

Fears for the future of Gold Coast koalas as report reveals significant decline

[ABC Gold Coast](#)

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A Gold Coast City Council report shows one of south-east Queensland's largest koala populations is likely to decline so far in size it will be unviable within 50 years and will nearly halve within 20 years.



[Photo: A koala seen on a footpath at East Coomera. \(Supplied: Coomera Conservation Group\)](#)

Those forecasts come from pages that were redacted from a council report into the East Coomera koala population on the northern Gold Coast that was released last November.

Most of the information on the redacted 17 pages has now been released to the Coomera Conservation Group under a Right To Information application.

WHAT INFORMATION WAS WITHHELD?

University of Queensland Associate Professor Jonathan Rhodes led the state's expert koala panel and has examined the section of the report that was withheld from the public, including forecasts for the population's future.

"Really what it shows is that modelling suggests that population is likely to be declining over the next 50 years, maybe getting down to around 150 koalas in 50 years but also the expected future development is likely to reduce that further," Associate Professor Rhodes said.

"Maybe down to 100 or as low as 50 koalas."

The council report found the area now has 499 koalas and needs a population of 170 to remain viable.

The population has remained steady for the past decade, but is facing reduced habitat from development and deaths from car strikes, disease and dog attacks.

The publicly released report included sections that found the population is "still theoretically possible to establish a viable koala population", with the conclusion the population will be lost "within decades" if no action is taken to save the population.

What it did not include was the specific modelling showing that decline.

WHY WERE SOME PAGES REDACTED?

The council said in a statement that the redacted section contained information that could be found in other parts of the report.

It said the modelling that was redacted required specific koala ecology and biology knowledge.

"The models cannot be read in isolation and without this knowledge of koala ecology and biology, the models can be easily misinterpreted," the statement said.

Coomera Conservation Group co-founder Karina Waterman said she applied for the full report after becoming curious about what was in the redacted pages.

"We had been told most of that redaction had occurred because it related to property owners and land that they owned and there were some issues with privacy," Ms Waterman said.

She said she was surprised by what was released under Right To Information.

"When we got it back we found what was in there that was redacted was quite different to what we had believed at the time," Ms Waterman said.

The federal Department of the Environment and Energy is assessing a major proposed development by Polaris Coomera for the area, and Ms Waterman wanted the full report considered.

The Department had previously told the ABC it only had a redacted version of the report, but now said it has now been provided with the full koala report that will be included in its assessment of that development.