

Question on Notice

No. 37

Asked on Tuesday, 4 February 2020

MR A POWELL ASKED THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND MINISTER FOR THE ARTS (HON L ENOCH)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the government's Draft South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy 2019-2024—

Will the Minister guarantee it will not impinge on the current approvals primary producers in Glass House have through the Vegetation Management Act to undertake bushfire mitigation (i.e. controlled burns) and felling of timber for fence posts and building maintenance?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

The Nature Conservation and Other Legislation (Koala Protection) Amendment Regulation 2020 commenced on 7 February 2020.

The new regulations do not impinge on the ability of primary producers to undertake bushfire mitigation (that is, controlled burns) and felling of timber for fence posts and building maintenance that is done in accordance with the legislation.

The new planning framework introduces Koala Priority Areas, which are large connected areas that include koala habitat, as well as areas that are suitable for habitat restoration.

More than 690,000 hectares of land in south east Queensland has been mapped as koala habitat under the new regulations. That is an increase of more than 421,000 hectares on what existed previously for State protected koala habitat. Over 577,000 hectares in south east Queensland is now identified as Koala Priority Area.

Clearing of koala habitat areas within Koala Priority Areas is prohibited under the new regulations, however, certain exemptions apply including clearing for safety – establishing a necessary fire break or management line, and removal of dangerous trees.

The vegetation management framework under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, has never required land owners to seek a development approval to undertake fuel reduction burns. The only thing that is required, is for land owners to have a permit issued by their local Fire Warden. Similarly, in regrowth vegetation or 'least concern remnant vegetation', land owners have never needed an approval to take timber to maintain fences and infrastructure.

The same exemptions for land owners that have been in effect for almost 20 years under the vegetation management framework, will also apply to koala habitat areas. This includes clearing for fire breaks, fire management lines, and the need to remove or reduce the imminent risk of serious injury to a person or damage to infrastructure that the vegetation poses.

It includes the exemption to clear and maintain necessary fire breaks adjacent to built infrastructure of up to 20 metres wide, or 1.5 times the height of the nearest adjacent vegetation, whichever is wider; and to clear necessary fire management lines up to 10 metres wide.