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# Koalas evicted as families move in

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LOOKING up a gum tree at Phil the koala, it is easy to imagine you are in the middle of acres of bush-land and far from development.

But as Katy Perry's pop hit 'I Kissed A Girl' booms from the stereo of a nearby builder, the reason the Gold Coast's koala population is in trouble hit home with every high-pitched word.

Phil and his neighbour Kirsty live metres from a housing development at Coomera and their slice of bush will soon be gone.

But thankfully, so will they, as they are due to join 60 koalas that are being relocated to a council reserve at Lower Beechmont, west of Nerang, in the next few weeks.

Koala Conservation Project manager John Callaghan is moving the native animals as a last resort,

but has been heartened by the fact the innovative program is achieving a 90 per cent success rate.

"It is still early days but there is no question it is working," he said.

While the stress of moving is likely to have contributed to some of the koala deaths, others suffered from disease or were attacked by dogs and one was hit by a car.

Gold Coast City councillor Peter Young said it was 'unfortunate' the program was necessary because the environment had lost out to urban property development.

"But at least we can be confident we have the right amount of resources applied to it," he said.

"The thoroughness and scientific nature of the approach is fundamental to knowing if it is going to be a success.

"It seems to be going well, but we will not be able to properly judge the results for years."

Council funding of \$2.4 million for the program also includes money for health checks, scientific research, radio collars and monitoring of the koala population.

The program is the only one of its kind in Queensland and the results are being closely watched by the State Government.

Mr Callaghan and his team were given a permit by the Department of Environment and Resource Management to relocate 100 koalas and it seemed the State Government will have to approve more.

"We think we may need to relocate up to 200 in the east Coomera area in total," he said.



Koala Conservation Project manager John Callaghan and assistant Kimberley Edwards track koalas at Coomera

Photo: RICHARD GOSLING