

# \$500 fine for koala attack

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AUTHORITIES have fined an Upper Hunter man over an incident where a koala was punched in Port Stephens on New Year's Eve.

A National Parks and Wildlife Service spokesman said the man was issued with a \$500 infringement notice last week for harming an animal of a vulnerable population.

The man was allegedly involved in chasing down the koala and punching it in the One Mile Beach car park.

The Newcastle Herald reported in January that the National Parks and Wildlife Service was investigating.

The spokesman said the matter had been pursued, thanks to residents' help, and urged Hunter residents to report any attacks on koalas.

He said it was vital koalas were left alone, particularly when they were more active in the summer months.

"[People] should not try to capture, cuddle or pat koalas [and] should only view koalas from a safe distance and keep their pets under control," he said.

Penalties for harming a vulnerable species can include up to a year in jail, a fine of up to \$55,000 or both.

Hunter Koala Preservation Society president Sue Swain applauded authorities for following the case through to the end.

"I doubt this person will ever do it again, and maybe their mates will think twice," Ms Swain said.

**The 24-hour rescue number for sick or injured koalas is 0418 628 483.**

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