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Koalas at risk with climate change

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Australia's koala population is at serious risk, a Senate inquiry into populations has heard.

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Koala Research Centre of Central Queensland program leader Alistair Melzer on Thursday told a Senate inquiry that climate change and competition with humans for habitat was threatening colonies in the state.

"I think it's at serious risk," Dr Melzer said.

While koala colonies had adapted to challenging climatic events over thousands of years, the landscape was increasingly fragmented as land clearing continued, Dr Melzer told the inquiry.

It took colonies up to 30 years to recover from drought and flooding, on the evidence Dr Melzer, considered an expert in the field, said he'd seen.

But if climate change predictions became reality, the koala population could decline even further.

Relevant plant populations would shift from moist areas to drier regions putting pressure on the koala's ability to survive.

Australian Greens leader Bob Brown welcomed the inquiry into the koala population which, he said, faced dire challenges from an HIV-type retrovirus and chlamydia, that renders half the marsupial's population infertile.

Senator Brown said the animal was at risk of being lost, which would be a national shame.

He said the koala was of equal importance on global terms to China's iconic Pandas.

Dr Melzer said that while mining and resource corridors were reducing the available habitat for koalas, mining companies also had financial resources to help conserve populations.

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This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/koalas-at-risk-with-climate-change-20110519-1eutp.html>