

Plea to list dwindling koalas

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ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

CONSERVATIONISTS have called on federal Environment Minister Tony Burke to stop stalling and list the koala as vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Australian Koala Foundation executive director Deborah Tabart yesterday said unless the animal was protected by a listing, conservation groups would waste their time trying to save koalas while exemptions were repeatedly found for developments in which habitat was cleared.

The koala was nominated for a federal listing more than a year ago and a report by departmental scientists has gone to Mr Burke, who has not revealed its recommendations.

The koala is listed as vulnerable in southeast Queensland and has been nominated for a critically endangered listing in the Koala Coast between Brisbane and the Gold Coast, which is ironically an area set up by the State Government in 2000 to protect the marsupial.

Greens leader Bob Brown asked Senator Stephen Conroy, representing Mr Burke in the Senate, what the estimate of koala numbers was and why their protection would be left to state governments who had overseen their destruction.



PERKING UP: Koala joey Frodo has begun eating again after she was shot in the head last week.

Senator Conroy said AKF figures of 44,000 to 85,000 koalas could not be confirmed because there were no proper past estimates with which numbers could be calculated.

He said Mr Burke would decide on the listing after taking departmental advice.

A koala count on North

Stradbroke Island off Brisbane last month found 28, two more than the previous year.

While it was good news, about 20 had died in the same period, showing the population's vulnerability.

"The same thing is going on all over the country - small numbers of koalas in small

isolated areas," Ms Tabart said.

She said Premier Anna Bligh and Sustainability Minister Kate Jones had ignored the nomination for listing the Koala Coast population as critically endangered under the Nature Conservation Act.

"It makes you completely lose faith in the system."

Post-surgery Frodo on the mend at last

KOALA joey Frodo, who survived a shotgun blast a week ago, has started eating eucalypt leaves, raising hopes she might survive.

Australia Zoo veterinarian Amber Gillett has removed seven pellets from her body so far, but it is not clear when she will have further surgery.

"Frodo has made good improvement overnight and has started eating leaves on her own, which is a positive sign for her future," Dr Gillett said.

"Frodo is now much brighter and alert and is moving around well.

"Her condition is stable but she still has a long road to full recovery.

"I will continue to

monitor her condition and make a decision (on surgery) at a later stage.

"The wounds to the top of Frodo's head where one pellet was removed have been closed and I am happy with how the wounds are healing."

The joey was found beside her dead mother last Friday at the bottom of a tree on property at Jimna on the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and police have been under pressure from the RSPCA to act more promptly after it was revealed that, five days after the shooting, no authorities had visited the Jimna site.

Population growth pushed by all levels of government in southeast Queensland has allowed urban sprawl to reduce what was Australia's largest remaining koala colony from about 7000 a decade ago to possibly fewer than 2000.

If Mr Burke lists koalas under the EPBC Act, it will mean any

land owner, developer, farmer, council or state or territory government proposing to clear habitat will have to show loss of vegetation is not harmful to koalas.

More than 25,000 koalas have died from disease, car hits and dog attacks in southeast Queensland since 1998.

Bare facts about marsupial's survival

■ Koalas are under threat from development, vehicle strike, dog attacks and stress-related diseases.

■ Koalas like to walk long distances, putting them at risk of cars and dogs.

■ About 340 koalas are hit by cars and taken to koala hospitals each year. About 80 per cent of vehicle strikes are fatal.

■ About 190 koalas are treated each year for dog attacks. About 76 per cent of dog attacks are fatal, although many dog attacks on koalas are not reported.

■ To help, keep dogs locked up at night and drive slowly. Plant trees and build koala-friendly timber fences.

Source: Environment Department

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