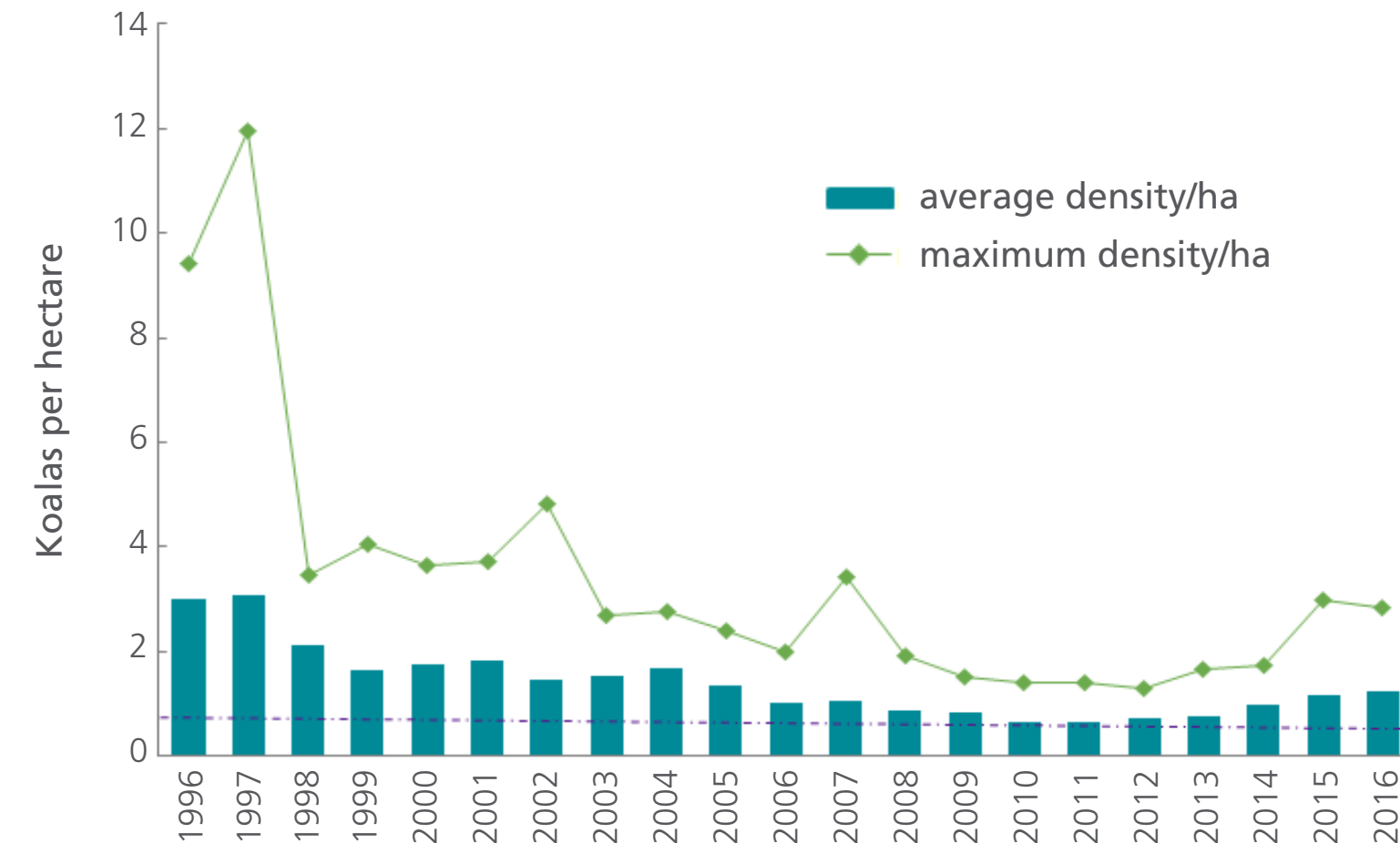


Average and maximum koala density at sites in the Cygnet River catchment



Project Update 2016-17

Kangaroo Island Koala Management Project

Summary

- » Aim is to reduce koala damage to trees by reducing koala numbers to a sustainable density (estimated 0.75 koalas per hectare)
- » >12,700 koalas sterilised since 1996
- » >15,000 trees planted to restore vegetation
- » >400 large overbrowsed manna gums collared to prevent koala access
- » koala numbers halved from 27,000 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2010 but have now increased.

Background

In the 1920's, 18 koalas were introduced to Kangaroo Island (KI) due to concern they would become extinct on the mainland from hunting, disease and habitat loss. Tree damage from koala overbrowsing was first recorded on KI in 1965, and by the early 1990's significant overbrowsing damage was evident in the Cygnet River valley. Overbrowsing occurs when koalas consume leaves to such an extent that the canopy is devoid of foliage and the tree eventually dies.

Images left to right: Manna gum damaged by koalas in 2002 and the same tree in 2008 recovering following koala sterilisation in the area.



For further information

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Kangaroo Island



Government
of South Australia

Impacts of overbrowsing

Large areas of manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis* v. *cygnetensis*), the koala's preferred food tree, have been lost on KI through overbrowsing. Manna gum grows along rivers and is important habitat for native bees, pardalotes and honeyeaters. The loss of these trees causes erosion along river banks, affecting water quality. Natural regeneration of manna gum is restricted through grazing by stock and native herbivores and a lack of disturbance (particularly fire).

Other native tree species eaten and damaged by koalas on Kangaroo Island include:

- » SA blue gum (*E. leucoxylon*)
- » red gum (*E. camaldulensis*)
- » brown stringybark (*E. baxteri*)
- » messmate stringybark (*E. obliqua*)
- » swamp gum (*E. ovata*)
- » peppermint box (*E. odorata*)
- » marsh gum (*E. paludicola*)
- » Port Lincoln mallee (*E. albopurpurea*).

KI Koala Management Project

The project began in 1996 to protect the island's habitats from koala overbrowsing. This is carried out through a program of sterilisation and translocation of koalas, to steadily reduce population growth, and hence browsing pressure and habitat restoration. Culling is not permitted under the *National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009–2014* or the *SA Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2016*.

Image: Captured koalas awaiting sterilisation.



Reducing the number of koalas

Since 1996, >12,700 koalas have been sterilised of which 3,800 have been translocated back to their native habitat in the southeast of South Australia. The island population has declined from an estimated 27,000 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2010. However, the 2015 census showed that koala numbers have increased. Population modelling is now underway to obtain a more confident estimate of the population size on Kangaroo Island.

Improving tree condition

Improvement in tree condition has been found in a range of koala food tree species, particularly in the past five years. As well, >15,000 trees have been planted to restore habitats and > 400 large manna gums collared to protect them from koala overbrowsing.

Community involvement

Thanks to all landholders who have allowed access to properties for koala management and monitoring. Please continue to report any high density koala populations where vegetation is being impacted. If areas are left unmanaged koala numbers can build up and disperse into neighbouring areas.

The KI Koala Management Project is one of the largest mammal sterilisation projects in the world and has been operating for over 20 years.

Images left to right: Catching a koala. Successful revegetation. Collaring trees to prevent further damage.

