



Clarence Valley Council

Empowering Community-Led Conservation Through Digital Engagement

OVERVIEW

When **Clarence Valley Council** set out to better understand and protect its local koala population, it recognised that traditional scientific surveys alone would not deliver the scale, accuracy, or community buy-in required for long-term impact. Instead, Council turned to digital engagement to invite residents into the conservation process, transforming community members into active contributors to biodiversity protection.

Using the **Granicus' Sentiment & Feedback solution** (EngagementHQ) through its Clarence Conversations site, Council launched an interactive register that enabled residents to map koala sightings, share contextual information, and directly contribute to state-level biodiversity data systems. The result was not just streamlined data collection, but stronger community participation, richer insights for conservation planning, and real-world outcomes to help protect an endangered species.

This innovative, community-powered approach earned Clarence Valley Council the Changemaker Award at the 2026 Granicus Digital Government Awards.

“It’s not just about gaining scientific data. It’s also about community storytelling and participation, which is a key part of Clarence Conversations. It has brought the community together to protect a vital koala population and its habitat.”

**Reece Luxton, Coordinator Natural Resource Management,
Clarence Valley Council**

MUST HAVE SOLUTIONS

Sentiment & Feedback



5,400+
koala sightings
logged



~8,500
hectares of occupied
koala habitat mapped
across six priority
areas



Increased
community
participation
in biodiversity
protection efforts

Improved
ability to identify
and mitigate koala
threats



SITUATION

Clarence Valley Council, located in northern New South Wales, manages a diverse natural landscape that is home to one of the region's most vulnerable koala populations. As part of a New South Wales Environmental Trust project, the Council needed a more comprehensive way to identify koala populations and understand emerging threats, including habitat fragmentation and vehicle strikes.

Traditional data collection methods were resource-intensive and limited in geographic reach. At the same time, Council recognised growing community interest in environmental stewardship and the opportunity to harness local knowledge to complement scientific research.

"We were looking for a means of engaging with the community, and we were looking for a wide range of different aspects," said Reece Luxton. "This digital engagement platform seemed to be a good way to go."

To succeed, the solution needed to be simple, accessible, and capable of turning community participation into actionable conservation data.

SOLUTION

Clarence Valley Council launched a digital koala sighting register using Sentiment & Feedback, inviting residents to actively participate in koala conservation through an interactive, map-based experience.

"We opted for a digital engagement platform through Clarence Conversations," explained Luxton. "This allowed us to utilise an interactive map for community members to pinpoint a sighting, as well as provide other data relating to the location of the koala."

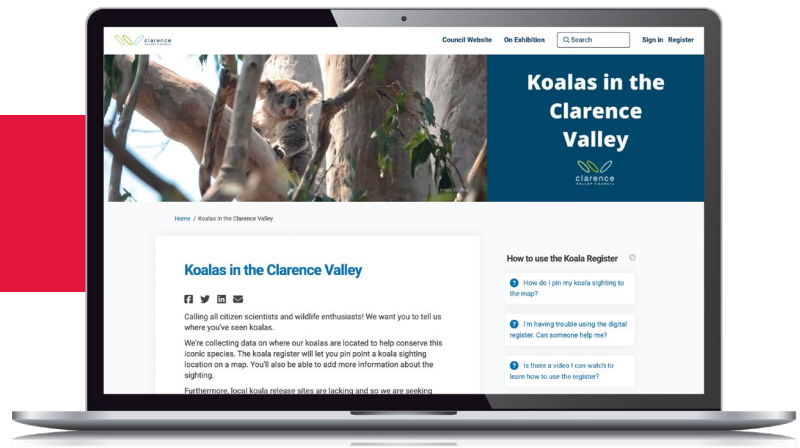
Residents could log sightings directly on the map, including location details and contextual observations. Behind the scenes, this data was automatically streamlined and uploaded into BioNet, the New South Wales state biodiversity information system, ensuring community-generated insights contributed to both local and state-level conservation strategies.

"That helps not only at a local level but also at a state level for improving our conservation strategies for the koala," Luxton said.

The platform made it easy for people to participate while giving Council clean, structured data it could trust and act on. Just as importantly, it created a sense of shared responsibility between Council and the community.

“This project has allowed us to streamline our data collection processes for koala populations in the Clarence. And it’s not just about scientific collection of data. Having more people involved means better outcomes for our koala population.”

Sarah-Rose Johnson,
Communications Coordinator,
Corangamite Shire Council



RESULTS

The project fundamentally changed how Clarence Valley Council collects environmental data and engages the community in conservation efforts. What began as a digital engagement initiative now plays a direct role in Clarence Valley Council's long-term Koala Strategy. Community-submitted sightings captured through Clarence Conversations feed into ongoing monitoring, planning decisions, and reporting – embedding citizen input into an evidence-based conservation framework.

"This project has allowed us to streamline our data collection processes for koala populations in the Clarence," said Luxton. "And it's not just about scientific collection of data."

By lowering barriers to participation, Council significantly broadened community involvement in conservation, turning residents into partners in protecting an endangered species. Increased participation translated into more comprehensive insights across a wider geographic area, enabling better-informed planning and risk mitigation.

"Having more people involved means better outcomes for our koala population," Luxton said.

The initiative is already helping influence real-world outcomes, including efforts to address vehicle strikes – a leading threat to koalas in the region. Community-submitted data helps Council identify hotspots, prioritise interventions, and advocate for broader protective measures.

"It's helping to reduce vehicle strikes as well," Luxton noted, "which is a major threat for the koalas."

Clarence Valley Council formalised community-powered conservation through its Koala Strategy 2026, ensuring digital engagement directly informs on-ground action, planning controls, and future investment.

By linking community-generated data to formal monitoring and adaptive management processes, Clarence Valley Council moved beyond consultation to create a system where engagement directly informs conservation outcomes; a true example of change through participation.

This story highlights the hard work and innovation that earned Clarence Valley Council recognition as a winner in the 15th Annual **Granicus Digital Government Awards**, honouring exceptional achievements in digital government.

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