



Redland
CITY COUNCIL

LATE REPORT GENERAL MEETING

**Wednesday, 18 December 2019
commencing at 9.30am**

**The Council Chambers
91 - 93 Bloomfield Street
CLEVELAND QLD**

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14 REPORTS FROM COMMUNITY & CUSTOMER SERVICES

14.5 SUBMISSION TO SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND KOALA HABITAT MAP CONSULTATION

Objective Reference:

Authorising Officer: Louise Rusan, General Manager Community & Customer Services

Responsible Officer: David Jeanes, Group Manager City Planning & Assessment

Report Author: Michael Beekhuyzen, Strategic Planner

Attachments:

1. Koala Priority Area Map - Draft SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019-2024 [↓](#)
2. Existing State mapped koala habitat areas proposed to be removed by the new State Koala Habitat Map [↓](#)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Provide a preliminary overview of the proposed new South East Queensland (SEQ) koala planning framework as proposed in the State Government's draft *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* that has been recently released for public consultation on 8 December 2019.
2. Provide an overview and analysis of the proposed SEQ Koala Habitat Map that supports the new SEQ koala planning framework, highlighting significant issues with the new mapping.
3. Seek Council endorsement to delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer to make a submission to the Department of Environment and Science (DES) on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map based on the following:
 - Council supports the adoption of new mapping and regulatory provisions aimed at facilitating the long term protection of a sustainable population of koalas in SEQ however the draft mapping as released has a number of inherent weaknesses and omissions that are likely to result in further net loss of currently protected koala habitat in Redland City (an existing priority area for koalas).
 - The two (2) week consultation period on the draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map is inadequate and should be extended to align with the consultation period for the SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy (31/01/2020). Council also questions the timing of the release of these important reforms and the commencement of the public consultation period in mid-December 2019.
 - The draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map proposes a significant reduction in the area of currently mapped koala habitat that have been subject to long-standing planning controls including a prohibition on clearing. Specific issues to be included in the submission are as follows:
 - Approximately 1,935 hectares of mapped and protected koala habitat under the current koala regulations in the *Planning Regulation 2017* (primarily high and medium value koala bushland) has been removed from the draft Map. This area, where identified as koala habitat or remnant vegetation or high value regrowth in accordance with Council's 2015 mapping (approximately 1,340 hectares of the 1,935 hectares proposed to be removed) should be reinstated in the new koala habitat map and

identified as transitional habitat (Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area) on the SEQ Koala Habitat Map to ensure these areas are protected while a State-led review of this habitat is undertaken over the next two (2) years.

- Approximately 60 hectares of land that meets the new koala habitat methodology being remnant ecosystems or high value re-growth ecosystem with high to very high koala habitat suitability has been removed based on Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) applications. These areas should be reinstated in the koala habitat area mapping recognising the State has identified these areas as having high to very high koala habitat suitability.
- Approximately 5,680 hectares of mapped high and medium value koala rehabilitation areas under the current koala regulations in the *Planning Regulation 2017* that includes scattered koala habitat trees and small stands of koala habitat has been removed. This area needs to be retained and separately identified in the new koala habitat map to allow existing planning control, the avoid, minimise and offset hierarchy, to be retained.
- The State Government Koala Expert Panel's recommendation to allow local government to map and protect locally significant koala habitat through local planning schemes be implemented in the new SEQ koala planning framework to support coordinated action on koala protection by both the State and local governments in SEQ.
- Areas identified on the new koala map as Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area should be identified as Transitional Habitat, recognising these areas are State mapped koala habitat that are being proposed to be removed by the new mapping.
- North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah) be identified as a Koala Priority Area (KPA) to ensure the strictest clearing controls apply to protect the Island's koala habitat and unique local koala population.

BACKGROUND

- In 2016, a Uniquist report (University of Queensland) called 'South East Queensland Koala Population Modelling Study' concluded that between 1996 and 2014 there was significant statistical evidence of a decline in koala population densities of about 80% in the Koala Coast (mainland of Redland City and parts Logan City Council and Brisbane City Council) and 54% in the Pine Rivers area, despite current protection measures.
- In response to the Uniquist report, a Koala Expert Panel (the Panel) was established in 2016 to provide the State Government with realistic and achievable recommendations to reverse the decline in koala population densities and ensure the long-term persistence of koala populations in the wild in SEQ.
- The Panel undertook a year-long review of existing koala protection measures in SEQ, including seeking expert advice and consideration of the best available research. The Panel's review also included consultation with public and industry sectors.
- The Panel's final report 'Queensland Koala Expert Panel: A new direction for the conservation of koalas in Queensland' (2017) included six (6) key recommendations and a number of supporting actions under each recommendation aimed at addressing the ongoing decline in koalas in SEQ.

The key Panel recommendations included:

- Develop a SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy to implement the Panel's recommendations.
- Identify and map connected priority areas for koala habitat protection, restoration and management i.e. KPA.
- Establish a Koala Advisory Council (KAC) to coordinate implementation of the koala conservation strategy.
- Do not permit clearing of core and non-core habitat (remnant, regrowth and scattered trees) inside a KPA.
- Do not permit clearing of core and non-core habitat (remnant and regrowth) outside of the Urban Footprint and outside of a KPA.
- Ensure that locally significant koala habitat, not captured by State mapping, or not in identified priority areas for koalas, can still be protected through local government planning schemes.
- The Queensland Government Response to the Queensland Koala Expert Panel's Report was to accept all six (6) key recommendations with some of the supporting actions accepted in principle.
- The KAC was established in 2018 and is made up of members from State Government, the community, non-government organisations, industry and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ). The first meeting of the KAC was held on 13 December 2018. The KAC make publicly available communiques and minutes from each meeting.
- The second meeting of the KAC was held in March 2019. The new proposed State koala habitat mapping for SEQ was presented at this meeting. The KAC were advised that the mapping was built using an evidence-based approach of the most important factors for koala persistence in the wild with additional input from several State Government departments. This mapping also sought to balance koala protection including the provision of habitat connectivity with the requirements of housing and commercial development. The KAC recommended that consultation with industry and local governments be undertaken on the mapping.
- In June 2019, five meetings with local governments were held across SEQ with all participants required to submit a signed a Deed of Confidentiality and Privacy that limited the distribution of confidential materials.

Council officers attended the meeting held on 12 June 2019 at Logan City Council. At this meeting, a presentation on the broad direction of the koala regulatory reforms, including the introduction of a prohibition on the clearing of koala habitat in a KPA was provided. Mapping was also provided at a scale that did not allow any detailed review.

- Following the meeting, the spatial data for the new koala habitat mapping for Redland City was provided on 26 June 2019 for officer review and feedback. A broad review of the new mapping identified some significant issues, including a significant reduction in areas of State mapped koala habitat in the city resulting in inconsistent mapping outcomes whereby areas of vegetation with the same ecosystem and associated koala habitat values were mapped differently. This issue was highlighted in officer comments provided to LGAQ to be included as part of a coordinated local government submission to the State.
- LGAQ provided a submission to the State on 17 July 2019 making seventeen (17) recommendations in total, including:

- State Government to work with local governments to ensure habitat not mapped by the State can be protected prior to the new mapping coming into effect;
- State Government to continue to hold one-on-one meetings with local governments as necessary prior to finalising the state-wide mapping of koala habitat, KPAs and restoration areas, and to ensure the mapping and mapping methodology was updated to appropriately address concerns raised by local government including gaps and inconsistencies between State and local mapping. The LGAQ also recommended local government be able to view and comment on the final version of the mapping before its release.
- An urgent meeting of the KAC was held on 30 July 2019 to consider local government feedback. LGAQ have advised that the outcomes from the meeting were for the State to hold one-on-one meetings with local governments and develop options to protect koala habitat not mapped by the new State mapping.
- One-on-one meetings with local governments subsequently occurred in August 2019. Officers from the DES and the Department of State Development Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (DSDMIP) met with Council officers on 7 August 2019. At this meeting, the State officers provided an interim solution to protect existing State mapped koala habitat as included in the City Plan (as required by the State Planning Policy) but not included in the proposed new State mapping under a two (2) year transitional arrangement.
- On 21 August 2019 the DES requested that local governments in SEQ nominate koala habitat currently mapped in local planning schemes by 30 August 2019 that should be included as transitional habitat in the new State Koala Habitat Map for SEQ.
- In light of the confidential deed agreement in place at the time, Council officers responded to the DES request on 29 August 2019. The response to DES:
 - highlighted significant concerns with the ad-hoc officer consultation process undertaken by the State on the proposed changes to the koala planning framework including the extremely limited time provided to nominate transitional koala habitat; and
 - provided spatial data of State mapped koala habitat included in the City Plan (as required by the State Planning Policy) on both the mainland and North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah) that had not been included in the new state koala habitat mapping.
- A letter was also sent from the Mayor to the Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts further expressing concerns with the lack of transparency and limited time provided for the consultation process undertaken with Council officers on the koala reforms.

ISSUES

1. Draft SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy and mapping consultation

The State Government released the draft *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019-2024* and SEQ Koala Habitat Map for public consultation on 8 December 2019. The following timeframes are provided for consultation:

- Consultation on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map closes 22 December 2019.
- Consultation on the draft Strategy closes 31 January 2020.

This report only addresses the SEQ Koala Habitat Map in order to meet the extremely limited two (2) week consultation timeframe that closes 22 December 2019. A further report will be provided in January 2020 addressing the draft Strategy.

2. Proposed new koala planning framework

In reviewing the new koala habitat mapping it is firstly important to understand the proposed reforms to the SEQ koala planning framework as these reforms are intended to work in conjunction with the SEQ Koala Habitat Map.

The Habitat Protection section of the draft *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* outlines the major reforms proposed to the SEQ koala planning framework. The proposed new SEQ koala planning framework continues to apply different planning controls to areas of koala habitat identified as being within a KPA to areas of koala habitat located outside a KPA.

The KPA is based on the Panel's recommendation to identify a network of connected priority areas for koalas to strategically focus State Government initiatives for habitat protection and restoration, threat reduction programs, community partnerships, and recovery actions for koalas across SEQ (see Attachment 1 which includes a map of the Koala Priority Area from the *draft SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024*).

The draft *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* significantly expands the area identified as a KPA across SEQ with more than 300,000 hectares of land identified. Every local government area in SEQ has an area mapped as a KPA except Toowoomba. This compares to the existing SEQ koala planning framework which only identifies the Koala Coast (mainland of Redland City and parts Logan City Council and Brisbane City Council) and areas in Moreton Bay Regional Council as a priority area for koalas (Priority Koala Assessable Development Area). However, while the extent of the KPA has been expanded across SEQ there has been a significant reduction in mapped koala habitat in the existing priority area for koalas on the mainland of Redland City and parts of Moreton Bay Regional Council local government area.

2.1 SEQ Planning Framework in a Koala Priority Area

A KPA is proposed to be the focus for habitat protection and restoration and where the strictest clearing controls will apply. Under the new mapping the whole of the mainland of Redland City is retained as a KPA.

The key planning provisions in a KPA include:

- Prohibiting the clearing of a Koala Habitat Area in a KPA (unless otherwise exempt – clearing for a development footprint up to 500m² and clearing for a range of purposes including firebreaks around buildings and structures). This applies regardless of whether a Koala Habitat Area is in or outside the Urban Footprint of the *SEQ Regional Plan 2016*.
- Local government assessing development impacts on a Koala Habitat Area in a KPA against new assessment benchmarks to be included in the *Planning regulation 2017*, where clearing is not proposed, to ensure other conservation outcomes to habitat protection are achieved, such as habitat quality protection and safe koala movement.

The draft *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* states that the new assessment benchmarks to be used by local government to assess development that does not propose clearing koala habitat will ensure that:

- Development does not result in fragmentation of koala habitat (this may mean that the placement of buildings, structures or works is at least 50m from the edge of retained koala habitat).
- The condition of koala habitat is not impacted by factors such as changes to soil condition, or the introduction of weed or pests.
- The development allows for safe movement of koalas.

It is important to note that unlike the existing koala regulatory provisions, the proposed new SEQ koala planning framework no longer maps areas currently identified as high and medium value rehabilitation within a KPA. Similarly, the existing controls to avoid, minimise and offset clearing of koala habitat within areas of existing high and medium value rehabilitation have also been removed.

In addition to the major reforms in a KPA, changes are also proposed to the SEQ koala planning framework outside a KPA.

2.2 SEQ Planning Framework outside a Koala Priority Area

Under the new framework the State will take assessment responsibility for applications that involve the clearing of koala habitat outside the KPA. Assessment will be carried out against a new State code that applies the 'avoid, minimise and offset' hierarchy. This assessment is currently undertaken by local government. Local government may still provide an informal referral role on such applications. This arrangement has however not been confirmed.

In Redland City, North Stradbroke Island (NSI) (Minjerrabah) is not included in the KPA and as a result new development that proposes the clearing of koala habitat will become subject to State assessment. Through the officer level consultation the DES was requested to consider the suitability of NSI for inclusion as a KPA. The DES did not accept NSI as a KPA and advised that while NSI has a relatively large area of koala habitat, the Island does not meet the rules for inclusion in the KPA on the basis that the majority of the habitat is of moderate quality and the higher quality habitat is relatively fragmented and subject to threats.

As discussed later in this report, it is recommended that the submission to the DES request that NSI be re-considered for inclusion as a KPA for the following reasons:

- Existing koala habitat on NSI is the only habitat for a genetically unique island koala population that requires the strictest protections against clearing to ensure their survival.
- NSI should be given special consideration with regards to how koala habitat is classified and mapped due to its unique island circumstances. It is inappropriate to assess the suitability of koala habitat in the same way as habitat is assessed on the mainland of SEQ.
- The suitability of the NSI koala habitat cannot be considered through the same methodology as the rest of SEQ but must be given specific consideration. This is a critical oversight and has potentially critical implications for that Island koala population, short and long term.
- NSI koala habitat has been previously identified as core habitat for koalas.

It should also be noted that the Southern Moreton Bay Islands (SMBI) and Coochiemudlo Island are also located outside the KPA but do not have any mapped koala habitat. As a result, the new koala planning controls do not apply.

2.3 Summary of existing koala planning framework and proposed new koala planning framework

A comparison of the existing planning framework and proposed new planning framework is provided in Table 1.

In summary, the proposed new koala planning framework:

- Continues to prohibit the clearing of areas mapped as Koala Habitat Area on the mainland of the city. This is no change from the current koala regulations which does not allow the clearing of non-juvenile koala habitat trees in areas mapped as high, medium and low value koala bushland habitat.
- Development that does not involve clearing in an area mapped as a Koala Habitat Area is assessed by Council against new State assessment benchmarks to be included in the *Planning Regulation 2017*. The details of new benchmarks have not at this stage been released.
- On North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah) the State Government will assess development that proposes to clear an area mapped as a Koala Habitat Area against a new State development assessment code. It is expected that Council will provide advice to the DES as part of their technical agency role.
- Where land is not mapped as a Koala Habitat Area, the proposed new koala planning framework will not apply.
- Under the proposed new koala framework a net loss in koala habitat is expected on the mainland of the city based on the reduction in the area currently mapped as koala habitat (high, medium and low value bushland koala habitat) and the removal of currently mapped areas and associated planning controls to protect or at least offset koala habitat loss in areas of high and medium value rehabilitation (the rehabilitation areas are discussed further in section 4 of this report).

Table 1: Comparison of existing SEQ Koala planning framework and proposed new planning framework

Proposed planning framework for areas mapped as a KPA – Redland: Mainland		
Changes to	Existing provisions	Proposed provisions
Types of controls for koala habitat	Priority koala assessable development area.	Koala priority areas.
Affect	Contain planning controls.	Contain planning controls.
What's prohibited	Urban activity in non-urban area (open space, conservation zones, etc) and clearing of areas mapped as bushland habitat.	Clearing of area mapped as koala habitat.
What's assessable	Clearing koala habitat where identified as high and medium rehabilitation.	Development that would not result in clearing of mapped koala habitat. The details of this new provision is unknown at this stage.
Assessment	Local government assessment in line with State and local planning regulation.	Local government assessment in line with new benchmarks in the Planning regulation (development not resulting in clearing only).
Offset recipient	Local government where clearing of koala habitat trees in high and medium value rehabilitation.	Not applicable as high and medium value rehabilitation areas have been removed. No offsetting provisions.

Proposed planning framework for areas outside of a KPA – Redland: North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah)		
Changes to	Until 2019	Commencing in 2019
Types of controls for koala habitat	No specific koala habitat protection: general controls for clearing of habitat regardless of species.	Specific controls for clearing koala habitat.
Assessment	Local governments conduct development assessment.	The State Government conducts development assessment in line with updated State Development Assessment Provisions.
Assessment framework	Local government: Avoid, minimise and offset.	State Government: Avoid, minimise and offset.
Where the land is not a koala habitat area, no koala conservation controls are proposed to apply.		

3. New Koala Habitat Mapping

The new SEQ Koala Habitat Map is intended to underpin the new SEQ koala planning framework. The draft *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* states that the State is committed to implementing a single Koala Habitat Map for SEQ.

This statement is contrary to the Panel recommendation 2.2 (g) to:

- Ensure that locally significant koala habitat, not captured by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (now DES) mapping, or not in identified priority areas for koalas, can still be protected through local planning schemes.

It is recommended that the submission to the DES request that in accordance with the Panel's recommendation, local government be allowed to map and protect locally significant koala habitat through local planning schemes.

If this recommendation is not accepted by the DES a significant onus is placed on the new State Government SEQ Koala Habitat Map to comprehensively and accurately identify koala habitat from commencement of the new planning framework.

The new SEQ koala habitat mapping includes the following two key elements:

- Koala Habitat Areas.
- Locally Refined Koala Habitat Areas.

These two mapping elements are discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.1 SEQ Koala Habitat Area

The new SEQ Koala Habitat Map is based on a new koala habitat mapping methodology. The new methodology primarily uses existing State Government mapping of regional ecosystems and high-value regrowth mapping. Only regional ecosystems or high value regrowth that are considered suitable koala habitat are used. This mapping is then compared with koala sighting records to map koala habitat in SEQ.

The SEQ Koala Habitat Map has been reviewed at a high level given the very limited time to provide comment. This review has identified significant issues and inconsistencies with the new mapping. These issues have been identified and raised previously through the officer level consultation with the DES directly as well as through the LGAQ.

Key findings of the review include:

- The new Koala Habitat Map significantly reduces the extent of the current state koala habitat mapping by approximately 1,935 hectares across the mainland. There has been no field validation of the areas to be removed.
- The new Koala Habitat Map includes an additional 706 hectares of koala habitat on the mainland. This additional habitat is distributed across the mainland and not focused in any one location. The additional areas of koala habitat have generally resulted from the new mapping smoothing out jagged edges of the current mapping.
- The proposed koala habitat to be removed includes areas currently identified under the current State mapping as being high value and medium value koala bushland habitat. Under the *Planning Regulation 2017* clearing this type of habitat is prohibited. With the removal of these areas from the proposed new mapping there will be no longer a prohibition on clearing. Similarly, some of the areas proposed for removal are located in critical areas of known koala populations, such as Hilliards Creek, Oyster Point and the acquired land in Birkdale adjacent to Tingalpa Creek, etc.
- Some of the habitat areas that are proposed to be removed are justifiable on the basis that the land does not have koala habitat values such as where new housing development has occurred like Mount Cotton. This is due to the State not updating the current koala habitat values mapping since its release in 2010.
- The new mapping contains many inconsistencies with contiguous vegetation being part mapped as a Koala Habitat Area while other parts of the same patch of bushland being mapped as not having any koala habitat value. This results in one area being included in the mapping and subject to clearing prohibition and adjoining areas with the same vegetation not being mapped and subject to clearing prohibition.
- Critically, under the existing mapping large parts of the mainland are mapped as high and medium value rehabilitation koala habitat areas (6,155 hectares). Specific planning controls are included in the *Planning Regulation 2017* which require development to avoid, minimise and as a last resort offset koala habitat in these areas. The majority of the koala rehabilitation areas have been removed from the new mapping (only 478 hectares of 6,155 hectares has been retained) including the controls to protect scattered koala trees and small stand of koala habitat and offsetting any unavoidable loss of koala habitat trees.
- The new mapping reduces the State koala habitat mapping on NSI (Minjerribah) including higher and medium value koala habitat.

Attachment 2 shows the areas of existing State mapped koala habitat (high, medium and low value koala bushland (shown in red) and high and medium value rehabilitation (shown in orange) that are proposed to be removed in the new State Koala Habitat Map.

A key reason that appears to explain the issues identified above relates to the methodology that produced the SEQ Koala Habitat Map using State regional ecosystem and high value regrowth mapping that does not reflect the full extent of ecosystems on the ground.

The simple methodology used for the new proposed 2019 koala mapping that relies on existing vegetation mapping was recognised in the 2009 SEQ Koala Habitat Assessment and Mapping Project as an issue with koala mapping. The 2009 reported identified notable mapping improvements including:

- the analysis, valuation and mapping of all potential koala habitat in SEQ, rather than solely focusing on existing vegetation mapping.

The new SEQ Koala Habitat Map with its focus on existing state ecosystem and regrowth mapping, rather than identifying and mapping all potential koala habitat reverts to a methodology broadly criticised by the State Government commissioned koala mapping project in 2009.

If the State continues to simply rely on regional ecosystem and high value regrowth mapping it should utilise the best available data. In this regard, Council has more detailed koala habitat and regional ecosystem mapping from 2015 that was produced at a smaller scale (1:5,000) than the State ecosystem mapping. This more detailed mapping can readily be provided to the State to address some of the above mapping issues. While using this mapping to identify koala habitat has the same limitations as the new State mapping methodology it does however provide an opportunity to address some of the mapping issues in a limited time frame as it is more detailed than State mapping and was prepared using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), aerial photo interpretation and field data.

An analysis of the areas of existing State koala habitat mapping not included in the SEQ Koala Habitat Map against Council's more detailed koala habitat and regional ecosystem mapping shows that almost 1,340 hectares of the 1,935 hectares proposed to be removed is identified under Council's 2015 mapping as having koala habitat or a regional ecosystem.

In addition to issues identified above with the use of existing State regional ecosystem mapping, an analysis of the new State Koala Habitat Map also highlights that certain areas that satisfy the State's new mapping methodology still do not appear on the new State koala mapping. These areas are mapped as remnant or high value regrowth ecosystems that have a very high koala habitat suitability. Examples of areas which have been removed include heavily vegetated parts of the area included in the Emerging Community zone in south west Victoria Point. These areas seem to have been removed on the basis that a landowner has undertaken a Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) that has identified the area as Category X.

A PMAV is an assessment of the vegetation category identified on a property under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* that a landowner may request the State undertake. The results of a PMAV assessment show the boundaries of vegetation categories on a property. Category X is a vegetation category under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* that is not generally regulated under the State's vegetation management laws. For example, if a PMAV finds the vegetation of a property is Category X, this vegetation is not generally regulated by the State and may be cleared as exempt. Importantly, vegetation found through a PMAV to be Category X can still have very high koala habitat values. Category X only means that it is not a category of vegetation protected by the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

A review indicates that across the city approximately 60 hectares of land has been removed as a result of landowners and developers lodging PMAV applications that have been assessed to be Category X.

It is recommended that the submission to the DES request that the areas containing remnant or high value regrowth that have high suitability for koalas be included in the new koala habitat map. The removal of these areas would appear unjustified and contrary to the *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* vision of a sustainable koala population in the wild in SEQ.

It is also important to understand that large areas of mapped scattered koala habitat trees under the current framework (high value rehabilitation area and medium value rehabilitation area) where the 'avoid, minimise and offset' hierarchy currently apply are not proposed to be included

in the new SEQ planning framework or mapping. Currently, in the order of 6,155 hectares are mapped in the high and medium rehabilitation categories under the current regulation. There is no apparent planning control to protect koala habitat trees in these areas or require that development that cannot avoid clearing minimises the extent of clearing and offsets any unavoidable clearing through offset replanting. Without these provisions it will be more difficult for Council to protect these areas and where necessary utilise offsetting to facilitate revegetation programs in identified key habitat and priority corridors. The removal of the rehabilitation from the new mapping appears to be in direct conflict with the Panel recommendation 2.2 (d) that new development assessment requires for SEQ be introduced that:

- do not permit clearing of core and non-core habitat (remnant, regrowth and scattered trees) inside identified priority areas for koalas, regardless of whether inside or outside the Urban Footprint.

The proposed assessment benchmarks to be included in the *Planning Regulation 2017* for development in a KPA that does not involve clearing of koala habitat to be assessed by local government (discussed in section 2.1) may potentially provide some planning controls. However, the details of these benchmarks have not been provided and the detail provided in the draft Strategy suggest the benchmarks are more related to protecting mapped Koala Habitat Areas rather than koala habitat located outside of mapped areas.

3.2. Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area (Transitional koala habitat)

As an interim measure to address the key issues previously identified with the new SEQ koala habitat mapping, earlier this year in August the DES formally requested for Council to identify nominate any koala habitat that was subject to the City Plan regulatory provisions that had not been included in the draft State Koala Habitat Map provided at the time.

It was agreed at the time that the additional nominated koala habitat would be protected under the new SEQ planning framework for a two (2) year transitional period. During this two (2) year period, the DES would work with Council to develop and implement a specific methodology for incorporating finer scale, locally-identified koala habitat into the State mapping. This approach was intended to provide an opportunity to review and ground truth the areas of koala habitat mapping not included under the new methodology in the new mapping rather than simply removing this koala habitat without any review. It was intended that at the end of the two (2) year period, the areas protected under the transitional mapping arrangements would either:

- Be recognised as koala habitat in the new State koala habitat mapping under the newly proposed methodology (to be developed in conjunction with local government) and subject to the relevant planning and development controls; or
- Be recognised as having matters of local environmental significance (MLES) because of their value for local biodiversity conservation and for protection under the State Planning Policy and City Plan; or
- Not be protected under either of the above arrangements.

Other SEQ local governments also identified similar issues with new State koala habitat mapping and the nomination provided an opportunity to review the areas proposed to be removed before removing these areas.

At the time, Council officers nominated all currently State mapped koala habitat included in the City Plan (this being the adopted policy of Council) as a Matter of State Environmental Significance

(MSES), to be included in the new SEQ koala habitat mapping as transitional habitat. This included just over 9,000 hectares of State mapped koala habitat in the city on the mainland and NSI.

A review of the recently released SEQ koala habitat mapping shows the extent of areas nominated has been significantly reduced (around 50% of the 9,000 hectares nominated) without any further discussion or consultation. The majority of the reduction in the nominated areas has been on the mainland of the city with approximately 1,884 hectares of the almost 1,900 hectares nominated being removed.

The new SEQ koala habitat mapping identifies these previously nominated areas as Locally Refined Koala Habitat Areas (LRKHA). This name is misleading as the LRKHA represents areas of existing State mapped koala habitat that the State is proposing to review and possibly remove from the new SEQ koala habitat mapping after two (2) years. Previous comments made to the DES raised similar concerns with the naming of this category as LRKHA recognising it does not accurately reflect what the mapping is and implies it may relate to Council koala habitat mapping.

The DES provided the following explanation to the reduction of Council nominated habitat in the draft Koala Habitat Map:

‘as part of the map release to be used during the map validation process, a number of updates were applied to the locally refined koala habitat area (LRKHA) based on advice from the Queensland Herbarium and to ensure that the new mapping is as accurate as possible. This included ensuring existing commitments to PMAV align with the new mapping and restricting mapping to only remnant and high value regrowth areas.

As a result of these decisions and changes, of the 9,066 ha you provided to DES as LRKHA 4,527ha of LRKHA remain in Redland City Council (RCC). 186ha were removed as a result of property map of assessable vegetation (PMAV) Category X (areas generally not regulated by State vegetation management laws), and 4,329ha removed as a result of restricting the LRKHA to remnant vegetation and high value regrowth vegetation. The remaining 24ha were removed as a result of small non-contiguous area removal and applying erases.’

From a brief review, a significant amount of the land removed from the LRKHA is vegetated and has koala habitat values based on Council’s more detailed ecosystem mapping.

Accordingly, removing the nominated areas at this time is premature and means that the review of these areas in a two (2) year transitional period will no longer occur. The inclusion of the areas that do not have koala habitat value would have no impact on landowners in the interim as the new planning controls propose to prohibit application for the clearing of koala habitat. If no koala habitat exists on a property there would be no reason/need for a landowner to lodge an application to clear koala habitat.

It is recommended that the submission to the DES request that the areas of LRKHA removed in the new koala habitat map on the mainland be reinstated where Council’s more detailed koala habitat and ecosystem mapping identifies koala habitat values. The mapping layer should also be requested to be more accurately named as transitional habitat rather than LRKHA. In making this recommendation the following points should be noted:

- The LRKHA is to be reviewed during the two (2) year period to either confirm the areas have koala habitat values/local environmental significance or no environmental significance.
- The areas to be included as transitional habitat have been mapped as having koala habitat values for at least ten (10) years, in the majority of cases as high or medium value bushland.

The current state koala regulations already protect areas of high or medium value koala habitat from clearing.

- The current State koala regulations prohibits most of the areas to be included as transitional habitat from lodging a material change of use application for an urban activity (almost 1,250ha).
- There has been no field validation of the area of State mapped koala habitat that is proposed to be removed. It is unclear whether even a desktop exercise has been undertaken.
- The areas to be included as transitional habitat are currently subject to the regulatory provisions of the City Plan as Matters of State Environmental Significance.
- A new mapping request process is proposed to be introduced that will allow a landowner or local government to request that the DES review an area mapped as koala habitat. This will provide an option to address any inaccuracies in the two (2) year transitional period.

For NSI (Minjerribah) it is recommended that all koala habitat currently mapped by the State as koala habitat be reinstated in the LRKHA and called Transitional Habitat. Council does not have detailed regional ecosystem mapping to refine this mapping. It should be noted that NSI (Minjerribah) is currently not proposed to be included in the KPA and as such the prohibition will not apply. Also the majority of the area to be included as transitional habitat is not in the townships and as such not subject to development. Even where development is affected, development that proposes the clearing of koala habitat will be subject to avoid, minimise and offset development controls.

3.3 Proposed State Koala Habitat Map Amendment Process

As part of the koala reforms, the State Government is proposing a new koala habitat map amendment application process. Currently, amendments to the koala habitat map can only be considered in conjunction with a development application and requests for amendments are assessed by Council.

This new State proposed map amendment process will enable an application to be made at any time rather than as part of a development application. The map amendment application will be assessed by the DES rather than Council to ensure a consistent approach across SEQ.

The DES will also update the koala habitat map annually to address updates issues with the current mapping. The current mapping has not been updated since its commencement.

It is expected that Council will be able to provide advice on map amendment applications that the DES will consider in making a decision on a map amendment application. The new map amendment process is supported.

4 Matters of State Environmental Significance

The City Plan maps and protects Matters of State Environmental Significance (MSES) in the Environmental significance overlay. This is a requirement of the State Planning Policy.

MSES includes the currently mapped koala habitat areas. Should the State Government proceed with the current proposed significant reductions to the extent of koala habitat areas and in turn reduce the area of mapped MSES there will be no state environmental mapping layer that supports these areas being retained in the City Plan.

There is significant uncertainty whether the areas of currently mapped koala habitat proposed to be removed could continue to be protected under the City Plan as MSES or Matters of Local

Environmental Significance. If these areas cannot be protected under the City Plan an amendment would be required to the City Plan. Such an amendment will require public consultation and may result in the community viewing the Council as responsible for significantly reducing mapped and protected koala habitat in the city rather than reflecting the changes to State mapping. It should be noted that the State does not have to undertake consultation on changes to its MSES map.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Legislative Requirements

There is no legislative requirement to provide the State with a submission during the public consultation on the new koala habitat mapping.

Risk Management

The risks of not providing the State with a submission to improve the new State koala habitat mapping include:

- Diminishing the effectiveness of the new SEQ koala planning framework to protect koala habitat.
- Reducing the ability of the new SEQ koala planning framework to contribute to protecting the koala population on Redlands Coast.
- Lack of public confidence in new koala mapping.
- Negative community perception of inaction by Council on koala conservation.
- Council may be seen by the community as responsible for the significant reduction in koala habitat rather than the State as the City Plan may need amendment to align its mapping of MSES with the new State koala habitat mapping.

Financial

There are no direct financial implications in providing a submission on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map. The proposed two (2) year review of koala habitat mapping currently mapped as LRKHA in the transitional period is likely to require officers and resources from a number of Council environmental and planning teams.

People

The submission will be provided by the Strategic Planning Unit.

Environmental

Providing a submission on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map seeks to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of the proposed State koala habitat mapping prior to its commencement. This will have significant benefits for a wide range of other native species and ecological communities which also share the koala's habitat.

Social

The koala is an iconic species that is highly valued by the Redlands Coast community that contributes to the character of Redland City. Ensuring the best available mapping is used for the new State koala habitat mapping can help maintain public support for koala habitat protections.

Alignment with Council's Policy and Plans

This report aligns with a number of Council policies and plans. These primarily include:

- Healthy natural environment outcomes of the 2018-2023 Corporate Plan including ‘threatened species are maintained and protected, including the vulnerable koalas species’.
- City Plan – strategic framework that seeks development to be carefully managed to protect significant habitats, wildlife corridors, ecological functions and scenic landscapes.
- *Redlands Koala Conservation Strategy 2016* that aims to retain a viable koala population and conserve and manage suitable habitat both on the mainland areas and NSI (Minjerribah).
- Natural Environment Policy (POL 3128) commits Council to protect, enhance and restore the natural values of the city that include koalas and other native animal and plant populations and habitats.

CONSULTATION

Consulted	Consultation Date	Comments/Actions
Strategic Planning Officers, Environmental Education Officers and Environmental Assessment Officers	12 June & 7 August 2019	Attended the officer level confidential consultation provided by the State on the koala regulatory reforms and provided officer level comments sent to the LGAQ to provide the State with a coordinated submission.

OPTIONS

Option One

That Council resolves to authorise the Chief Executive Officer to make a submission to the Department of Environment and Science (DES) on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map based on the following:

1. Council supports the adoption of new mapping and regulatory provisions aimed at facilitating the long term protection of a sustainable population of koalas in South East Queensland however the draft mapping as released has a number of inherent weaknesses and omissions that are likely to result in further net loss of currently protected koala habitat in Redland City (an existing priority area for koalas).
2. The two (2) week consultation period on the draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map is inadequate and should be extended to align with the consultation period for the *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* (31/01/2020). Council also questions the timing of the release of these important reforms and the commencement of the public consultation period in mid-December 2019.
3. The draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map proposes a significant reduction in the area of currently mapped koala habitat that have been subject to long-standing planning controls including a prohibition on clearing. Specific issues to be included in the submission are as follows:
 - (a) Approximately 1,935 hectares of mapped and protected koala habitat under the current koala regulations in the *Planning Regulation 2017* (primarily high and medium value koala bushland) has been removed from the draft Map. This area, where identified as koala habitat or remnant vegetation or high value regrowth in accordance with Council’s 2015 mapping (approximately 1,340 hectares of the 1,935 hectares proposed to be removed) should be reinstated in the new koala habitat map and identified as transitional habitat (Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area) on the SEQ Koala Habitat Map which will ensure these areas are protected while a State led review of this habitat is undertaken over the next two (2) years.

- (b) Approximately 60 hectares of land that meets the new koala habitat methodology being remnant ecosystems or high value re-growth ecosystem with high to very high koala habitat suitability has been removed based on Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) applications. These areas should be reinstated in the koala habitat area mapping recognising the State has identified these areas as having high to very high koala habitat suitability.
- (c) Approximately 5,680 hectares of mapped high and medium value koala rehabilitation areas under the current koala regulations in the *Planning Regulation 2017* that includes scattered koala habitat trees and small stands of koala habitat has been removed. This area needs to be retained and separately identified in the new koala habitat map to allow existing planning control, the avoid, minimise and offset hierarchy, to be retained.
- (d) The Koala Expert Panel's recommendation to allow local government to map and protect locally significant koala habitat through local planning schemes be implemented in the new SEQ koala planning framework to support coordinated action on koala protection by both the State and local governments in SEQ.
- (e) Areas identified on the new koala map as Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area should be identified as Transitional Habitat recognising these areas are State mapped koala habitat that are being proposed to be removed by the new mapping.
- (f) North Stradbroke Island (Minjerrabah) be identified as a Koala Priority Area to ensure the strictest clearing controls apply to protect the Island's koala habitat and unique local koala population.

Option Two

That Council resolves to authorise the Chief Executive Officer to make a submission to the Department of Environment and Science (DES) on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map based on the following and any additional matters Council decide to raise:

1. Council supports the adoption of new mapping and regulatory provisions aimed at facilitating the long term protection of a sustainable population of koalas in South East Queensland however the draft mapping as released has a number of inherent weaknesses and omissions that are likely to result in further net loss of currently protected koala habitat in Redland City (an existing priority area for koalas).
2. The two (2) week consultation period on the draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map is inadequate and should be extended to align with the consultation period for the *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* (31/01/2020). Council also questions the timing of the release of these important reforms and the commencement of the public consultation period in mid-December 2019.
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- (Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area) on the SEQ Koala Habitat Map which will ensure these areas are protected while a State led review of this habitat is undertaken over the next two (2) years.
- (b) Approximately 60 hectares of land that meets the new koala habitat methodology being remnant ecosystems or high value re-growth ecosystem with high to very high koala habitat suitability has been removed based on Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) applications. These areas should be reinstated in the koala habitat area mapping recognising the State has identified these areas as having high to very high koala habitat suitability.
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 - (d) The Koala Expert Panel's recommendation to allow local government to map and protect locally significant koala habitat through local planning schemes be implemented in the new SEQ koala planning framework to support coordinated action on koala protection by both the State and local governments in SEQ.
 - (e) Areas identified on the new koala map as Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area should be identified as Transitional Habitat recognising these areas are State mapped koala habitat that are being proposed to be removed by the new mapping.
 - (f) North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah) be identified as a Koala Priority Area to ensure the strictest clearing controls apply to protect the Island's koala habitat and unique local koala population.

Option Three

That Council resolves to not make a submission on the SEQ Koala Habitat Map.

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to authorise the Chief Executive Officer to make a submission to the Department of Environment and Science (DES) on the new SEQ Koala Habitat Map based on the following:

1. Council supports the adoption of new mapping and regulatory provisions aimed at facilitating the long term protection of a sustainable population of koalas in South East Queensland however the draft mapping as released has a number of inherent weaknesses and omissions that are likely to result in further net loss of currently protected koala habitat in Redland City (an existing priority area for koalas).
2. The two (2) week consultation period on the draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map is inadequate and should be extended to align with the consultation period for the *SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy 2019–2024* (31/01/2020). Council also questions the timing of the release of these important reforms and the commencement of the public consultation period in mid-December 2019.
3. The draft SEQ Koala Habitat Map proposes a significant reduction in the area of currently mapped koala habitat that have been subject to long-standing planning controls including a prohibition on clearing. Specific issues to be included in the submission are as follows:
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 - (b) Approximately 60 hectares of land that meets the new koala habitat methodology being remnant ecosystems or high value re-growth ecosystem with high to very high koala habitat suitability has been removed based on Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) applications. These areas should be reinstated in the koala habitat area mapping recognising the State has identified these areas as having high to very high koala habitat suitability.
 - (c) Approximately 5,680 hectares of mapped high and medium value koala rehabilitation areas under the current koala regulations in the *Planning Regulation 2017* that includes scattered koala habitat trees and small stands of koala habitat has been removed. This area needs to be retained and separately identified in the new koala habitat map to allow existing planning control, the avoid, minimise and offset hierarchy, to be retained.
 - (d) The Koala Expert Panel's recommendation to allow local government to map and protect locally significant koala habitat through local planning schemes be implemented in the new SEQ koala planning framework to support coordinated action on koala protection by both the State and local governments in SEQ.
 - (e) Areas identified on the new koala map as Locally Refined Koala Habitat Area should be identified as Transitional Habitat recognising these areas are State mapped koala habitat that are being proposed to be removed by the new mapping.

- (f) **North Stradbroke Island (Minjerrabah) be identified as a Koala Priority Area to ensure the strictest clearing controls apply to protect the Island's koala habitat and unique local koala population.**



