

# Premier chastised over looming koala extinction

## Queensland

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Conservationists have warned Premier Anna Bligh she will be held accountable for the impending eradication of South-East Queensland's urban koala population.

State Government figures released in May showed numbers of the iconic species in the Redland and Logan areas halved from 4611 in 2006 to 2279 last year.

The Australian Koala Foundation said koalas could be wiped out within two years - before Ms Bligh is due to head to the polls.

The organisation has now gone over her head, writing to Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett nominating the region's koalas as a "critically-endangered" population.

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In a letter to Ms Bligh, AKF executive director Deborah Tabart harshly criticised the Premier for failing to protect the animals and nominate them for extra protection.

"This action should have been your Government's responsibility given your public admission of its endangered status," the letter read.

"It is Queensland's faunal emblem, for goodness' sake."

Ms Tabart told [brisbanetimes.com.au](http://brisbanetimes.com.au) the extinction of the animals on the 'Koala Coast' - which includes Redlands, Logan and Brisbane - was now inevitable.

"It's been on [former premiers Wayne] Goss' watch, on [Peter] Beattie's watch and now on Bligh's watch," she said.

Queensland Climate Change and Sustainability Minister Kate Jones on Wednesday said she understood the need to act quickly and that new state planning policy would soon be implemented to help protect koalas.

She said better koala habitat mapping, which would be available within weeks, would give councils the ability to veto development on habitat land, which was more valuable than changing their protection status.

"That mapping will give councils the ability to identify koala habitat and ask developers to provide an offset parcel of koala habitat land if they want the development to go ahead," Ms Jones said.

She said she had received the Australian Koala Foundation's nomination to increase Queensland's protection of koalas.

"We will consider its listing, but it will be done on a South-East Queensland basis, not just on the Koala Coast," Ms Jones said.

"We are prepared to change its categorisation once the koala habitat mapping is completed."

Redland mayor Melva Hobson last month said the State Government's plans had failed, and 1000 koalas were now killed each year.

She told [brisbanetimes.com.au](http://brisbanetimes.com.au) on Wednesday night there was too much focus on urban growth, rather than saving koalas.

"To me the balance at the moment should be in favour of koalas, not in favour of people," she said.

"I can't find words to express what (extinction of koalas) would be like and how anybody could allow that to happen.

"We need to pull out all stops to recover this iconic species."

A population of fewer than 500 koalas cannot sustain itself, experts say.



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