

Last-ditch efforts to save koalas

Murray Simpson

The thumbscrews are being applied to the Tweed Shire Council to take urgent action to preserve the remnants of the region's once thriving koala population.

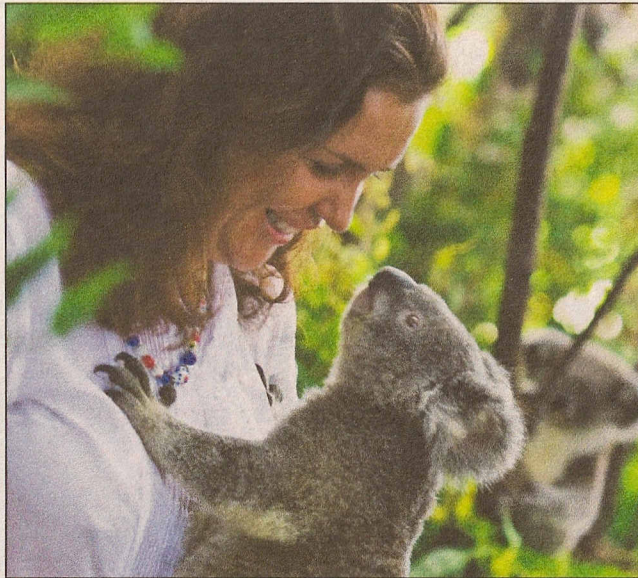
The flashpoint is the gigantic 856ha development at Kings Forest, approved in September, with provision for up 4,500 homes.

Unfortunately it is also home to one of the Tweed Coast's three remaining koala colonies.

Environment and koala groups are urging Tweed residents to lodge submissions with the council to protect the last of the koalas.

Ardent koala activist Jenny Hayes says the clock is ticking for the colony unless proper protection measures are put in place and it would be devastating if all there was left was just a memory.

'I've lived here all my life and can't bear the thought that our children won't know them,' she said.



Koala advocate Jenny Hayes with one of the animals threatened by huge new developments about to destroy their habitat.

Key elements are a ban on dogs and cats and the provision of a fauna overpass on the development's proposed four-lane highway.

'Ideally we'd like to see restrictions similar to those applying at Koala Beach which include a 40km/h speed limit, dim street lights and elevated

houses so koalas can pass underneath,' she said.

This week the council's Koala Advisory Committee chairman Dot Holdom claimed the council's powers were limited.

But Ms Hayes, who is also on the committee, said the council had the planning powers to make a difference. It was

more a matter of will-power.

The Tweed Heads Environment Group has also entered the fray with president Richard Murray claiming the council's performance was woeful compared with what was happening north of the border.

'While new koala refuges are being created in south-east Queensland, the Tweed Shire Council has yet to provide protection for the Tweed Coast's last three koala colonies,' he said.

'The last three colonies at Kings Forest, Round Mountain and Pottsville need immediate protection.

'The Tweed's failure to conserve the koala will mean our children and grandchildren will not experience koalas in the wild.'

He said the current population represented only ten per cent of that existing in 1996.

'For koalas to have any chance of survival at Kings Forest minimum standards for koala protection need to be put in place.'

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