

# Aussie icons in peril on Coast

by Leah Fineran

THEY are cute, sometimes cuddly and dying by the thousands.

Take a good look because this may be the only way future generations get a glimpse of these furry Aussie icons.

Koala experts gathered on the Gold Coast yesterday to issue a warning the species was closer than ever to extinction and the wild southeast Queensland population could be the first to disappear.

The latest Queensland Government figures show the population of more than 4000 koalas living in the Brisbane-Gold Coast region had dropped 51 per cent since 2006 and now there were only an estimated 2279 left.

Firefighter David Tree, who shot to fame after saving Sam the Koala during the Victorian bushfires, said the death of his 'little mate' from chlamydia last month had opened his eyes to the plight of koalas.

Yesterday, he visited Dreamworld to help launch Save the Koala Month and the Australian Koala Foundation's 'No Tree, No Me' campaign.

"If we don't act now, the only place we'll be able to see these little guys is in captivity," he said.

Australian Koala Foundation CEO

Deborah Tabart said Sam's death had saddened the nation but the greater loss of thousands of koalas had gone unchecked.

She said the Gold Coast's estimated 500-strong koala population had been forsaken by the Gold Coast City Council and State Government which had chosen greed over good.

"They have far too close a relationship with the development industry and they need those donations for political power," she said.

"The Premier herself has admitted the koalas in the Koala Coast region will become extinct next year ... does anyone understand that means for ever?"

Councillor Peter Young, chairman of the council's Sustainable City Future committee, said the council's hands were tied by state legislation that prevented rezoning needed to protect koala habitat areas in east Coomera.

"We can't turn back time but we've got the relocation plan in place and it's better than doing nothing," he said.

Work has already begun on the East Coomera Koala Conservation Project, with koala captures, detailed health assessments and radio-tracking to begin later this month.

Locals can help by buying a \$1 'No Tree, No Me' bumper sticker.



Above: David Tree at Dreamworld yesterday and, right, David gives Sam a drink after the Victorian fires ● Main picture: Richard Gosling

## Remaining habitats

East Coomera (estimated 250-500 koalas)	
Dreamworld (60)	Nerang
Pimpama River	Numinbah Valley
Wongawallan	Tugun Hill
Clagiraba	Upper Mudgeeraba
Lower Beechmont	Elanora
Coombah	Currumbin Waters
Helensvale	Burleigh Heads



## Fight to preserve the koalas' family tree

GROUND-breaking research on the Gold Coast may give koalas a brighter future.

Dreamworld carers and scientists at the University of Queensland have been working on ways to preserve genetic integrity of the species.

Al Mucci, general manager of the 800-animal

Australian Wildlife Experience at the theme park, heads the 60-strong koala program.

"For the last four years we've been collaborating with UQ and trying to freeze koala semen," he said.

"So far we've managed to chill it for 72 hours and from that we've been able to pro-

duce 32 babies but there's still work to do."

Mr Mucci said success would allow scientists to keep genetic diversity and stop interbreeding which often leads to deformities.

The city council is also involved in research to develop koala anti-chlamydia vac-