



My

'Crunch time' for koalas

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CONSERVATIONISTS believe it's crunch time for North Coast koala populations.

Scientists have found around 240 koalas remain on the Byron Coast and only 144 animals are left in the Tweed, far short of the minimum viable population of 170 animals.

Friends of the Koala president Lorraine Vass said the animals are dying due to disease, habitat destruction, cars and increased development.

"As a grass roots rescue and rehabilitation organisation we bring in 300 koalas annually - but from those 300 we had 220 mortalities last year so we don't seem to be winning the game," Ms Vass said.

Within days the Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke will hand down his decision on whether the koala is given threatened status under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Ms Vass said a threatened listing would give the Federal Government power to intervene in cases where koala habitat could be threatened by development.

She pointed to the Kings Forest development on the Tweed Coast as a situation in which the minister could possibly intervene.

"The Kings Forest development is obviously in early stages but over the next 20 or so years that could introduce another township and community of over 10,000 people right in the middle of one of the remaining koala population on the Tweed Coast."

Ms Vass believes listing koalas as threatened could help prevent the extinction of the species.

"I feel the animals are at the brink and the threatened status would bring real protection."

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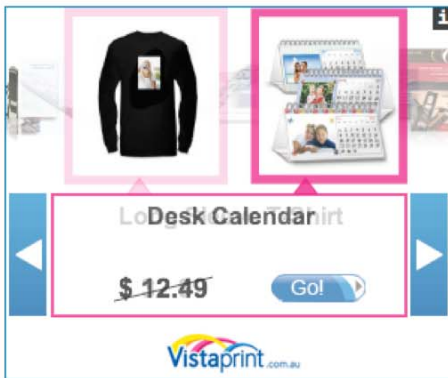
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