



Council Policy

KOALA CONSERVATION

Corporate Plan Reference:	<i>Custodianship of Noosa's Environment</i>
Endorsed by Council:	
Policy Author:	Planning and Environment Branch

INTRODUCTION

Noosa Shire's open space and vegetation networks set it apart from other coastal areas of South-east Queensland. This vegetation is habitat for many native species including koalas. Koalas are of great interest to residents and visitors and are listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act as 'vulnerable' in Queensland. A Koala Conservation Policy has been developed to help guide Council and the community with the conservation and protection of Noosa's koalas.

POLICY PURPOSE

The purpose of the Noosa Council Koala Conservation Policy is to provide a coordinated and structured framework to help conserve and protect koala populations and habitat within the Noosa Shire.

POLICY OUTCOMES

This policy seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- Protection and conservation of koala populations and habitat;
- Minimal or no interference with the natural movement and behaviour of koalas;
- Improved understanding of the distribution, abundance and health of koalas;
- More informed decision making when assessing developments and implementing Council capital and operational works;
- Increased community awareness and participation with koala conservation; and
- The development of a Koala Conservation Plan to guide implementation of this Policy.

POLICY SCOPE

This is a Shire-wide policy and applies to public and private lands.

This policy is sub-ordinate to State and National koala legislation and policy and does not replace such provisions. Further information can be found in the Noosa Council Koala Conservation Policy-Background Paper.

POLICY CONTEXT

Measures to conserve and protect koalas and their habitat will align with other strategies, policies and plans, such as the Noosa Plan, the Environment Levy Policy and the Tree Management on Public Land Policy.

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy states Council's position on the conservation and protection of koalas in Noosa Shire.

The Koala Conservation Policy focuses on eight key areas:

1. Habitat protection.
 - a. Where legislative and planning instruments allow, further habitat loss within known core koala habitat areas is prevented.
 - b. Measures to protect koala habitat are consistent with other plans, policies and programs for biodiversity protection. Examples include the Noosa Plan Biodiversity Overlay and Riparian Protection Areas and the Environment Levy Program.
 - c. Where possible, measures to conserve and enhance Strategic Biodiversity Corridors and/or Strategic Offset Investment Corridors, are focused on areas that assist koala populations.
 - d. Land conservation practices are encouraged in known koala habitat areas. This may include support for Voluntary Conservation Agreements through the Environment Levy, and/or encouragement to include koala food trees on both private and public land in known koala habitat areas.
 - e. Measures to conserve and protect koalas are prioritised in koala habitat areas where it can be demonstrated that there are long-term viable populations of koalas. This will ensure that resources and efforts are allocated effectively.
 - f. State government controlled land with known koala habitat, that currently does not have conservation protection, is to be investigated for potential inclusion in the conservation estate.
2. Improved understanding of Koala needs and behaviours.
 - a. Research partnerships between Council, State Government, research organisations and koala interest groups are encouraged and aimed at:
 - i. identifying and eliminating information gaps about koala behaviour within the Noosa Shire.
 - ii. identifying habitat and range requirements for local koalas.
 - iii. assessing the health of koala populations.
 - iv. assessing the importance of regrowth and isolated trees to koalas, outside remnant vegetation areas.
 - v. prioritising conservation and protection actions.
 - b. Processes and systems are to be investigated, potentially with koala interest groups and experts, to further collate information about koala sightings, injuries, and mortality in the Shire.
 - c. Key experts are to be identified and consulted on koala needs and behaviour. Such experts may include State Government Departments, University staff and students, Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, wildlife carers and koala advocates.
3. Mapping and Monitoring Local Koala Populations.
 - a. In partnership with research agencies, the distribution and health of koalas across the Shire is to be assessed and monitored.
 - b. Building on current mapping resources, koala records, and regional ecosystem mapping, koala habitat mapping is to be updated. The updated koala habitat mapping will be considered in future amendments to the Noosa Plan.
 - c. Regrowth, urban trees and rural 'stepping stone' corridors are to be considered in koala mapping.

- d. Records and data of koala injuries and fatalities are to be used to support the mapping of critical hot spots to inform development assessment and Council capital and operational works projects. These critical hot spots may relate to vehicle strikes, dog attacks or infected koalas.
- e. Up-to-date methods for verifying the occurrence and health of koalas in Noosa Shire is to be investigated and applied where possible. This may include grid point surveys, koala detection dogs and heat-seeking monitoring devices attached to drones.

4. Planning & Development Decision-making

- a. Potential gaps in National and State legislation and policy on koalas is to be investigated and measures considered for further protection through the Noosa Plan. This may include, for example, the identification of Matters of Local Significance (MLES) and tree protection provisions other than the Noosa Plan mapped biodiversity overlay.
- b. Government organisations, research organisations and koala interest groups are to be consulted on the preparation of comprehensive shire-wide koala habitat mapping. Mapping may considered for inclusion in the planning scheme for development assessment purposes and can also inform Council developments that may be exempt from planning scheme provisions.
- c. State Government has developed the Qld Environmental Offsets Policy 2014 to guide developments that may impact on matters of environmental significance. As directed by State Government, the Environment Offsets Policy 2014 is to be integrated into the new planning scheme.
- d. Offset receiving sites are to be identified on public or private land that could potentially be used for re-instating koala habitat.
- e. Consistent with the State Qld Offset Policy 2014, environmental offsets provisions are applied for clearing of koala habitat in mapped koala habitat areas, provided the relevant development applicant has demonstrated that the clearing is unavoidable and efforts have gone towards mitigating potential risks to koalas.
- f. Council Environmental staff are to consider, on an as-needs basis:
 - i. potential land suitable for purchase as environmental offsets, and/or
 - ii. Council owned or controlled land suitable for environmental offsets, and/or
 - iii. land parcels in or near koala habitat areas that are suitable for revegetating with koala food trees.
- g. The feasibility of dog-free estates in or abutting known koala habitat areas is to be investigated.

5. Infrastructure Decisions

- a. The impacts on koalas and habitat from Council planned capital and operational works is to be assessed through the following process:
 - i. In the first instance, investigate measures to avoid any impacts on koalas and habitat from planned works;
 - ii. Mitigate unavoidable impacts from works¹;
 - iii. Offset unavoidable impacts as close as possible to the impact site.

¹ An example of mitigating impacts: reducing tree clearing by shifting the majority of the impact site to an area already cleared of vegetation. Any remaining trees that are unavoidably cleared (residual impact) are offset.

- b. Where appropriate, the best practice design and construction of infrastructure in known koala habitat areas is to be considered, including:
 - i. koala-friendly fencing in koala movement corridors;
 - ii. koala exclusion fencing at known car strike hotspots;
 - iii. koala crossing' warning road signs where koalas regularly cross roads;
 - iv. subject to traffic regulations and standards, potential speed limit reductions at points where koalas regularly cross roads;
 - v. improved street lighting where koalas regularly cross roads to ensure the animals are visible to drivers;
 - vi. where it can be demonstrated that it will be of benefit to koalas, wildlife underpasses and/or land bridges, when constructing roads and bridges;
- c. State government authorities (e.g. Department of Transport and Main Roads) are to be consulted and encouraged to mitigate threats to koalas on state controlled roads.
- d. Where possible, vegetation on road reserves is to be retained because it provides valuable movement corridors for koalas and other fauna.

6. Pest Control

- a. Targeted control of wild dogs in known koala habitat areas is to be undertaken, consistent with the Noosa LGA Pest Management Plan and subject to Council pest management priorities.

7. A Cautious Approach to Supporting Koala Translocation.

- a. Translocation of koalas within the Shire is only be supported where it adheres to State guidelines, considers existing koala populations at the site, and involves identification of suitable animals for translocation.

8. Increased Community Awareness and Participation.

- a. Community education concerning koala conservation is provided. Such information may include habitat requirements, threats and measures to conserve and protect koalas. Mechanisms for educating the community and visitors may include:
 - i. engaging with Tourism Noosa and tourism operators to foster koala conservation and educate visitors to the shire;
 - ii. providing koala education at public events such as the Noosa Show, Festival of Water and other events.
- b. The adequacy of wildlife care in relation to koalas is to be reviewed for:
 - i. Current wildlife rescue contact signage and information that is available to the public.
 - ii. The process of the public responding to sick or injured wildlife and referral to care and veterinary services.
- c. Community involvement in koala monitoring or research projects is encouraged.
- d. The capacity for Council and the community to protect and manage koala populations and habitat is enhanced by partnering with organisations such as local environmental groups, local koala advocacy groups, Noosa Biosphere Reserve Foundation, natural resource conservation groups, philanthropic organisations etc.

- e. Through existing mechanisms, such as Council's Responsible Dog Ownership program, encourage dog owners in known koala habitat areas to:
 - i. take active measures to reduce dog attacks on koalas through keeping dogs constrained at night;
 - ii. encourage the keeping of small (under 7 kg) dogs instead of large dogs;
 - iii. encourage dog-owners to be koala-aware when dogs are exercised on public land.

CONSULTATION

Council consulted with key stakeholders and undertook a public consultation process with regard to the development of this Koala Conservation Policy.

RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

- *Australian Government Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)*
- *Australian Government Interim Koala Referral Advice for Proponents*
- *Koala-sensitive Design Guideline: A guide to koala-sensitive design measures for planning and development activities (2012)*
- *Noosa Council Environment Levy Policy.*
- *Noosa LGA Pest Management Plan 2015-2019.*
- *Noosa Council Tree Management on Public Land Policy*
- *Qld Environmental Offsets Policy (2014)*
- *Qld Land Act (1994)*
- *Qld Local Government Act (2009)*
- *Qld Nature Conservation Act (1992)*
- *Qld Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan (2006)*
- *Qld Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Program (2006 - 2016)*
- *Qld Vegetation Management Act (1999)*
- *South East Queensland Koala Conservation State Planning Regulatory Provisions (2010)*
- *State Government Supported Community Infrastructure Koala Conservation Policy (2014)*
- *The Noosa Plan-Biodiversity Overlay and associated provisions.*

DEFINITIONS

“Biodiversity” refers to the variety of all life forms - all the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, and the ecosystems of which they are a part.

“Environment” refers to the use of the word to describe the natural (not man-made) environment of the region and includes the natural ecological systems of air, water, soil and associated species of flora and fauna.

“Strategic Biodiversity Corridors” are broad tracts of vegetated, cleared and partly cleared land, extending across the Noosa landscape that consolidate or connect core habitat, and can occur across private and/or public land.

“Strategic Offset Investment Corridors” are broad tracts of vegetated, cleared and partly cleared land, extending across the Noosa landscape that consolidate or connect core habitat, and can occur across private and/or public land which are subject to biodiversity/koala offsets.

Version control:

Version	Reason/ Trigger	Change (Y/N)	Endorsed/ Reviewed by	Date
1.0	New Policy	N	Noosa Council	14 July 2015