

# Herald Sun

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## Koalas 'facing extinction'

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**AUSTRALIA continues to use the koala as a national symbol even as the marsupial population is in precipitous, perhaps terminal decline, Greens leader Senator Bob Brown said.**

Senator Brown said the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee was told today of "a catastrophic drop in the number of koalas".

"Their great habitat here in Queensland, in the mulga countries, the stronghold of koalas has seen an up to 95 per cent crash in population since the mid-90s, in our recent lifetimes."

Senator Brown said the committee hearings in Brisbane were told there were now "well less than 100,000" koalas left on the continent.

He said all the factors involved in the population disaster, such as land clearing and the destruction of trees, are continuing.

Senator Brown said the investment in tackling an AIDS-like disease and chlamydia is pathetic.

"It's a matter of national shame," he said. "We can do better in both areas. We need to protect their habitat and we must tangle with those diseases."

"It's the national icon (but) there are fewer left in Australia now than there were in the slaughter years in the 1920s, and the numbers are crashing.

"We have to deal with that.

"We are a nation that proudly has the koala as an icon but is watching with hands behind our backs, the ultimate descent towards extinction, of the koala.

"That's not understating it, those figures are shocking."

He said it is time those who allow their dogs to kill koalas are "brought to book".

Senator Brown said he hoped the Senate committee hearings will lead to a national plan of action to save the koala.

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