Wildlife sanctuary given the boot

By KONNOR FURBER

ONE of the largest wildlife rescue and rehabilitation services in Queensland is being forced to find a new home for more than 40 orphaned joeys after it was given 11 weeks' notice to relocate from its site just outside of Mareeba.

The Agile Project – Wildlife Rescue has operated its sanctuary off Kay Road for the past two and a half years but has now been told to get out, claiming it is because Kanjini Co-Op Limited, who owns the land, was recently given the go ahead for a tourism development on the property.

"Our enclosures and wildlife sanctuary have now been described as an 'incompatible use in this location'," Agile Project founder Shai Ager said.

"This incredible facility, that has taken years, hundreds of people, and thousands of hours to create, is at threat of being destroyed.

"Over $100,000 of grants have gone into these enclosures since we moved here.

"If we're forced to shut down our sanctuary and vacate the property, the region will lose a critical wildlife care facility at a time when the need is greater than ever.

"We've successfully rehabilitated hundreds of animals as one of the state's largest non-profit wildlife groups.

"With other sites either destroyed from flooding or at capacity, wildlife carers from across Queensland are desperate for us to take in more animals, even though they know our situation, but we just can't.

"My partner and I have put our heart and soul into this, worked additional jobs to cover rent, and carried out fundraising for our non-profit.

"We refuse to be forced to release joeys earlier than they're ready. Some are still several months off being near the age of full release," she said.

The wildlife group is well-known for successfully completing Australia's largest macropod relocation in 2021, relocating 400 wallabies from the Trinity Beach area to safer environments.

They now monitor young wallabies and other macropods for release back into the wild, as well as many other native species such as possums, reptiles and birds.

The group was issued with a notice to leave on 14 March, requiring them to be out by the end of their current lease on 1 June.

The news came as a shock to Ms Ager, who was under the impression the Kanjini property would be a long-term site for her sanctuary.

She also claims there was no transparency between the Co-Op and the group regarding their intentions to develop the land.

"I had expressed my strong desire to eventually purchase this place and (a member of the Co-Op) said it was possible. That was all in verbal agreement," Ms Ager said.

"Not once did we get notification that the development had been approved. We found out just a few days before were issued with a notice to leave.

"If we had known this two and a half years ago, we wouldn't have invested all of our time and resources so much into this place."

The Kanjini Co-op, which has hosted the Kuranda Roots Festival at the property for the past four years, rejects that it is forcing the wildlife group to move out because of the approved development application.



Agile Project founder Shai Arger with some of the injured or orphaned animals at the wildlife sanctuary that is being forced to close.

"We have run events and tourist activities while having a wildlife sanctuary without any conflict for several years, before and during Shai's stay," property manager Svargo Freitag said.

"This is not about our development or the wildlife sanctuary. It is about almost all other persons on the property reporting having had rather unpleasant encounters with Ms Ager.

"The notice to leave was given when it became apparent that Ms Ager was not mending her relationships with these people.

"Kanjini would welcome the continuation of the wildlife sanctuary under new tenants, providing that they and their visitors treat everyone else on the property with respect."

Given the situation, Ms Ager has no choice but to find a new appropriate location to care for injured or orphaned wildlife.

"We need to find somewhere away from suburban areas with cars, busy roads, and dogs," Ms Ager said.

"We also need to do an ecological assessment to make sure there are already existing and viable populations of certain species before we release them."

Anyone who can assist, can contact Ms Ager at shai@theagileproject.com.au.

Shire postal underway

BALLOT papers were hitting letterboxes in Mareeba Shire last week, with the postal vote by-election to be held this Saturday.

Five candidates – Alan Pedersen, Mladen Bosnic, Robyn Drury, Carol Chong and Gaye Taylor – have put their hand up to contest the by-election which is being held to fill a vacancy left by the passing of former councillor Kevin Davies.

The five hopefuls put forward their case as to why they should be elected at the Mareeba Chamber of Commerce luncheon on Thursday.

Residents are being advised by the Electoral Commission Queensland (ECQ) that once the postal vote ballot paper arrives in the mail, they should read the instructions, detach the ballot paper from the declaration envelope and complete their vote.

Voters do not have to wait until Saturday to fill out the ballot paper.

The ballot paper should then be folded in half, placed into the declaration envelope and sealed. Voters then must sign the declaration envelope and a witness must also sign. The sealed and signed declaration envelope must then be placed into the reply-paid envelope and posted.

Postal votes must be completed before 6pm on Saturday. Votes must be received by the ECQ by 15 April to be included in the count.

The counting of all votes begins after 6pm on election day.

For more information, go to www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/election-events/mareeba-shire-council-by-election

Australians to head to polls

AUSTRALIANS are headed to the polls on 3 May after Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called a Federal election on Friday morning.

Experts say the election will be a tight race, suggesting that polls show the results could be a minority government, putting the independents and members of minor parties, like Member for Kennedy Bob Katter, in a commanding position.

"This will be a very tight electoral race. Opinion polls have been signalling that Labor has been losing support. Labor can't afford to lose seats as it won government with a very slim majority in 2022. Losing a couple of electorates may mean Anthony Albanese becomes a one-term prime minister," Head of Politics and International Relations Discipline at the Monash School of Social Sciences, Dr Zareh Ghazarian, said.

"It's not all rosy for the opposition either. Peter Dutton is leading the Coalition which lost 18 seats at the last election, including heartland seats in Melbourne and Sydney.

"The Liberal Party in particular must hold onto all its seats and win others, especially metropolitan electorates, if the opposition has any chance of winning majority government.

"The Greens and Independents are also facing challenges. After winning several seats in 2022, the pressure will be on them to retain their electorates within the context of a political debate in which cost of living is prominent.

"While minority governments can occur at the state level, they are rare at the national level. The polls at the moment, however, suggest that we might have the first minority government since Julia Gillard's government between 2010 and 2013.

"'If neither major party wins enough seats, the Independent and minor party MPs will ultimately determine who can form government and who will become prime minister.

"With cost of living on everyone's lips, Labor's Budget last week becomes a very important background to the campaign. Labor will discuss its tax cuts, while the Coalition will discuss reducing fuel prices."

