

# Koala conservation - land use planning protections in SEQ

## Introduction

The koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) is listed as vulnerable under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

A 2015 report on the status of koalas in South East Queensland found that koala numbers had decreased by 50-80 per cent in key habitat areas over the last 20 years<sup>1</sup>.

The Queensland Government appointed a Koala Expert Panel to provide recommendations on actions to address the decline of koala population densities in SEQ.

A key recommendation of this Panel was for the State to assume responsibility for the assessment of koala-related planning and development issues to ensure consistency across SEQ<sup>2</sup>.

The Queensland Government has amended the planning framework to address a key threat to koala populations in SEQ – loss of habitat. The new koala conservation protections commenced on 7 February 2020.

## New koala maps

The Queensland Government has developed new koala habitat mapping, which will support implementation of the South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy and koala conservation protections.

This koala habitat mapping uses regional ecosystem and high-value regrowth mapping, provided by the Queensland Herbarium.

Find out about koala mapping on your property by downloading a free [vegetation management report](#).



## Conservation protections

The Koala Expert Panel found that previous koala planning provisions were failing to halt the decline of koala populations and koala habitat across SEQ. Under the previous framework, differences in local government mapping, development assessment triggers and conditions meant that koala protections were complex and inconsistent.

The new koala planning framework is based upon scientifically-based, consistent koala habitat mapping. The framework applies consistently across SEQ and establishes where clearing may be prohibited, where it is assessable by the State, where koala conservation outcomes will be considered by local governments and what exemptions may apply.

Inside a Koala Priority Area, clearing of koala habitat areas will be prohibited. Development that doesn't involve clearing will be assessed by local governments for koala conservation outcomes, such as safe koala movement.

Outside of a Koala Priority Area, developments involving the clearing of koala habitat areas will be assessed by the Queensland Government.

Certain exemptions do apply.

# What does this mean for me?

Koala habitat protections may be considered in development-related decision making in South East Queensland.

The clearing of native vegetation in Queensland is regulated by both the Australian and Queensland governments. Some local governments also regulate clearing through their planning schemes or local laws.

The first step in identifying clearing requirements administered by the Queensland Government is to obtain a [property report and vegetation maps](#). These are free and can be requested online.

For information on any Australian Government requirements, see the [EPBC Act referral guidelines for the vulnerable koala](#).

## I have koala habitat areas mapped on my property

If you are proposing to develop your property, your development may be either prohibited, assessable by State or local government, or exempt from assessment for impacts upon koala habitat areas.

If you are planning a development, call your local government or the [Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Industry and Planning](#) to find out what rules apply.

## I'm in a Koala Priority Area but not a koala habitat area

If your property does not contain mapped koala habitat areas, the new koala conservation provisions do not impact you.

The Queensland Government encourages restoration of koala habitat where it will connect with existing habitat and it is safe to do so. Other conservation actions that help koalas in your area include observing signage on koala safety while driving, and constraining any dogs at night.



## I want to build a house on my block

Refer to the list of exemptions in Schedule 24 of the [Planning Regulation 2017](#).

For example, a one-off exemption from koala planning provisions allows you to clear up to a total of 500m<sup>2</sup> of koala habitat area, which provides room for a house and more.

Landowners should first try to locate any new buildings in existing cleared areas on their property to minimise their environmental impacts. Refer to the [Koala Sensitive Design Guidelines](#) for more information.

## I need to build a fence around my house

Clearing to establish a necessary fence on your existing lot may be exempt from koala planning protections. If your lot is less than 5ha, the maximum width of clearing is 5m. For lots over 5ha, the maximum width is 10m.

This exemption only applies to regulated regrowth or least concern Category B vegetation, under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. To see the mapping for your property and to find out more about the Vegetation Management Act, see [www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/vegetation](http://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/vegetation)

If you are constructing a new fence, make it [koala friendly!](#)

## I'm defending my property from bushfire

Exemptions apply for essential management activities such as establishing or maintaining a necessary firebreak or establishing a fire management line, however clearing limits do apply. For more information on these and other exemptions, refer to the list of exemptions in Schedule 24 of the [Planning Regulation 2017](#).

## I have previously notified of clearing under an ADVCC

To align with new koala habitat conservation protections, minor amendments have been made to five accepted development vegetation clearing codes under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. You may need to renotify, and clearing must be compliant with the new code. For more information visit [www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/vegetation](http://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/vegetation)

## I want to subdivide my property that contains a koala habitat area within a Koala Priority Area

If your reconfiguration requires the clearing of koala habitat areas, this development is prohibited.

If your reconfiguration doesn't require clearing, and your local government planning scheme makes reconfiguration of a lot assessable development, your local government will assess your development against new [assessment benchmarks](#) for koala conservation outcomes.

## I've already submitted a development application or have a current development approval

These reforms commenced on 7 February 2020. For development applications made (or approved) prior to this date, the previous

planning framework (including any previous koala habitat mapping) applies. These reforms will not change your development assessment or approval process.

## I am seeking a variation on my pre-existing approval

Your assessment manager (either state or local government) will determine whether or not your variation is significantly altered from your original approval. If it is significantly altered, you will be required to submit a new application under the new framework unless you are otherwise prohibited.

For further information see the [Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Industry and Planning development assessment rules](#) or contact your local government.

## Further information

This document is not designed to constitute technical or legal planning advice. Please contact your local government or the [Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Manufacturing and Planning](#) for more information on how planning rules apply to your proposed development.

More information on the Queensland Government's koala conservation measures is available at [www.qld.gov.au/seqkoalas](http://www.qld.gov.au/seqkoalas).

## References

<sup>1</sup> Rhodes, J.R., Beyer, H.L., Preece, H.J. & McAlpine, C.A. (2015). *South East Queensland Koala Population Modelling Study*. UniQuest, Brisbane, Australia

<sup>2</sup> Rhodes, J.R., A. Hood, A. Melzer, & A. Mucci. (2017). *Queensland Koala Expert Panel: A new direction for the conservation of koalas in Queensland*. Queensland Government, Brisbane.

