

# Operational policy

Wildlife Management

## Release of rehabilitated koalas and the take and release of koalas in imminent danger

*Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of Environment and Science. Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.*

### Policy subject

This policy outlines the circumstances in which a koala is released back into the wild, including a rehabilitated koala<sup>1</sup>, and a koala which has been taken that is in imminent danger<sup>2</sup>.

### Policy statement

A healthy koala can only be taken from the wild by key personnel and only when the koala is in clear and imminent danger. This excludes injured koalas. Wherever possible a koala taken from the wild should be released back to its prescribed natural habitat<sup>3</sup>.

A permit holder can apply to release a koala to an area other than its capture site if there is a high probability the koala would suffer serious injury or death if released back into its original habitat. This belief must be supported by sufficient evidence such as records of repeat occurrences of rehabilitation (either of the same koala, or multiple koalas from the same site).

### *Koalas in imminent danger*

An appropriately qualified person<sup>4</sup> within the South East Queensland (SEQ) Wildlife Hospital Network may take an apparently healthy koala from the wild when it is found to be in clear and imminent danger to release the koala in an area other than its prescribed natural habitat. If a person identifies a koala that they perceive to be in imminent danger, the person can call 1300 ANIMAL, where the RSPCA Call Centre will notify the closest person approved within the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network to respond to koalas in imminent danger. No person is to capture a koala that is in clear and imminent danger if, in so doing, the person is likely to place either him/herself or the koala at risk of injury.

If the risk of injury to an apparently healthy koala is not immediate, the hazard should be removed, where possible, and the animal should be observed and allowed the opportunity to move away from the risk independently.

<sup>1</sup> A koala which has been rehabilitated following admission and treatment under the supervision of a koala hospital in relation to trauma, disease or orphaned juveniles and is ready for release into the wild

<sup>2</sup> A situation where all of the following circumstances are apparent:

- a koala is found to be in danger of death due to human-related factors; and
- the danger is immediately present and is likely to result in injury to, or death of, the koala if immediate intervention is not undertaken.

<sup>3</sup> As defined in Schedule 2 of the Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan 2017, for a koala taken from the wild, or a koala that is the progeny of a koala taken from the wild –

- (i) the area within 1km from where the koala was taken, if at least part of the area is koala habitat; or
- (ii) otherwise – any koala habitat within 5km from where the koala was taken.

<sup>4</sup> A holder of a rehabilitation permit granted under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 who is authorised to rehabilitate koalas

## Release of koalas and the take and release of koalas in imminent danger

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If it is determined that the koala is not in imminent danger, the koala is not to be interfered with, and a notification is to be provided to the department within 10 business days.

If it is determined that the koala is in imminent danger, an appropriately qualified person may be authorised to capture the animal and transport it to either RSPCA Queensland Wildlife Hospital, Currumbin Wildlife Hospital or Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital for veterinary assessment, based on whichever is in the closest proximity. A notification of this capture is to be provided to the department within 10 business days.

Pending the results of a veterinary assessment, the koala is to then either be held at the assessing hospital for treatment, or transported and held at the Moggill Koala Rehabilitation Centre to await release.

### **Release of a koala into its prescribed natural habitat**

Wherever possible, a koala taken from the wild, or a koala that is the progeny of a koala taken from the wild, including a koala that has been rehabilitated, should be released back to its prescribed natural habitat. However, circumstances may arise where this may not be possible including where the habitat is no longer available or is not considered to be a suitable environment for release.

If the exact location where the koala was found is known and it has been assessed as being a suitable environment<sup>5</sup> for release, it must be released there.

If the original location where the koala was found is assessed and found to not be a suitable environment for release, the koala must be released into suitable prescribed natural habitat. This habitat must be as near as possible to the original location, and preferably without transporting it across a physical boundary that it would not normally cross (e.g. a river) or a hazard that would pose significant risk or injury (e.g. a major road).

### **Release of koalas outside prescribed natural habitat**

To release a koala outside of its prescribed natural habitat, when that habitat is no longer available or considered to be suitable, the appropriately qualified person is to apply for approval.

A koala should only be released away from its original location when the known in-situ hazards outweigh the hazards associated with relocation. The release of rehabilitated animals into habitat other than that from which they originated should always be carefully considered in order to control the risk of undesirable ecological impacts.

In this process, both the prescribed natural habitat and the alternative habitat need to be assessed.

When an authorisation to release outside of prescribed natural habitat is received, an appropriately qualified person must carry out the release within three (3) months of the koala's readiness for release being confirmed by a veterinarian. The release must be in accordance with the release procedures outlined in the 'Code of Practice: Care of orphaned, sick or injured protected animals in Queensland – *Nature Conservation Act 1992*'.

An official record of the authorisation to release a koala outside of prescribed natural habitat is made.

## **Legislative provisions**

The following legislation and instruments provide authority for this operational policy:

- *Nature Conservation Act 1992*

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<sup>5</sup> A suitable environment for release is one that:

- contains appropriate habitat and an adequate number of food trees, and
- is free of genuine hazards or risks (i.e. not a roadside), and
- is not known to be subject to imminent land-clearing or development.

# Release of koalas and the take and release of koalas in imminent danger

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- Nature Conservation (Wildlife Management) Regulation 2006 ("Wildlife Management Regulation")
- Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan 2017 ("Koala Conservation Plan").


## Related documents

A detailed procedural guideline will be developed to ensure successful implementation of the Operational policy.  
Code of Practice: Care of orphaned, sick or injured protected animals in Queensland

## Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Science should satisfy themselves independently by consulting their own professional advisors before undertaking any course of action.

## Approved by



Signature

30/07/2019

Date

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## Version history

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