

## Koala extinction 'imminent'

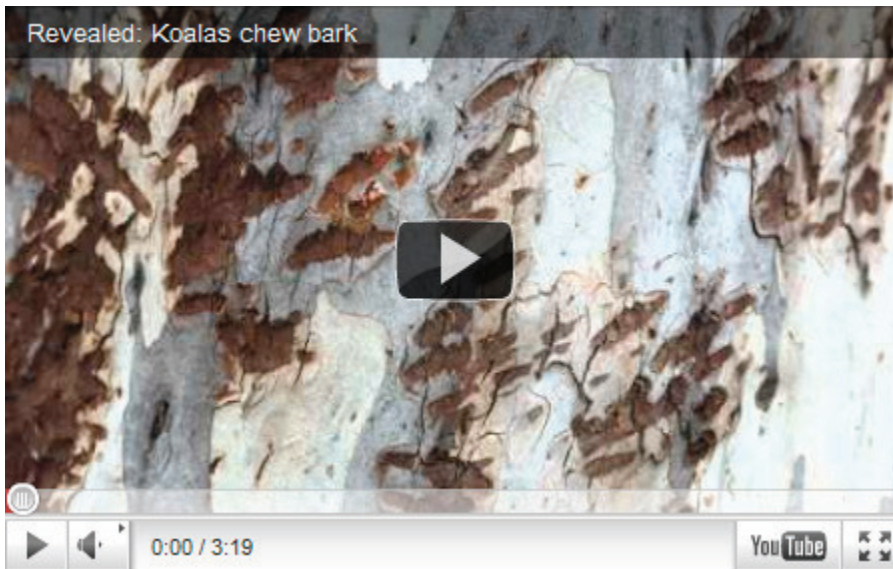
BY ROSSLYN BEEBY, SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

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Australia currently lacks the scientific data needed to convince Federal bureaucrats to list koalas as an endangered species, a Senate inquiry has been told.

The Koala Research Network, a group of 36 leading koala scientists, says koala populations face "imminent local extinction" in Queensland, southern NSW and Gippsland in Victoria unless urgent action is taken to protect forest habitat from clearing.

In their submission to a Senate inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koalas, the group calls for more research in rural areas to determine how drought, climate change and logging are affecting koala numbers.



Th eir call comes as new research by NSW National Parks and Wildlife ecologists Chris Allen and Andrew Claridge has revealed koalas in southern NSW may have a more complex - and varied - diet than previously thought.

[Video evidence from infra-red cameras shows healthy koalas eating bark from brittle gum trees](#) in dry eucalypt forest south-west of the Monaro plains town of Bredbo.

"We don't know if bark is a food source or supplement, or if this chewing is linked to weaning behaviour in young animals," Mr Allen said.

The discovery contradicts decades of research that has defined koalas as leaf-eating specialists, feeding exclusively on eucalypt leaves. Mr Allen said the pattern of "chew trees" across the landscape suggested koalas were moving through the forest, testing whether trees were suitable.



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One of the koalas south of Bredbo where koalas have been observed chewing on brittlegum trees. Photo: Andrew Sheargold



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