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## News

# 15,300 signatures as forest fight ramps up

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Rob Mellett

CONSERVATION leaders are backing growing numbers of Ipswich residents demanding an 1,800 house Springfield development is stopped.

The University of Queensland's Professor and Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, Hugh Possingham, along with ecologist for the Australian Reptile Academy Dr Christina Zdenek have said Stockland's Springview Village development (stages 2 and 3) should be halted because of its devastating impact on a host of threatened and endangered species. Council officers are due this Friday to decide the fate of the forest as they prepare to sign off on Stage 3 of the proposed plan.

The Stockland development will see around 167 hectares at the heart of Woogaroo Forest's 400 hectares cleared to become a housing development.

More than 15,000 people have signed a petition by the Save Woogaroo Forest Group Inc calling on Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek to stop the development.

Professor Possingham said the forest was one of the only remaining small areas of natural habitat left in Ipswich and its conservation was critical.

"Federal environment laws are clear – developments likely to have a significant impact on federally listed species should not be allowed to proceed," he said.

"This development is likely to have a significant impact on the koala which is in decline across all of Southeast Queensland.

"Woodland bird communities are also in decline across eastern Australia. One of their greatest threats is fragmentation through habitat loss. Development in Woogaroo Forest, which has a relatively intact woodland bird community with uncommon species like the Varied Sittella, will fragment and destroy the threatened woodland bird community."

In 2016, Professor Possingham created the Threatened Species Index for Australia, now adopted by the Federal Government as the key national biodiversity measure.

Dr Christina Zdenek said one of Australia's most iconic lizards, the Frilled-neck Lizard, inhabits Woogaroo Forest.

"This spectacular species is so unique that there is no other species in its genus. This site is one of just a handful of fragmented sites left in the species' entire southern range," she said.

"It is hanging on by a thread and it cannot afford an assault like that planned for Woogaroo Forest."

Dr Zdenek said Woogaroo Forest was a Matter of National Environmental Significance because it is home to nationally threatened species and ecological communities.

"What is happening here is exactly what's wrong with the nature laws in Australia and why we continue to lose species quicker than just about any nation in the world," she said.

"A 30-year-old development control plan (the Springfield Structure Plan) is somehow overpowering our national environmental laws (the EPBC Act). It's utterly shameful and deplorable."

Not only do koalas and powerful owls inhabit the forest, but more than 130 native bird species, more than 80 non-avian vertebrates, and 471 plant species.

If all four developments go ahead, about 210 hectares of the forest, more than 50 percent, would be lost, causing fragmentation of critical wildlife corridors in Ipswich.

The Ipswich City Council local government area has the lowest percentage of remnant vegetation of any council area in Southeast Queensland with most other LGAs which conserve 30 percent or more.

As the four proposed developments impact koala habitat, they are assessable under the EPBC Act 1999 giving the Environment Minister the power to stop the developments.

Save Woogaroo Forest Group is waiting for the Department to open submissions as part of its assessment of the Stockland proposal (as well as a proposal for 70-plus houses at Eugene Street in Bellbird Park, on the northern side of the forest).

“The region’s need for more homes is well documented. The Ipswich region is expected to nearly double the 2023 population by 2041, as recognised by the State Government’s ShapingSEQ 2023 report.

“Stockland has been working with all levels of Government to carefully plan the proposed development at Springview. The approved Springview Village 2 and 3 Precinct Plan exceeds the minimum environmental and planning control requirements of the Federal Government and Ipswich City Council, and includes the retention of native wildlife corridors and habitat trees.

“Stockland has a long and proud history helping more Australians achieve the dream of home ownership and we are committed to continue working with Government and the community to provide housing options to first homebuyers and families in SEQ.

“The proposed site remains subject to robust and independent environmental and planning approvals across all levels of Government, including the independent assessment of flora and fauna management plans.”

The group encourage the public to make submissions.

Petition link: <https://www.change.org/p/tanya-plibersek-save-the-koalas-of-woogaroo-forest-ipswich-queensland-australia>



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