

Question on Notice

No. 667

Asked on Thursday, 12 September 2013

MR HOLSWICH asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR EMERSON)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise what steps are being taken to ensure the protection and preservation of koala populations as part of the Moreton Bay Rail Link project?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Pine Rivers for the question.

The Moreton Bay Rail corridor traverses a significant population of koalas. Safeguarding the welfare of these nationally-significant animals is one of the project's highest priorities.

The project team has prepared a Koala Action Plan to manage the project's impacts on the local koala population, with input from experts in koala ecology, conservation and environmental management.

In consultation with the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Moreton Bay Regional Council and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, the project team has been working to secure local land for planting of koala habitat trees as part of the project's offset strategy.

I can advise work has already started on tree planting activities on state-owned land, at the corner of Wagner and Junction Road in Griffin, the first stage of koala offset tree planting for the Moreton Bay Rail Link and that land has also been purchased at Laceys Creek for more planting.

In addition to off-set tree planting, the project is funding ground breaking research being carried out for the first time in Queensland. An extensive tagging and monitoring program is being carried out under the expert direction of Dr Jon Hanger and his team from Endeavour Veterinary Ecology.

The monitoring program allows real time tracking of koala movements, which will assist with tracking local koalas prior to and during the construction phase and ensure their safety. By monitoring koalas for at least six months prior to clearing work starting, the project team will get an indication of their numbers, location and preferred movements.

This information will help the project designers to identify the locations and design of fauna crossings.

At the time the koalas are tagged they also undergo a health check, and thanks to a collaboration between the project team and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) vaccine development researchers, they may also receive a vaccine for Chlamydia.

The project team has been working with QUT, Australia Zoo, Endeavour Veterinary Ecology to make this trial happen and provide valuable data to the research team.

Trials with captive animals at Lone Pine Sanctuary have so far shown the vaccine is effective; the researchers now have the opportunity to carry out the largest trial of the vaccine on wild koalas by working with the animals in the vicinity of the rail link project.

The project team are committed to working with koala stakeholders and relevant government agencies to provide for the short and long term protection of koalas throughout construction of the project.