



MEDIA RELEASE

30 June 2016

KOALAS TO THE RESCUE FOR CASH STRAPPED HUNTER REGION BOTANIC GARDENS

Prime Koala habitat near Raymond Terrace has proved an unlikely financial saviour for the cash strapped Hunter Region Botanic Gardens.

Hunter Water has committed to providing the Gardens with an annual sponsorship of approximately \$50,000 using its proceeds from the sale of biodiversity credits to be provided by the Office of Environment and Heritage, in return for a commitment to maintain and improve the 92 hectare reserve.

The Gardens sit on Hunter Water land in the Tomago Sandbeds catchment, and Hunter Water is developing a 'BioBanking' arrangement with the NSW Government where 'biodiversity credits' are paid in return for protecting the land's important ecosystem, which includes a koala habitat.

Hunter Water's Interim Chief Executive Officer Jeremy Bath said the partnership was a win for the Gardens, Hunter Water, the environment, and local koalas.

"Hunter Water has supported the Botanic Gardens since its formation thirty years ago, providing financial and in-kind support to help the Gardens grow into one of the most important and popular tourist and education facilities in the region.

"Hunter Water supports the Gardens due to their position above the Tomago Sandbeds, undoubtedly one of the Hunter's most important drinking water storages.

"The Gardens have faced an uncertain financial future for years, and this sponsorship finally provides them long term security, while at the same time protecting drinking water and koala habitat," he said.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter Scot MacDonald MLC described the scheme as a win for local conservation.

"BioBanking is one of the most effective tools we have outside of the national park and reserve system for conserving bushland, and the proposed BioBanking of this site will provide long term habitat protection."

Hunter Region Botanic Gardens Chairman Kevin Stokes said the sponsorship will allow the Gardens' volunteers to preserve native plant species and the ecosystems that support endangered fauna.

"Hunter Water has been a great supporter of the Botanic Gardens during the past three decades, and has on several occasions helped keep us going with a series of emergency grants.

"The Botanic Gardens is well equipped to manage the BioBanking reserve, and welcomes the opportunity to permanently protect this important habitat.

"We appreciate the generous support of Hunter Water, and the efforts of Port Stephens Council, Hunter Councils, GHD, Bloomfield Group and Rio Tinto in investigating the opportunities BioBanking provides.

"The concerns of our 150 volunteers about the future of the Gardens can now be laid to rest," he said.

Nick Kaiser | 0411 485 204 | nick.kaiser@hunterwater.com.au