



KOALA CONSERVATION IN MORETON BAY REGION

FACT SHEET

APRIL 2022

Protecting and improving habitat

Moreton Bay Regional Council has a leading [koala habitat protection and restoration program](#), which includes green infrastructure investments, conservation and land use planning initiatives. Together these initiatives focus on increasing the amount and quality of koala habitat across the region, as well as improving green corridors used by koalas.

Council has established a [Land Buyback for Environmental Purposes Program](#), which has allocated \$2.9 million per year to purchase land to conserve its environmental values and restore it for local wildlife, including koalas. In February 2022 Council purchased almost 13 hectares of land in Eatons Hill, which contributes to a green corridor and the protection of koala habitat. The protection and restoration of Koala and other threatened species habitat and corridors is a key consideration in the selection of sites for acquisition under this program.

Council has [three dedicated koala nature refuges](#) covering 282 hectares of bushland habitat and a [koala habitat restoration program](#) focusing on natural areas and riparian zones. Council carefully reviews projects and developments to ensure tree loss is avoided wherever possible and where unavoidable, clearing is minimised and offset. Council also voluntarily plants a minimum of three koala trees for every tree removed (3:1), as well as meeting legislated obligations.

The habitat protection program is complemented by actions undertaken by 46 bushcare groups and annual 'call to action' community events, such as National Tree Day.

Council also supports private landowners to protect and enhance native bushland via Council's [Land for Wildlife](#), [Voluntary Conservation Agreements](#) and [free tree programs](#) which in total receive over \$300,000 in funding per annum.

The [Urban Koala Tree Planting Research Project](#) is a collaboration between Council and the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC). The project focuses on determining the suitability of growing small eucalyptus gum trees in urban areas, to provide habitat and food resources for koalas. The project involves monitoring the growth and health of the trees.

Funding is allocated each year to targeted tree planting initiatives, which enable Council to restore key koala corridors. Council's Green Infrastructure Program has planted over 100,000 trees at more than 60 strategic sites across the Moreton Bay Region. All trees are locally native with a majority of trees selected to support local koala populations.





Reducing threats to koalas

Key threats to koalas in the Moreton Bay Region include disease, vehicle strikes, dog attacks and habitat fragmentation.

Council has partnered with USC over three years, to support the leading [koala chlamydia disease vaccine research](#) undertaken by USC. Chlamydia disease in koalas is one of the most prominent threats to koalas, with 40% of all koalas attending wildlife hospitals showing chronic symptoms.

To mitigate vehicle strikes, Council has established a leading [Green Infrastructure Network \(GIN\) Program](#), which aims to improve road safety for motorists and wildlife by delivering wildlife movement infrastructure. Underpasses, safety fencing, refuge poles, road stencils and signage are installed to help wildlife to cross roads safely and raise driver awareness, particularly during koala breeding seasons. Council's green infrastructure assets have an estimated replacement value of \$11.7 million (June 2021).

To mitigate the impacts of attacks from dogs, Council funds a range of [wild dog management](#) activities and has adopted a strict [zero-tolerance policy](#) towards irresponsible [domestic dog owners](#). These initiatives are intended to not only keep koalas alive, but keep our community safe too.

Habitat fragmentation is mitigated through the enforcement of regulations by Commonwealth and State Governments and Council (see below), aimed at avoiding losses of habitat and where avoidance is not possible, offsetting the loss with replacement planting. Council and community efforts to restore habitat, (as discussed above) in important corridors and areas of known habitat contribute towards addressing impacts of habitat fragmentation.

Council also supports various research initiatives undertaken by universities Australia-wide. The research focuses on a range of topics, including:

- ✓ assessment of koala sightings in the field via the use of detection dogs and drones
- ✓ disease prevalence and diversity linked with parasitic protozoa and ticks
- ✓ assessment of koala genetics and parentage studies.

Pioneering koala care

Council has invested heavily in establishing a leading koala conservation and care program which combines veterinary care with ecological expertise to achieve koala welfare and reproductive success in proximity to major urban development. The outcome has seen the koala population at [The Mill site in Petrie](#) defying trends of declining koala populations by achieving a 22% per year increase, more than doubling the koala population since 2017. At the start of 2022 there were over 100 koalas at the site.

The data from the program has assisted in identifying koala home ranges, preferred food and habitat trees, and dispersal pathways. The learnings and on-ground actions of this program will continue to be promoted across South East Queensland.



Working with the community

Council communicates regularly with and supports local koala groups in identifying and delivering koala habitat projects. Council support includes investing in the maintenance of eucalyptus fodder plantations for the exclusive use of wildlife carers and providing letters of support to groups for grant funding submissions.

For more information:

[Koala conservation initiatives - Moreton Bay Regional Council](#)

[Voluntary conservation - Moreton Bay Regional Council](#)

[Community plant nurseries - Moreton Bay Regional Council](#)



Planning and development

All three levels of government have responsibilities under the planning framework for Moreton Bay, and a role to play in koala conservation.

Commonwealth Government

Commonwealth Government authorisation is required where listed threatened species, such as koalas, will be significantly impacted by the taking of an action, such as development. These protections have recently been enhanced by the listing of the koalas in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory as 'endangered' under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, which will lower the threshold at which the impact on koalas needs to be considered.

This means that more scrutiny will be placed on planning and developments, and more actions will require Commonwealth assessment and approval. The criteria under which they will be assessed will also be stronger, with all koala populations now able to be considered (not just **important** populations, as defined by the Commonwealth guidelines).

Queensland State Government

The Queensland Government regulates developments involving koala habitat clearing as a Matter of State Environmental Significance (MSES). More than 90,000ha of land in the Moreton Bay Region is mapped as MSES, 95% of which is protected by statutory prohibitions or public ownership.

On 7 February 2020, the Queensland Government released new [regulatory koala habitat maps](#) for South East Queensland (SEQ). The maps support the implementation of the [South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy 2020–2025](#). Amended koala conservation protections were included within the planning framework. The Queensland Government is also in the process of developing an on-line tool for residents to input their own [koala sightings](#) and experiences to directly link to future mapping.

These new amendments include Koala Priority Areas (KPAs), which are large, connected areas that include koala habitat areas, as well as areas that are suitable for habitat restoration, where no clearing of koala habitat is allowed, subject to some [exemptions](#). More than 65% of Moreton Bay is within a KPA.

Local Government

The [Moreton Bay Regional Council Planning Scheme](#) forms the basis for ensuring appropriate development occurs within Moreton Bay.

The strategic framework sets the policy direction for the planning scheme and identifies the koala as a priority species, with a strategic outcome focused on ensuring the viability of the koala population within the Moreton Bay Region is maintained and improved.

The Planning Scheme contains provisions aimed at conserving and expanding strategic koala habitat networks, along with the incorporation of koala design principles that integrate green infrastructure and facilitate koala movement across the landscape. Only 20% of the Moreton Bay Regional Council area is in the [South East Queensland Regional Plan 2017](#) (Shaping SEQ) 'urban footprint'. The urban footprint is the area where urban development is permitted to occur. Even within the urban footprint, development which has the potential to impact on koala habitat is regulated and assessed.

Council is committed to further enhancing the environmental values of the Moreton Bay Region as it grows, which will assist koala conservation and wildlife movement opportunities. This is achieved by working with applicants seeking development approvals to:

- retain, restore and rehabilitate environmental areas, including bringing important environmental areas into public ownership
- ensure developments are designed to provide for safe, unimpeded, convenient and ongoing wildlife movement and establish and maintain habitat connectivity
- mitigate the impacts of unavoidable vegetation clearing through ensuring appropriate offsets are provided.

Offsets

Environmental offsets are sometimes used to compensate for impacts of development upon significant environmental values, such as the habitat of protected species like the koala. An 'avoid, mitigate, offset' approach underpins [Queensland's offsets framework](#), which means that developers are obliged to try to avoid or mitigate the environmental impact on koalas in the first instance. Offsets may be required where this was not possible, and can include impacts on:

- areas mapped as a koala habitat area identified under the *Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan 2017*
- essential habitat for the koala, under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*
- areas which are not mapped but contain, or are likely to contain, koalas.

Moreton Bay Regional Council will spend more than \$1 million over the next few years to strengthen key koala corridors. This expenditure is from offset contributions already received. Some other significant offsets are already planned. An example is in the suburb of Moorina, where koala offsets will be provided as part of a large development that was approved by the Commonwealth Government. The offsets provided will strengthen a key biodiversity corridor, which is important for the Moreton Bay Region and South East Queensland.