

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Announcement: Geoff Cousins AM in Byron Bay to address koala luncheon on 27 September, Save the Koala Day

Byron Bay, 16 September 2024

Friends of the Koala operates the largest Koala Hospital in the region but unfortunately is struggling to keep its doors open due to lack of funding. Their work, however, is essential and must continue to give us all hope for the survival of the koala in the region. Just in the last couple of months two female koalas have been spotted, both hand-raised as orphaned joeys by Friends of the Koala volunteer carers. Both raising their own joeys for multiple years and contributing to the continuation of their species. Wendy lived to the ripe old age of 20 and Enya is just 9 years old. <https://friendsofthekoala.org/enya-the-koala-a-story-of-hope> <https://friendsofthekoala.org/the-wild-story-of-wendy-the-koala>

Friends of the Koala is looking for new ways of raising funds to ensure its continued existence and is excited to announce a very special guest speaker at its inaugural Save the Koala Day luncheon, an initiative which aims to raise funds and awareness of the plight of koalas in the Northern Rivers.

Geoff Cousins, a well-known, successful businessman has added successful environmental activist to his impressive track record of achievements during the past twenty or so years.

Cousins has taken on three major environmental fights and won: he helped knock back a \$2 billion pulp mill; a gas export hub and considerably reduced the size of the Adani coal mine which was set to become the largest coal mine in the world in the middle of a World Heritage area in QLD. He now has set his sights on fighting the NSW Forestry Corporation, an institution in NSW destroying koala habitat as we speak.

This is good news for koalas in NSW. Cousins doesn't like losing and chances are, he won't.

Quote: *"The government should end native forest logging in the state, and particularly inside the boundaries of the Great Koala National Park. I have been moved to re-engage in politics as a result of reporting about the operations of the Forestry Corporation."*

Quote: *"The state's Forestry Corporation is increasing logging before the park is finalised and ripping to pieces the very areas that the koalas need for habitat and food. It takes about 150 years for a forest like that to regrow to where it is today, if the loggers cut it all to pieces, it doesn't matter when you create the park. It's not going to save animals that are already listed as endangered."*

This of course is true for all areas of conservation value in NSW currently threatened by development, regardless of their location. The Great Koala National Park, while of utmost importance, is not the only habitat that needs protecting, a fact we are only too aware of in the Northern Rivers.

Quote: *"There are many more areas in NSW, including the Northern Rivers, which are of high conservation value and need to be protected if we want to save the koala from extinction."* said Geoff.

Habitat is also fragmented and requires private and public initiatives to address the urgent need for quality, connected koala habitats and corridors. Geoff's wife is leading by example, she has purchased a property in the Byron hinterland to help create koala habitat by planting many hundreds of koala food trees.

Quote: *“We are thrilled to welcome Geoff Cousins to our luncheon and his focus on saving koalas from extinction in NSW.” said Silva Everaers, General Manager, Friends of the Koala. We have been fighting for koalas in the Northern Rivers for almost four decades, have distributed close to 1,000,000 trees to local landholders through our nursery and have rehabilitated and released over 2000 koalas back into the wild. We would never give up the fight to save koalas in the Northern Rivers but are in desperate and urgent need of funding to be able to continue to operate our Northern Rivers Koala Hospital and other habitat and koala conservation initiatives. Mr. Cousins’ focus on the issue of koalas in NSW has the potential to propel our work of protecting and increasing koala habitat, koala numbers and improve health and research outcomes, so the koala can be taken off the endangered species list.”* Silva Everaers, General Manager Friends of the Koala.

The luncheon: Up to 120 people will gather for a Save the Koala Day luncheon, 27 September 2024 at Crystalbrook Byron Bay to mark the day and raise funds for koalas. There will be an auction and raffle with amazing items and prizes with all proceeds going to Friends of the Koala’s Northern Rivers Koala Hospital. For more information and to buy tickets visit: <https://friendsofthekoala.org/save-the-koala-day-lunch>.

People who can’t attend are called on to become a Friend of the Northern Rivers Hospital to help save koalas survive into the future: <https://friendsofthekoala.org/friends-of-the-northern-rivers-koala-hospital/>.

- ENDS -

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For further information and photos visit our online media centre:

<https://friendsofthekoala.org/media-centre>

BACKGROUND

Friends of the Koala is committed to protecting and conserving koalas and their habitats in the Northern Rivers region. Through their tireless efforts and with over 240 volunteers, they provide 24/7 rescue, veterinary treatment, rehabilitation, community education, habitat restoration and advocacy for koalas. However, preventing accidents in the first place is crucial to ensure the long-term survival of these beloved creatures. For more information or to make a donation, please visit www.friendsofthekoala.org.

CONTEXT/FACTS

Why are we holding a fundraising luncheon and why is our work important and should be continued?

- Koalas are on the brink of extinction in NSW, the ACT and in QLD.
- For almost four decades Friends of the Koala have worked on critical, on the ground activities to conserve habitat and protect koalas individually and as a species across the local government areas of Ballina, Byron, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed covering a 10,000+ sq. km area.
- Friends of the Koala has adopted a holistic approach which has proven to be especially effective. The work covers:
 - 24/7 koala rescue service
 - The Northern Rives Koala Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre
 - Groundbreaking koala research
 - Habitat protection and restoration
 - Community engagement and education
 - Advocacy.
- With 240+ volunteers contributing over 75,000 volunteer hours per year, Friends of the Koala keep operational costs extremely low. Therefore, donations received go much beyond their net dollar value.
- Friends of the Koala tends to hundreds of sick, injured, and orphaned koalas each year, more than any other Koala Hospital in New South Wales, Queensland, or Victoria.
- The Northern Rivers Koala Hospital initiative aims to raise \$500,000 required annually to keep the doors of the hospital open. The services are free to the community, but it costs an average of \$5,000 to rehabilitate and release a koala. The onsite hospital is adjacent to the Koala Rehabilitation Centre and has increased koala survival rates by 40%.
- <https://friendsofthekoala.org/help-us-keep-the-doors-of-our-koala-hospital-open>