

Swap plan to protect habitat for koalas

By MARK BODE

COAST Mayor Bob Abbot has endorsed a State Government proposal to turn a koala habitat near Noosa National Park and Lake Weyba into a protected area.

The proposal, which the government claims would create Queensland's first bio-diversity offset area, requires Brisbane-based developer the Mantle Group to hand over privately owned land to public ownership.

But that would only happen if a development application for land adjoining the proposed protected area is approved by Sunshine Coast Council.

If that occurs, it would result in a 140-hectare land swap to effectively extend Noosa National Park.

Sunshine Coast Environment Council, however, has refused to back the plan, saying "offset areas are not good policy".

But Local Government Minister Paul Lucas said the move would secure a significant publicly owned environmental corridor, while giving the developer the right to submit a DA on land that was a natural extension of the urban footprint.

"By working with developers and coming to these sorts of arrangements, we can protect our native flora and fauna and maintain and build environmental corridors in south-east Queensland," he said.

"This land swap, if it goes ahead, will effectively build on Noosa National Park, where the previous protections existed over land separated from it."

Mr Lucas said the land where the Mantle Group would be able to lodge a DA already had court approval for 24 holiday villas on one of the lots.



IN THE MIDDLE: A koala habitat near Noosa National Park could be protected.

But to further develop the land, he said the developer had to make other land available to the state for koala habitat.

"They have one year to lodge an application and if it's successful, then the 140 hectares will transfer to the people of Queensland," he said.

Cr Abbot said it made sense to make the koala corridor continuous throughout the park given its large size.

"But let me be clear about this. Any development application will still be subject to comprehensive assessment prior to any council approval," he said.

Sunshine Coast Environment Council president Wiebe ter Bals said while it would be great to see further protection of koala habitat, offset areas did not work.

"There's something fundamentally wrong with the way offsets are designed, and we do not believe offsets provide a good outcome for conservation," he said.