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PLAN TO PROTECT KOALAS

JANE PINDER

KOALA protection can be a complex issue for developers, with every project needing to be taken on a case-by-case basis.

After two months of consultation, the federal Department of Environment has released its finalised referral guidelines to help developers and governments navigate the requirements of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 for the koala.

It is important for long-term recovery planning for the vulnerable species, with a loss of as little as 2ha of critical habitat having the potential to be considered "significant".

The guidelines, designed for the project planning stage, promote a clear and consistent approach for developers dealing with koala habitat, and provide guidance on issues such as information expectations, survey planning and impact mitigation.

The Unison Projects Griffin

Pocket development at North Lakes has a community of koalas living in The Shores residential estate.

General manager Jonathan Levy said a lot of behind-the-scenes work went into making

sure the koala population was protected. Of the 17ha to be developed, about a third of it would be retained as open space and significant vegetation for koalas, connecting with environmental corridors to the north and south.

Mr Levy said extensive

revegetation would take place at The Shores koala habitat, with a 15-year plan requiring Unison to reach a certain percentage of canopy coverage and tree maturity, as well as remove weeds such as lantana, before handing the land back to government authorities as good quality "remnant vegetation".

"They won't accept it unless it's in the right state of environment," he said.

"The investment that has to go into that – the right plant species, the right densities, and

a lot of experts involved, and a lot of studies to make sure it is correct, it takes a long time. At the end of the day it will be fantastic, proper native forest."

The majority of land being converted to urban development within Griffin Pocket was historically used for farming, but any cleared sections, such as the entrance to The Shores, will be offset with new rehabilitation areas on site greater than the original area impacted. "That's a typical

requirement, and fair enough

too; you are taking away what is existing so you have to rebuild it," Mr Levy said.

Another koala impact mitigation measure is a buffer between the vegetation protection zone and the road, with houses only to be built on the other side of the road.

Mr Levy said when people saw bulldozers and trucks involved in site works, they often did not realise fauna spotters were on site, making sure animals such as koalas were safe.



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GREEN APPROACH: Koala habitat protection has been a key concern for Unison Projects, which is unlocking the 17ha The Shores section of its \$85 million Griffin Pocket community.