

Koala study — at last

By **PETER GARDINER**

AFTER a long silence the State Government has sounded what might be a late bugle charge to save Noosa's disappearing koalas.

And the breakthrough communication heralding a long sought research field survey next June is music to the ears of Koala Diaries campaigner Carolyn Beaton as Save the Koala Month starts to gear up.

Ms Beaton has been given a definite commitment by the Department of Environment and Resource Management's wildlife conservation unit head David Walker that the koala study will be happening.

The co-founder of the online diaries, which help map local koala sightings in Noosa and way beyond, has been heartened by this "definite commitment".

"After years of inaction, which has coincided with a dramatic decline in our Noosa koala population, I am grateful that there will be some meaningful action in 2012," Ms Beaton said.

"Hopefully it won't be too late."

Ms Beaton, at Mr Walker's suggestion, has contacted a department field officer to offer assistance with gathering data as part of a five-year \$2.5 million survey and monitoring program in the south-east Queensland koala habitat.

"Given the amount of data we have collected with regard to our local koala population since February 2010, David felt there would be merit in us assisting you to identify the best survey sites within the Noosa area," she emailed researcher Ros Leslie.

"I am presently liaising with Ben McMullen from Sunshine Coast Council with regard to bringing together a collective of koala experts to contribute to a holistic koala recovery and management plan for the Noosa Biosphere Reserve."

Ms Beaton's bid to halt the apparent alarming decline in local koala numbers is not helped by what she believes is an inappropriate survival rating.

SEQ koalas are officially listed as "vulnerable", but Ms Beaton is

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convinced that status bestowed in 2003 is out of date.

A Federal Government authorised review by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee has failed to list the species as a nationally "threatened" species under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

According to the Federal Department of Sustainability and Environment website, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee provided its

assessment of the national koala population to the Federal Environment Minister on September 30, 2010.

"The committee conducted a thorough assessment of the status of the national koala population, including an extensive literature review, an expert workshop and public and expert submissions," the spokesperson said .

"The TSSC recommended that the koala was not eligible for listing as nationally threatened, but noted that

reaching a conclusion was challenging due to significant gaps in national koala population data."

A final ministerial decision was delayed from February 10 this year until October 31.

In a written response dated July 26 this year, the principal policy adviser for the Queensland Environment Minister Vicky Darling said the State Government shared Ms Beaton's concern for the conservation of koalas in the Noosa area.