

Budget supports range of koala initiatives

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REDLAND City Mayor Melva Hobson has taken issue with claims that council has "wasted money" on projects such as the koala communications strategy.

Mayor candidate Karen Williams (Div 9) cited the koala strategy as an example of "waste" when she launched her bid for the city's top job last month.

Cr Hobson said the \$195,000 allocated in the budget for Koala Conservation Strategy communications was the entire annual budget allocated to promote koala conservation in the Redlands.

"It does not simply fund one position, as suggested in a recent Bayside Bulletin article (February 15), but supports a wide range of programs and initiatives," the Mayor said.

"Our community has told us time and time again how important the natural environment is to the people of the Redlands, and how much it values protecting our unique koala species.

This was a strong theme when we were developing the Redlands 2030 Community Plan, and comes through loud and clear each time we ask our community what is important to it."

Cr Hobson said the Koala Conservation Strategy was the result of extensive community consultation, culminating at the Koala Summit in 2007, at which time Council made a commitment to take strong action to save our endangered koala species.

"As part of that strategy, we created a Senior Communications Adviser - Environment position," she said.

"Originally, the role was koala specific, but was expanded in early 2010 to provide communications support to all environmental programs in Council, including koala conservation, Redlands IndigiScapes Centre, Healthy Waterways, vegetation protection, environmental education, Koala Conservation Agreement Program and similar extension programs.

"Most of the communications budget had been spent on keeping the community engaged in the fight to keep koalas alive by ensuring they know what actions we need them to take to do their bit.

"This included developing and launching the Koala.Central website (www.koalacentral.com.au), digital and traditional promotion advertising campaigns, and event management costs such as for the upcoming Koala Fun Run on May 29.

"Any attempt to represent our \$195,000 budget as simply funding an officer position is at best ill-formed, and at worst, mischief-making," she said.