

# Koala road signs not so flash

## Costly and ineffective, say critics

Hannah Davies

ELECTRONIC flashing koala crossing signs hailed as "innovative" by a southeast Queensland mayor are breaking down every day, prompting outrage from ratepayers, councillors and conservationists.

The six LED - or light emitting diode - road signs were installed by Redlands City Council at a cost of \$45,000 in a bid to make drivers slow down through koala habitat.

But they are costing ratepayers \$30,000 a year to run, with batteries that need to be changed every day - and have reduced the average speed by only 4km/h.

Councillor Karen Williams said Mayor Melva Hobson was wasting ratepayers' money and needed to take a fresh look at her koala strategies.

"These signs are just embarrassing," she said.

"They haven't worked properly since we've got them and a 4km decrease in the average speed is not going to save a koala crossing the road at night time.

"Rates are pretty exorbitant and people are struggling.

"I understand we are trying to do the right thing by the environment but we have got to get our priorities right."

Redlands is home to Australia's largest population of urban koalas, with 3000 on the mainland and North Stradbroke Island.

The new signs are the latest initiative in the council's "koala policy and strategy" program, which costs ratepayers at least \$195,000 a year.

Australian Koala Foundation executive director Deborah Tabart said Cr Hobson's strategies were a "Band-Aid" solution, which did little to help protect koalas.

She said the mayor should concentrate on pushing the State Government to list the koala as critically endangered - preventing developers from destroying their habitat.

"When I see Cr Hobson is committed to protecting koalas legislatively on a state and federal level, then I'll know she's committed to koala conservation," Ms Tabart said.

"Until then the people of Redlands need to really reflect on whether the council is doing a good job or just pouring money down the drain."

The criticism comes a few months after the council increased rates in some areas of



FACING EVICTION: Twins Paula, with pelican Kayla, and Bridgette Powers, with Wishy the peacock.

Picture: Megan Slade

## Sisters fear fate as empty nesters

Kristin Shorten  
SUNSHINE COAST BUREAU

WHY? the peacock and Kayla the pelican are among 120 sick or injured birds at risk of being homeless next month.

Their carers, bird-devotee twins Paula and Bridgette Powers, have been forced to seek a new sanctuary for their fluctuating flock after being evicted from their "dream property" at Beerwah due to an operational dispute.

"Every time we talk about it, we get very emotional. We've been crying all week," Paula said.

"We haven't been sleeping the best, we haven't been ourselves."

The 36-year-old sisters, known affectionately in the community as "Twinnies", have provided a 24/7 rescue and rehabilitation service on the coast for seabirds, waterbirds and native birds for 12 years.

"We've loved animals since we were knee high," Paula said.

"Although we specialise in seabirds, we never turn away any injured animal."

But the sisters are desperately seeking to lease a new acreage property where they could care for the skyrocketing number of birds - including pelicans, cormorants, egrets, darters and gannets - injured by human activity each month.

"We don't know what we're going to do and the birds on the Sunshine Coast really need us to look after them," Paula said.

"We can't just kick the birds out, it's so hard."

"The Sunshine Coast needs a proper bird rehabilitation centre."

The Powers' not-for-profit organisation, which spends \$400 a week on fish to feed the birds, has responded to calls for help from as far away as Gladstone.

Redlands Shire by a whopping 15 per cent.

Ratepayer Kathleen Crees, of Victoria Point, said she resented paying for the flashing koala signs.

"It's ridiculous that they break down all the time," she said.

But Cr Hobson defended the signs as "an effective tool to raise awareness and educate".

"They are not costing all that much," she said.

Report Injured wildlife 0405 056 066

7000 -  
Redlands' koala  
population in  
2000

3000 - Estimated  
population today

