

## **Senate Hearing Question:**

**Senator BOB BROWN:**

**Can you give us a street address or a Google co-ordinate for an offset area that has become a koala habitat that was not before - something that was used as an offset for a development which has taken up koala habitat?**

## **Response:**

The Queensland Government considers offsetting to be a useful tool for biodiversity conservation in particular circumstances.

Offsets are included as one measure in a hierarchy of habitat protection measures under the Queensland Government's Koala Response Strategy, along with prohibitions on clearing koala habitat, restrictions on intensification of land use (such as conversion of rural lands to urban) and over \$40M in koala habitat conservation and enhancement measures. Offsetting can only occur in prescribed circumstances, and only where every effort has been made to avoid habitat impacts and that those residual impacts have been minimised.

The new development controls (including offsets) commenced in May 2010. Local Government advises that, while there are offset proposals being progressed, none have yet been finalised, given the relatively short time since the new measures were put in place.

It should be noted that offsets have been provided under the now-superseded Koala Conservation Plan. Examples include:

- Lot 9 Clear Mountain Road, Clear Mountain – 7 hectares of koala habitat revegetation required for the permanent loss of 7 hectares of cleared land.
- 43 Dobson Road, Clear Mountain – 3 hectares of koala habitat revegetation required for the permanent loss of 3 hectares of cleared land.

- 151-169 Bunker Road, Victoria Heights – 3 hectares of koala habitat revegetation required for the permanent loss of 3 hectares of mostly cleared land.

The Queensland Government is also showing leadership in this area by offsetting its own impacts on koala habitat to the net benefit of koalas.

The former State Land Freeze on the clearing and disposal of koala habitat was established in December 2008 as an interim measure to protect koala habitat. This was replaced by a new community infrastructure policy in May 2010.

Under the State Land Freeze, Queensland Government community infrastructure projects deemed urgent were exempt from the freeze. However, proponent agencies were required to mitigate any unavoidable impacts to koala habitat, and were subject to a 5:1 offset for koala habitat trees removed (5 trees to be replaced for each non-juvenile tree removed).

Direct replanting offsets are being finalised by those State agencies that were assessed under the State Land Freeze, including:

- Grindle Road, Wacol - replanting of 6,286 koala habitat trees for the removal of 1,208 trees.
- Caloundra landfill at Pierce Avenue, Bells Creek - rehabilitation and protection of 15 hectares of koala habitat for the loss of 2.4 hectares of habitat.

In total, the State Land Freeze will see the direct replanting of 20,928 koala habitat trees for the loss of 3,528 trees by State agency proponents.

Financial contributions of \$920 per tree removed were also accepted by the Department of Environment and Resource Management in lieu of replanting. The \$10 million subsequently received from financial contributions has been pooled with over \$40M in koala habitat funding for the delivery of koala habitat acquisition and rehabilitation and Koala Nature Refuges. These programs focus on strategically acquiring, protecting and rehabilitating koala habitat throughout South East Queensland.

To date, 134.6 hectares of land have been purchased in strategic locations with more properties to come.

The Koala Nature Refuge Program has also established 87 hectares of new nature refuge areas incorporating 32.8 hectares of revegetation. An additional 2,288 hectares of nature refuge areas are currently proposed that will result in a further 103 hectares of revegetation.

As well as providing new habitat for koalas, these new habitat areas often form important strategic linkages between existing habitat areas.

## BACKGROUND

- Loss of koala habitat as a result of development occurs in South East Queensland primarily due to:
  - Land having pre-existing development approvals that provide for clearing to occur; or
  - Local government planning schemes providing for development to occur in areas containing habitat.
- The *Offsets for Net Gain of Koala Habitat in South East Queensland Policy* was adopted in May 2010 as a mechanism to ensure that koala habitat that is cleared will be replaced elsewhere on land that is protected in perpetuity from future clearing.
- The aim of the policy is to ensure that unavoidable clearing of high quality koala habitat is offset, contributing to a net gain in bushland koala habitat in South East Queensland by 2020.
- The *Offsets for Net Gain of Koala Habitat in South East Queensland Policy* requires the rehabilitation, establishment and protection of new koala habitat at a ratio of five new koala habitat trees planted for every non-juvenile koala habitat tree removed.
- This is a net benefit ratio of 5:1 which will contribute to a net gain in bushland koala habitat in SEQ by 2020.
- The Koala Offsets Policy is applied by:
  - Assessment managers (usually local governments) for development assessment decisions under the *South East Queensland Koala Conservation State Planning Regulatory Provisions*
  - The relevant Minister for community infrastructure designations under the *State Planning Policy 2/10 Koala Conservation in South East Queensland*
  - Queensland community infrastructure providers through the *State Government Supported Community Infrastructure Koala Conservation Policy*
  - Local governments within the South East Queensland Koala Protection Area when establishing offset frameworks within their local planning instruments, such as planning schemes, Structure Plans, Master Plans, Neighbourhood and other Local Area Plans as required by the *State Planning Policy 2/10*.
- The former State Land Freeze on the clearing and disposal of koala habitat was established by the Queensland Government in December 2008 as an interim measure to protect koala habitat in South East Queensland until the release of the (then proposed) new koala planning policies. The Freeze ceased on commencement of those planning policies in May 2010. In addition to requirements for the direct replanting of 20,928 koala habitat trees and the levying of \$10 million for habitat acquisition and restoration, State Land Freeze submissions involving more than 520 ha of State-owned koala habitat that was proposed to be cleared or sold were rejected or withdrawn.