

Mining company QGC given approval to clear critical koala habitat for CSG wells near Dalby

ABC Southern Qld 27 March 2017 By Isobel Roe Photo: ABC Open: Peter Crinion



A gas company has been given federal approval to clear 54 hectares of koala habitat for new coal seam gas wells on Queensland's Western Downs.

QGC, which is owned by Shell, applied to drill 25 new wells near Dalby as part of project Anya.

The company's own reports submitted to the federal Environment Department said habitat "critical to the survival of the koala" would likely be affected.

Australian Koala Foundation chief executive Deborah Tabart said the decision to allow any clearing in areas where koala populations were struggling was unacceptable.

"I have written to minister Jackie Trad and the Premier in recent times on several occasions saying that not one single piece of koala habitat in Queensland should be allowed to be cut down," she said.

"Every industry wanting to go about it should be absolutely ensuring that they do not destroy the koala habitat."

Ms Tabart said the federal environmental act had failed koalas in Queensland.

"The Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act in my view has been a complete waste of time to protect koala habitat," she said.

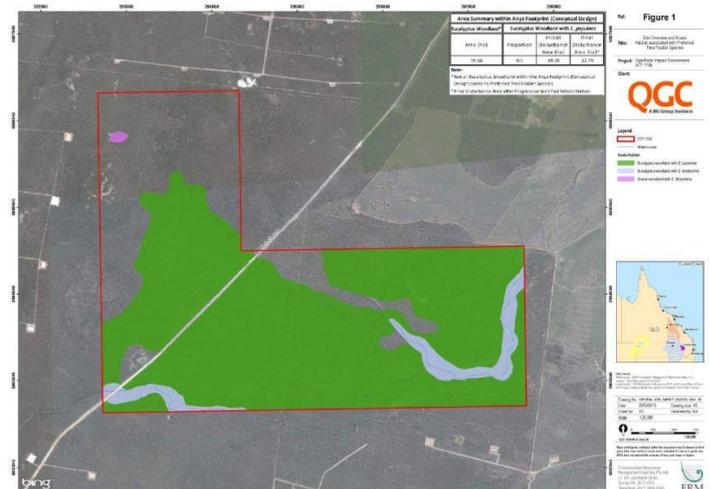
QGC's report compiled for the department in February 2015 said the development would encroach on the vulnerable animal's territory.

"Taking into account progressive rehabilitation of CSG wells shortly after commissioning, approximately 12.79ha of habitat critical to the survival of the koala will be impacted due to the proposed CSG development," the application read.

Photo: An image taken from the Significant Impact Assessment report showing the site overview. (Report: bg-group.com)

But the report said while about a third of the land slated for clearing was critical habitat, the impact on the vulnerable population would be minimal.

"While the identified koala habitat values within [the site] is considered to be in good condition, the very low density of koalas combined with large home ranges within a geographically extensive intact remnant, will result in "no significant impact", " the report read.



Koala habitat to be created in central Queensland

A QGC spokesman said the company would create koala habitat in central Queensland to offset any damage.

"All of QGC's operations, including the development of wells, pipelines and access tracks, comply with Queensland's strict environmental controls," the spokesman said.

"An area of 187 hectares within QGC's biodiversity property in central Queensland will be set aside to offset any potential loss of habitat."

But Ms Tabart said that was pointless.

"You get up to 70 and 80 per cent mortality once you move animals away from their homes," she said.

"It's like saying to you tonight, I'm going to knock your home down, no worries, I'll build you another one, but just wait 20 years and in the meantime just wander around."