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ENVIRONMENTALLY sensitive areas in Southeast Queensland would be off-limits to developers under an idea for planning changes endorsed by expert ecologists and environmentalists.

The Queensland Conservation Council has released maps – based on national parks and World Heritage Area boundaries – showing what they believe should be “no-go zones” for developers. It comes as governments and local councils look for land on which to build homes for the region’s growing population.

The Queensland Conservation Council released its work with experts from the University of Queensland and Griffith University to revive stalled federal legislation announced almost two years ago.

It also comes as The Federal Government continues to block environmental experts from accessing finer scale detail on threatened species, leading to overestimations in the size of remaining high quality ecological communities.

Queensland Conservation Council ecologist Natalie Frost said the state government must review its controversial policy of allowing tree clearing in land zoned as priority development areas and that offsetting as a policy has flopped.

“Our research shows one in seven offset areas has failed and the Queensland government has not yet released the findings of their offset policy review,” Ms Frost said.

One of the lead researchers on the report, Dr Michelle Ward of Griffith University, said Ipswich’s continued native habitat loss was of huge concern.

“The Woogaroo Forest came up continuously as a red zone, due to it having these irreplaceable habitat features for some critically endangered species like swift parrots and regent honeyeaters, of which there are only about 300 birds left in the wild,” Dr Ward said.

“These birds feed on the ironbark eucalypt woodland and inhabit dry sclerophyll forest – destroying such forest brings the extinction of the regent honeyeater one step closer.

“Woogaroo Forest is irreplaceable. It cannot be destroyed and restored elsewhere.”

Dr Ward said priority development areas and the Springfield Structure Plan must be updated.

“These planning schemes cannot be locked in stone for 30 years; they need to be modernised.”

Conservationists’ eight-point guide to protecting Southeast Queensland’s environment is

- All red zones recognised as “conservation in perpetuity”.
- Recognise some important habitats have not been effectively mapped.
- Must use scientifically defensible reasoning.
- If there is biological uncertainty, land must be zoned “orange”.
- If environmental risk is high but scientific evidence is unproved, choose the environment.
- Avoid clearing and use land offsets as a last resort.
- Remember there is imperfect data in some environmentally significant areas.
- If land is zoned both “red” and “orange”, it should be deemed “red” to prevent development.