

Zoo site homes spark fears for wild koalas

Cayla Dengate

MORETON Bay Regional Council is under pressure to reject a development application that would turn vital koala habitat into a bustling suburb.

The native bushland in Dakabin's Alma Park Zoo would be replaced by 151 houses when the zoo moves to Logan this year, adding to more than 1000 housing lots approved in Dakabin in the past 12 months.

Head native mammal zookeeper Kim Revelly had concerns for the wild koala population without the zoo's sheltering bushland.

"This is the last remaining stronghold for koalas and other native animals in the area," she said. Only a handful of koalas that live in the zoo's bushland are in captivity.

A 2001 Department of Environment and Resource Management report described Dakabin as an "area of high koala conservation value" and Australian Koala Foundation chief executive Deborah Tobart said the greater area was currently home to a population of an estimated 270-540 koalas.

"This is serious," Ms Tobart said. "Koalas will be forced on to the ground, where they'll be killed by dogs, cars and come to harm in other ways."

Moreton Bay Regional Councillor Julie Greer (Division 4) said development was inevitable.

"I wish Alma Park Zoo wasn't relocating, but the zoo and the

land it occupies at Dakabin are both privately owned," she said.

But she said all development adhered to strict conditions - including daily site inspections of future construction sites by a botanist, employing a qualified independent wildlife expert on site full-time during construction and planting a corridor of trees through subdivisions - in areas mapped as a koala habitat.

Villawood Properties cleared bushland on Alma Rd to build the residential development Essencia, and has sold 100 of 260 properties. Development manager Michael Williams said industry supported the koala-friendly conditions.

"We are committed to a tree replacement program which sees us replant five trees for every juvenile koala habitat tree cleared in a dedicated tree corridor, which provides a sanctuary for animals including koalas," he said.

"We've worked really hard to protect and enhance the area for both the wildlife that already call this area home and for the families that get to call this their back yard."

But Ms Revelly said it was too little, too late.

"It's something, but it's not enough," she said.

"Even if trees are planted through the suburb, it still puts koalas right next to roads and cats and dogs."

Cr Greer said council had not yet made a decision on the Alma Park Zoo lot's proposed development.

