

Land sale runs foul of green regulation

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A MASSIVE industrial development planned by the Federal Government along the congested Ipswich Motorway may be scrapped because of environmental concerns.

Despite claiming it wants to preserve the site, the Department of Defence is seeking to have bans on clearing trees on the Wacol land overturned.

The land is part of a three-parcel package being sold by the department, with plans for a 65-lot industrial park on one site that will add 4000 vehicles a day to the motorway.

But the biggest site, a 138ha parcel known as Pooh Corner, has been listed as having endangered remnant vegetation and cannot be cleared under state laws.

The Courier-Mail has obtained a letter from Defence-employed consultants to the state Department of Natural Resources arguing the protection is not warranted.

The letter said a new assessment by its ecologist and geologist had identified "inconsistencies" with old regional ecosystem mapping.

"It is requested that the remnant status and subsequently the regional ecosystem classification for the vegetation assemblage on the site is confirmed by your department," it said.

Parliamentary secretary for Defence Teresa Gambaro said the Government was only seeking clarification on a small portion of the site.

Ms Gambaro said the department was still determined to sell the land despite its protected status, and it was up to the future

owner to demonstrate how the ecological values could be preserved.

"The land is surplus to Defence requirements and will be disposed of in accordance with Commonwealth Property Disposals Policy," she said.

But Natural Resources Minister Stephen Robertson said it was "extremely unlikely" authorities would overturn the protection to allow it to be developed.

After being confronted by concerned environmentalists at a recent community Cabinet meeting, Mr Robertson wrote to Defence Minister Robert Hill highlighting concerns about the land sale.

"Any prospective buyer should be aware it is currently mapped as endangered vegetation, and under the Act endangered vegetation is protected and it is extremely unlikely any state approval would be given to clear the land," he said.

Mr Robertson said claims the mapping was dated were untrue as the site had been inspected by Environmental Protection Agency officers in November 2004.

The revelations have added to the Defence Department's woes in attempting to discard the three sites.

The Courier-Mail revealed last month that the department was distributing among potential buyers a traffic report based on the proposed Ipswich Motorway upgrade, which the Commonwealth opposes.

Federal Opposition infrastructure spokesman Bernie Ripoll said Canberra should scrap the sale.

"If the Federal Government is keen to offload the land, then perhaps they can gift it to the State Government to ensure its protection, rather than selling to a private developer," he said.