



FAQs: WHAT DOES THE KOALA LISTING DECISION MEAN FOR ME?

Australia's most at-risk populations of koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) – those in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory - are now protected under national environment law. These FAQs have been developed to inform industry, developers, landholders and landowners.

Why have these koala populations been protected?

Koalas in New South Wales and Queensland are under threat from vegetation loss, vehicle strike and predation by dogs as a result of urban expansion, particularly in coastal regions. A lot of habitat has already been lost and fragmented, making koala populations more susceptible to the effects of drought, climate change and disease.

As a result, the federal environment minister has listed the Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory koala populations as 'vulnerable' under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act), in order to protect the species and give it the best chance of survival.

Where are the newly protected koalas found?

The koalas protected under national environment law are all of those found in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Their range is limited to where eucalypts are found, mostly in coastal areas and in central Queensland. They can be sparsely distributed, and hard to see, so that people may not even know they are around. The map below shows what we know about where koala habitat exists in these states, which is a good indication of where they are likely to occur.

Koalas are also found in Victoria and South Australia. However, these populations are not considered to be vulnerable and are not listed as threatened under national environment law.



INDICATIVE MAP ONLY:

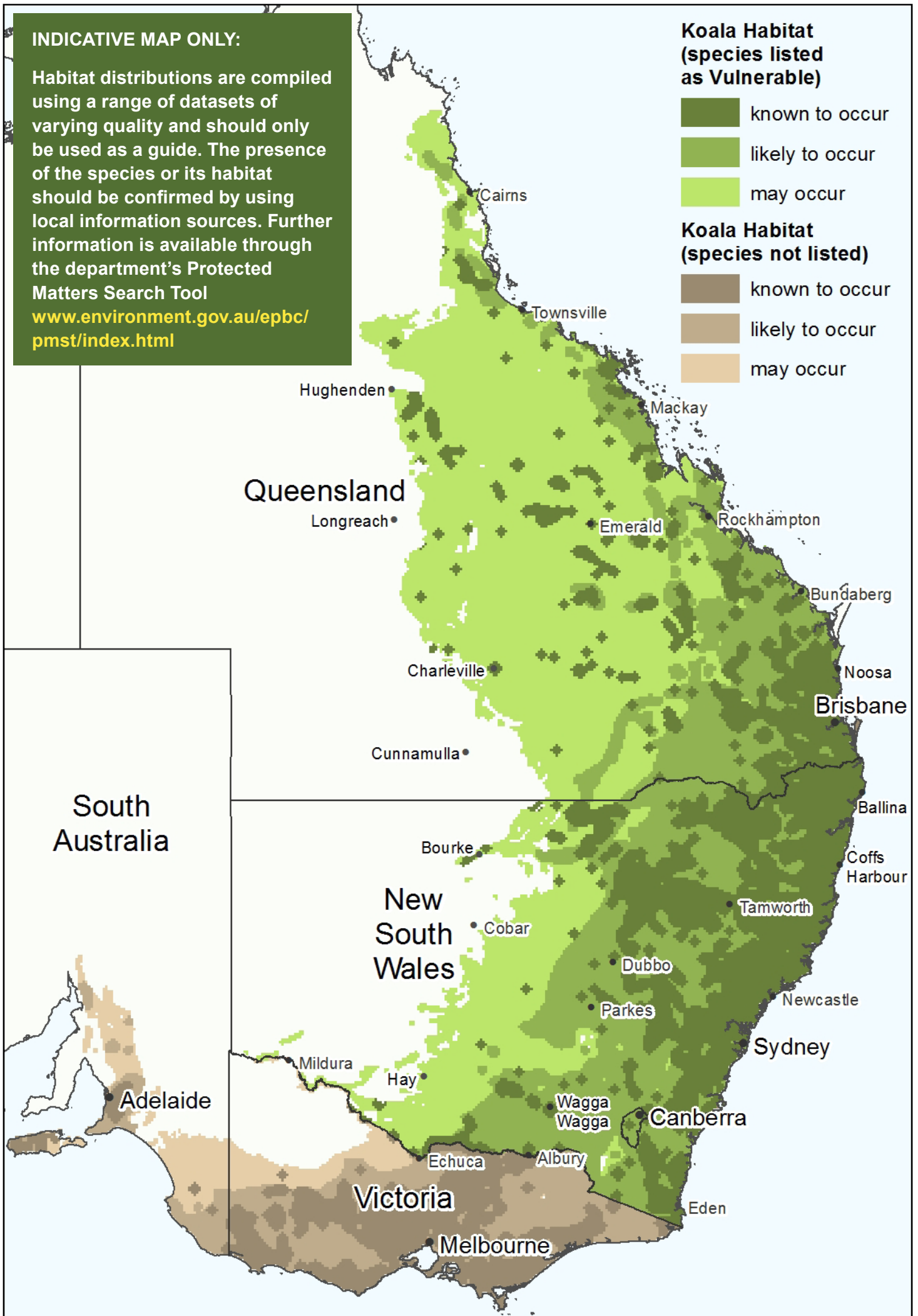
Habitat distributions are compiled using a range of datasets of varying quality and should only be used as a guide. The presence of the species or its habitat should be confirmed by using local information sources. Further information is available through the department's Protected Matters Search Tool www.environment.gov.au/epbc/pmst/index.html

Koala Habitat (species listed as Vulnerable)

- known to occur
- likely to occur
- may occur

Koala Habitat (species not listed)

- known to occur
- likely to occur
- may occur





Why is this only happening in a few places when there are also koalas elsewhere?

The health, size and status of koala populations differ significantly across Australia. For example, koala populations on Kangaroo Island and in parts of Victoria are considered too large to be sustainable for their habitat and need to be managed through supervised translocation and sterilisation.

At the other end of the spectrum, some regions such as parts of coastal Queensland and New South Wales have seen their koala populations decline over a number of years and they face an increasing threat from urban expansion, disease, habitat loss, vehicle strike, predation by dogs, and from their susceptibility to drought and climate change.

For this reason, it is not necessary to list all koala populations as nationally threatened. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee recommended that blanket or a one-size-fits-all approach to koala species listing would be inappropriate and did not recommend a listing of the whole national koala population.

The Committee recommended that koala populations in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory were most at risk and required listing under national environment law to ensure the species sustainability and the best conservation outcome for the koala. The Committee's advice is available at www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=197.





I'm planning a development in South Australia or Victoria that might impact on koalas. Do I need federal environmental approval?

You do not need to seek federal environmental approval related to potential impacts on koalas for projects in these states because the koala populations are not considered to be vulnerable and are not listed under national environment law.

However, your project may require approval under state or local government legislation. For information on Victorian state environment law, visit www.dse.vic.gov.au or for South Australian state environment law, visit www.environment.sa.gov.au.

Approval under national environment law may also be required if other matters of national environmental significance listed under the EPBC Act may be significantly impacted.

What happens to development in New South Wales, ACT and Queensland? Does this mean more red tape?

State legislation already exists in New South Wales and Queensland that restricts development in areas of koala habitat. In some cases there will be no additional impact on development and in others there should be minimal impact on development. However, national listing of these koala populations as a vulnerable species gives additional protection to important populations and habitat that is critical to their survival.

National protection has been deemed necessary by a thorough scientific assessment of the declining status of the species.

I live in Queensland/ACT/New South Wales. Does this mean that I can't cut down a tree on my property?

No. Federal listing of the Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory koala populations will strengthen the protections that are already in place for this iconic species. But this doesn't mean that all activities in these areas will now require federal environmental approval.

At the householder level, minor activities, such as cutting down a single tree on private land in an area where koalas are listed as vulnerable are unlikely to require federal environment approval.



In order to reduce red tape, the Australian Government is in the process of implementing proposed reforms to the EPBC Act, which aim to take a smarter approach to environmental regulation that will better protect our environment on a larger scale, while making things easier for business.

How will red tape be avoided?

Reforms to the EPBC Act have been proposed that will result in a more effective and efficient national environment law that will allow environmental assessments to keep pace with Australia's growing economy, and save money for business by increasing timeliness in decision-making.

As part of this process, the Australian Government is leading a national reform process through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targeting reduction of red tape. There is consensus at all levels that it is important to maintain high environmental standards while making things more efficient and certain for business.

The Australian Government expects to introduce legislation enacting key elements of this reform package in the winter 2012 session of Parliament.

Does this mean that I now have to get state and federal approval for my project?

You will only require federal environmental approval if your proposal is likely to result in a significant impact on a protected koala population.

State requirements in relation to projects proposed within mapped koala habitat are specified in specific state legislation. For information on Queensland state environment law, visit www.derm.qld.gov.au or for New South Wales state environment law, visit www.environment.nsw.gov.au.

How do I know if my project will have a significant impact on koalas?

The federal environment department is in the process of preparing guidelines for the listed koala populations to assist people to determine whether they need to lodge a referral under national environment law. These guidelines will give you information that will help you determine whether your proposed action is likely to have a significant impact on these koala populations.

In the meantime, if you are planning a project and you are uncertain about whether it will have a significant impact, you can contact the department at epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au or phone 1800 803 772 for more information. You may also wish to seek advice from your local council and/or state conservation authority.

What about koala habitat?

The map and the link to the Protected Matters Search Tool at the beginning of these FAQs provides a guide to where koala habitat is likely to occur. However, it is not exhaustive and it is recommended that you seek further information. A number of resources can be obtained from your state conservation authority and/or local council with information about koala habitat.





The federal environment department is preparing guidelines that will include information about where koala habitat occurs.

What happens if I don't refer my project and just ignore the federal environment law?

If you don't refer your project and ignore federal environment law and your project has a significant impact on an important population of the koala you will be subject to substantial penalties under the EPBC Act. The maximum penalties associated with a civil prosecution are \$550,000 for an individual and \$5.5 million for a body corporate.

How long will the national environmental assessment and approvals process take?

The timeframe for the initial assessment of whether or not your project will need a full assessment and approval under national environment law will take 20 business days.

If an assessment is required, then the timeframe for the next stage of the process varies, depending on the complexity of the assessment and the assessment method. Once you have completed and provided the necessary assessment documentation to the department, and the public have had an opportunity to comment on your proposal, it will take 40 business days for the final decision. The timeframe may be extended if the Minister stops the clock because additional information is needed.

For more information on the EPBC Act, visit www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.



How much will it cost me?

Currently, there are no financial charges associated with the assessment and approvals process under national environment law.

If my project might impact these koalas, does that mean it can't go ahead?

No, not necessarily. It depends on the degree of impact determined during the assessment process. Australia's national environment law is not about stopping activities and development. It is about protecting Australia's unique plants and animals. The department works with people to try and ensure that actions can proceed where appropriate measures are put in place. Social and economic circumstances can be taken into account when considering approvals.

What sort of conditions would I have to put in place?

Conditions imposed typically relate to avoidance, and mitigation of any significant impact. For any residual impact, you may also propose compensatory measures.

What constitutes 'significant impact' on a vulnerable species?

Information on what constitutes a 'significant impact' on a vulnerable species can be found in the 'EPBC Act Policy Statement 1.1 Significant Impact Guidelines – Matters of National Environmental Significance' on the department's website at www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/nes-guidelines.html.

These 'significant impact' guidelines should be read in conjunction with the specific guidelines for the koala, which are currently being prepared.

If you have any doubts about whether your project will have a significant impact on the species you can always contact the department at epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au or phone 1800 803 772 and officers will assist you.

