

Environment

Coast koalas 'face extinction'



Australian Koala Foundation chief executive Deborah Tabart at the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary.
Photo: *Michelle Smith*

Kate Dennehy
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Koalas in Queensland are headed for extinction because of the State and Federal government's inaction, wildlife groups say.

The Australian Koala Foundation and the Wildlife Preservation Society of Qld (WPSQ) said a State Government report proved koalas are "critically endangered".

The report, *Decline Of The Koala Coast Koala Population: Population Status In 2008*, released on May 23, said koala numbers had decreased 51 per cent in less than three years.

WPSQ spokesman Simon Baltais said last week the community had no faith in the State Government and called on federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett "to rescue the koala from extinction".

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Mr Baltais said under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 the Federal Government could list koalas as "endangered" and provide strong protection.

"The report shows Mr Garrett must take over the protection of koalas, as the State Government's koala conservation plans are a dismal failure," he said.

"To date, Mr Garrett has failed to do this."

The Koala Foundation's chief executive, Deborah Tabart said the report proved the State Government could not be trusted to protect koalas and Mr Garrett was "playing games" over the issue.

The report included a survey of Queensland's Koala Coast, located 20 kilometres south-east of Brisbane and covering an area of about 375 square kilometres encompassing areas of Redland, Logan and Brisbane cities.

The survey estimated there were 2279 koalas now compared with 4611 in 2005-2006. This represents a 51 per cent decline in less than three years and a 64 per cent decline in the 10 years since the original 1996-1999 estimate of 6246 koalas.

The largest declines occurred in bushland areas which showed a 59 per cent reduction in koala numbers compared with a 30 per cent reduction in urban areas.

"In the absence of conserving a viable urban koala population, adjacent bushland koala populations will continue to decline with consequences for the viability of the entire Koala Coast koala population," the report said.

The Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Kate Jones said the Government was committed to fighting to prevent the koalas' extinction.

"It's going to be tough and will require the combined effort of several departments and councils but by 2020 I want to see a net expansion of koala habitat in south-east Queensland," she said.

The Infrastructure and Planning Minister, Stirling Hinchliffe said a new state planning policy for koalas would be introduced by the end of the year after community consultation.

"The policy will give local authorities and other decision makers a clear framework to prioritise protection of koala habitat when they are preparing planning schemes and assessing developments," he said.

But Mr Baltais said the State and Federal governments were more interested in development than saving koala habitat.

A spokesman for Mr Garrett said a "rigorous assessment" on koala numbers was due for completion by September next year.

Recently, 43 hectares had been added to the koala habitat in the region, he said.

Ms Tabart said the extra 43 hectares would save only 10 koalas.