



Vaccine for koalas may be harmful

Author: By TIM CONNELL

Date: 08/04/2011

Words: 251

Source: NCH

Publication: Newcastle Herald

Section: News

Page: 26

THREE of every four koalas rescued in Port Stephens has chlamydia, but researchers say a mass vaccination could have devastating side effects.

The disease gives koalas conjunctivitis and urinary tract infections that can leave them infertile, and Hunter Koala Preservation Society volunteer Sue Swain said 75 per cent of rescued animals have it in some form.

Nelson Bay veterinarian Don Hudson is working with the University of Newcastle to track the disease's spread in Port Stephens, and said a mass vaccination could do more harm than good.

"You can't just vaccinate chlamydia out of the blue," Dr Hudson said.

"It may cause infertility or blindness, and if [some koalas] went off their food for a couple of days the population could decline."

Dr Hudson, Newcastle university Associate Professor John Rodger and Professor Peter Timms from the Queensland University of Technology will update local koala stakeholders next week on their research.

Professor Timms has successfully treated several female koalas at Brisbane's Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary with an experimental vaccine, but Dr Hudson said there were many questions still to answer.

Trials with small captive marsupials in Port Stephens had not yielded an effective vaccine free from dangers.

Sophia, a joey that came into care last December with severe conjunctivitis, had undergone rehabilitation at carer Fran Gamble's One Mile property and was expected to recover fully.

Ms Swain said clearing work for a business at Taylors Beach last year pushed infected pockets of the koala population into trees at Salamander Bay, mobilising the disease.
