

Mr R Doyle
The Clerk of the Parliament
Legislative Assembly of Queensland
Parliament House
Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE Q 4000

Dear Mr Doyle

Thank you for your letter of 28 November 2002 forwarding a copy of a petition tabled in the Parliament on 27 November 2002 regarding the survival of koalas in the Gold Coast region.

The South East Queensland Regional Nature Conservation Strategy complements a range of natural resource planning and management initiatives that are undertaken by the community, industry and government in south-east Queensland.

Such initiatives include the Regional Forest Agreement, plans for freehold lands and the State Coastal Management Plan. The strategy is designed to assist local government and industry by identifying areas of regional, sub-regional and local nature conservation significance. The strategy can be used as a decision-making tool that will inform the process of addressing nature conservation and management issues. The Nature Conservation Strategy covers about 2.25 million hectares, encompassing 18 local government areas extending from Noosa in the north to Toowoomba in the west and as far south as Beaudesert and the Gold Coast.

The responsibility for vegetation management, under the Vegetation Management Act 1999, lies with my colleague the Honourable Stephen Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM) is the agency responsible for the issuing of permits to undertake land clearing in Queensland.

Coordinated conservation areas are in place to protect the natural values of land. The Koala Bushland Coordinated Conservation Area contains land around south-east Queensland including Daisy Hill State Forest. The Koala Bushland Coordinated Conservation Area covers 1170ha of remnant bushland in Redland Shire and Logan City. It protects habitat for native animals, especially koalas, and is somewhere one can enjoy nature close to the city. It is Queensland's first coordinated conservation area.

The coordinated conservation area is protected under the **Nature Conservation Act 1992**, which specifies principles for management. Regulations also apply which control activities within this area. The primary purpose of the conservation area is to protect koalas and their habitat, stream fauna and flora communities, and bushland catchments. The conservation area supports several hundred koalas, which are an important part of a regional koala population totaling several thousand. Because of its large size, this regional population is one of the most significant in Australia. To survive, these koalas need large areas of suitable habitat. The conservation area's open forests and woodlands support tree species that provide koala food.

Many outdoor activities are possible in the conservation area's natural bushland settings. However, recreational activities that are likely to cause stress or danger to koalas, or damage their habitat, or degrade water courses are restricted.

To further wildlife and land protection the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) encourage Nature Refuge Agreements with landholders. A nature refuge is created through a voluntary conservation agreement between a landholder and the State Government. These agreements now protect more than 35,000 hectares throughout Queensland. Each agreement is tailored to suit the management needs of the particular area and the needs of the landholder.

The Gold Coast City Council has acquired significant areas of bushland as part of their Biodiversity Conservation Program. This acquisition program is ongoing and funded by the council through their Open Space Preservation Levy. Koalas and other wildlife in the Gold Coast area would benefit from the greater habitat security that the retention of these areas of bushland provides.

The QPWS has a koala research group located at the Moggill office in the Brisbane area as well as Daisy Hill office in Logan City. These centres are fully funded by the government to the tune of approximately \$600,000 annually. Over the last four years the government, through the QPWS, has allocated approximately \$2.5 million to koala conservation. In part this funding supports koala rescue and associated support services throughout South-East Queensland.

The expertise of the research group has been provided to local councils and other government agencies over the years. They are presently finalising the study of the Koala Coast, which covers Redlands Shire, part of Logan City and part of Brisbane City. At the same time this research group is commencing a cooperative koala study to the north of Brisbane with the Pine Rivers Shire Council.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

DEAN WELLS
Minister for Environment