

Port Stephens koalas in decline

BY BEN SMEE
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The koala population in Port Stephens is edging towards extinction, according to koala carers who have reported a dramatic drop in the number of rescued animals.

Australian Koala Foundation chief executive officer Deborah Tabart was in Port Stephens yesterday meeting koala carers and campaigning for federal protection for the marsupials.

Ms Tabart said about 2500 injured koalas have been rescued at Port Stephens in the past 15 years.

But that number is dropping rapidly year by year. In some areas, the number of koalas found dead or injured has dropped more than tenfold since 1995.

"There would only be two causes for the decline in koala deaths and that would be either better habitat protection or a decline in the koala population," Ms Tabart said.

"I have been visiting Port Stephens since 1992 and I can say with confidence that it is due to the latter."

Port Stephens Council was one of the first in the state to adopt a Koala Plan of Management.

But Ms Tabart said development and illegal clearing meant that plan was having little effect.

Environment Minister Peter Garrett is considering a proposal to list the koala as a vulnerable species.



CONCERN: Deborah Tabart with a rescued koala yesterday.
— Picture by Kitty Hill