



\$20m to rescue Coast koalas

Geoff Chambers

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A KOALA rescue operation could cost ratepayers and developers up to \$20 million to save 100 of the iconic animals.

The koalas will be sedated and moved to conservation sites and potential new sites acquired by the Gold Coast City Council.

The expensive program is an Australian first and will allow council officers to shift koalas from their Coomera home to the western side of the highway.

There are fears that moving the easily stressed animals from their natural homes could be detrimental to the koalas.

Mayor Ron Clarke, who will chair the first council budget review sessions tomorrow, said he was amazed at the cost of the project.

Phase one has been calculated at \$2 million. Phase two will cost \$15 million, plus more for conservation programs.

Cr Clarke said some council officers had been too quick to throw out his idea to move the koala population to South Stradbroke Island.

"I plan to ask the officers again when the item comes up at full council next Monday," he said.

"There is always this negativity from officers and a refusal to properly look at the facts.

"I also plan to take a look at the costs on the project. The costs on phase two do seem excessive."

The 500 koalas at Coomera are the last survivors of the northern Gold Coast koala reserve, which has been affected by development in the area.

The Coomera Town Centre precinct, which is expected to be approved by the State Government early next year, is also located in the middle of the koala habitat.

The council's sustainable city future committee chairman Peter Young said the project was the 'last resort' for the koalas.

Koala conservation project manager John Callaghan, Australian Wildlife hospital senior veterinarian Jon Hanger and Queensland University of Technology professor Peter Timms have orchestrated the rescue program.

The trio will play a leading role in rescuing the koalas.

The Environmental Protection Agency has endorsed the relocation operation.

"We will hopefully get the OK from council next Monday and then begin to proceed with the acquirement of equipment including radio collars, receivers, tracking equipment and the proper sedation tools," said Mr Callaghan.

The koala population appeared to be healthy and not suffering from chlamydia organisms, he said.

Dr Hanger said over-development had left the council with no other option.

"They would die if nothing was done," said Dr Hanger.

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"Since I arrived on the Gold Coast in 1983, I've witnessed probably a 50 per cent reduction in koala numbers."

Funding for the project will be sourced from the State Government, developers and ratepayers.

Fact sheets will be posted to Coomera residents early next year, asking them to alert the council when they spot koalas.