

# Caring for our Coastal Emu - partnerships to protect the endangered population

**COUNCIL NAME**

Clarence Valley  
Council

**WEB ADDRESS**

[clarence.nsw.gov.  
au](http://clarence.nsw.gov.au)

**SIZE**

10,429 square  
kilometres

**POPULATION**

51,662

## Overview

Clarence Valley Council (CVC) used a range of collaborative approaches to protect its endangered Coastal Emus population from vehicle strikes. The population remaining in the wild is estimated to be only 50 birds.

The project aimed to reduce the risk of vehicle strikes at emu crossing points, including a 7-kilometre section of Brooms Head Road at Taloumbi. This was achieved by improving driver awareness through community engagement, speed limit reductions, reserve boundary fencing trials, and the installation of dedicated vehicle activated signs and road patches.

## Background

The endangered coastal emu population in the NSW North Coast Bioregion is genetically distinct from the widespread inland emu; albeit not a separate species, or sub-species.

Annual population surveys coordinated by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) since 2000 found the coastal emu population declined from approximately 140 individuals to fewer than 50 individuals in 2017 (DPE survey data), with a more rapid decline since 2015. Vehicle strike is recognised as one of the leading threats to this endangered population with more than 50 animals recorded by NPWS as being killed by vehicle collision since 2000.

Following the bushfires in 2017 and 2019/2020 and an emu death by vehicle strike in February 2021, grass-roots community action was the catalyst for collaborative action. The project aimed to improve awareness of the threatened status of the Coastal Emu population and the ongoing threat of car strikes in one of the populations' final strongholds along a 7 kilometre stretch of Brooms Head Road near Taloumbi.

A partnership of key stakeholders was formed between Clarence Valley Council, NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Transport for NSW, CVC Local Traffic Committee and Lions Club of Clarence – Environmental, to manage threats to the coastal emu with a particular focus on reducing the risk of vehicle strike in key emu corridors and crossing hotspots along Brooms Head Road.

The Partnership funded a comprehensive package of targeted road marking and road signage actions designed to increase driver awareness of the presence of emus along the Brooms Head Road and to change driver behaviour.

## Implementation

The partnership governance group investigated and invested in a range of on-ground actions to manage threats to the population. This included trialling fence modifications and temporary signage to alert motorists to hazards and adjust driver behaviour.

The project also relied on the contribution of Traditional Owners (Yaegl, Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr); local landholders and businesses, Landcare (Maclean and Bungawalbin groups); Western Sydney University (WSU), NPWS and Local Land Services.

The project involved:

- Trialling a range of signs to encourage drivers to be alert for Coastal Emus crossing roads. Various signs and locations were trialled in collaboration with the project partners.
- Emu-friendly fencing trials with ongoing monitoring (funded through other projects)
- Installation of four 3 x 3m Thermoplastic thermoplastic 'EMU ZONE' pavement patches.
- A speed limit reduction along Brooms Head Road from 100km/h to 80km/h
- Two VAS (Solar powered flashing lights with radar to detect car approach) programmed to flash when vehicles travel above the speed limit. The threshold was set to lower speeds during emu breeding season and during school holidays when motorists may not be aware that Coastal Emus frequent the road.
- Traffic control
- Continued support of Council's Caring for Our Coastal Emus digital register – mapping the sightings of coastal emus. Over 830 sightings of Coastal Emus were submitted to Council's digital register and uploaded to NSW BioNet.

Lions Club of Clarence – Environmental collected their funding contribution from raffles and local market sales, highlighting the grass-roots support this project received from the community. The Club also provided key community champions to promote engagement with the project.

Communication was fundamental to achieving community support and adherence to the reduced speed limits. Council developed and implemented a communication and consultation plan, with communications channels including:

- Notices in Clarence Conversations (an online engagement website tool)
- Facebook posts - Clarence Valley Council and community group pages
- Letters to adjacent landholders
- Promotion at community markets and events
- Joint media release (TfNSW, CVC, Lions Club and DPE)

The project aimed to increase driver awareness about speeds and potential presence of emus. The message was targeted at both community members and landholders who regularly used the road as well as visitors using this popular tourist route.



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## Outcomes

The most important achievement of this project to date is that no Coastal Emus have been killed along the 'emu hotspot' stretch of Brooms Head Road since the fatal vehicle strike in February 2021.

An unexpected outcome of the project was the groundswell of community support and ongoing active involvement of individuals and businesses to work to protect the remaining coastal emus. For example, in late 2021, a Clarence Valley distillery launched a vodka range featuring Coastal Emus on its label and a description of their plight. The distillery is now donating a portion of vodka sales income to the Lions Club to fund ongoing coastal emu protection initiatives.

The project partnerships have enabled ongoing collaboration aimed at protecting the remaining population of Coastal Emus and provided Council with a partnership model which can be replicated in other projects.

## Key Learnings

During this project some key learnings included:

- Collaboration and support of local issues are key to a successful project.
- The importance of an active community to achieving positive project outcomes.
- Cross-organisation collaboration within Council (Natural Resource Management, Road Safety and Traffic and Communications teams) was key to achieving project objectives and improved outcomes.
- Learning and ongoing adaption is important. Previous signage proved inadequate to meet the objective of reducing vehicle strikes of the endangered population. An endangered species is high stakes, so pivoting and trialling different options is critical.
- Reducing the speed limit is effective.
- Developing the governance group early in the project, involving all partners was important. The group met regularly to discuss project objectives, budget, implementation, and communication. This group continues to meet regularly to share collaborative ideas and opportunities to further protect the endangered coastal emu population.
- Through this project, Council has embedded itself as a key delivery partner in the NSW Government's efforts to save the Coastal Emu population.

Council is continuing to work with the community and project partners to protect the coastal emu, including monitoring sightings to better understand and respond to movements of the remaining population.

## Contact

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This project was the 2022 winner of the Natural Environment Protection & Enhancement: On-Ground Works Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.