the surviving koalas.

Dr Phillips said 'It is the (Black Rocks) sports field area from which recolonisation of the habitat to the north (Pottsville Wetlands) will primarily occur'.

He made an impassioned plea to the audience for 'the community to put aside their differences and think only of the very real likelihood of a localised extinction event 'occurring in your backyard in your lifetime'.

He advocated 'a moratorium on development and future use of the Black Rocks sports field site until this critical cell ideally recovers to more sustainable levels'.

'Koalas not only face threats from fire, vehicle strike and dog attack, but also bureaucratic ineptness and a whole lot of apathy', said Dr Phillips.

He expressed concern at how divisive the koala issue had become and that 'where the debate is polarised the focus is diminished. People then lose sight of what is important'.

Cr Katie Milne spoke about why she and some other councillors oppose the Black Rocks sports field as a suitable location for a men's shed and provided an update on her investigations into an alternative site at the North Pottsville Caravan Park, which most members of the Pottsville and District Men's Shed executive have indicated is their preferred option.

Other speakers included Lindy Smith who provided details of the uncertainty of the future of Tweed Crown lands and the Tweed Local Environmental Plan. David Norris and Lyn Dickinson provided details of the koala sightings and activities which adversely affect koalas at the Black Rocks sports field. For further information phone 0423 267 555.

**David Norris and Lyn Dickinson , Pottsville**