

Tree change for koala



FREE AGAIN: Rescuer Murray Chambers releases Lesley back into the Noosa National Park five months after the koala was struck by a car. **Picture: Megan Slade**

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ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

THE return of a koala injured in a car accident to Noosa National Park will give an important boost to the district.

The koala – named Lesley – was hit by a car 10 months ago, in an accident that killed the joey on her back and another in her pouch.

There are thought to be only 11 koalas surviving in Noosa National Park.

Her plight mirrors that of Pan Da, the orphaned Redlands koala who had 13,000 Facebook fans world-wide.

His mother was killed by a car. Sadly, he ended up dying of chlamydia.

Carolyn Beaton – a spokeswoman for Koala Diaries, an organisation which maps koala sightings – yesterday said it was thought about 30 koalas remained in the Noosa region, down from hundreds in 2000.

This population crash was similar to that recorded on the Koala Coast – between Brisbane and the Gold Coast – and showed koala numbers were in free-fall across the east coast.

Ms Beaton said her organisation had applied for funding to conduct a scientific count of koalas, determine disease impacts, track movements and look at vegetation but this had been rejected by the Federal

Government's Caring for Country scheme and the Sunshine Coast Regional Council.

The council replied that koalas were the responsibility of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

"So we're back to scratch," Ms Beaton said.

The funding rejections reflect complaints raised by scientist Jo Loader to a Senate inquiry that funding for koala disease research was just a fraction of that for Tasmanian devil disease research.

Ms Beaton said she hoped that Lesley, 5, would have more joys and would be able to avoid the deadly chlamydia disease and stay away from dog attacks and cars.

"There is another female and a male in the area where she was released, so we're hopeful that she'll breed again," Ms Beaton said.

"She also was released away from roads but there is the potential for her to find her way back into busy areas."

Koala Diaries had been monitoring Lesley and her offspring in the days before they were hit by a car last April.

"The news of Lesley's accident had a ripple effect right through the community," Ms Beaton said.

"We are absolutely over the moon that she has come this far."