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## Land on table for koala refuges

Owen Jacques | 15th August 2012 5:29 AM

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THE state has put \$22.5 million on the table to snap up acreages for koala habitats throughout south-east Queensland.

As swathes of land are consumed by development, koala populations have become fragmented, unable to reach their potential mates dwelling on the other side of a highway or housing estate.

At a press conference around the back of the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, Environment Minister Andrew Powell detailed the scheme while cradling a koala raised in captivity.

He said the \$22.5 million would be funnelled into buying land between the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and west to Lockyer Valley, Ipswich and Somerset.

Landholders will deliver an expression of interest and, if suitable, negotiations could begin.

The blocks must be larger than 10ha, be connected to an established koala habitat and be free of contamination.

"The intent is to set up nature refuges or national parks," Mr Powell said.

"It's a case of working with various organisations so we can keep providing the great outcomes for the koalas.

"My staff will be sitting down with councils to make sure we identify the right parcels of land."

Australia Zoo curator Kelsey Engle said although diseases, including chlamydia and the enigmatic retrovirus, ravaged the species, protected habitats were vital.

Ms Engle said if the community failed them, koalas could die out in parts of Queensland within a decade.

"We see 70 koalas coming through here every month," she said.

"You have to think that is a lot of koalas in not that big an area."

The hospital is often delivered injured or sick koalas from across south-east Queensland because of its specialisation in koala health.

Expressions of interest for land opened yesterday and will close on October 31.

Mr Powell said he was confident that land would be secured.

"We've already had some expressions of interest," Mr Powell said.



Minister Andrew Powell with India.

Contributed

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