

Koala's listing gives hope for carers

BY FRANCES THOMPSON

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Carer Sue Swain knew that as new federal protection for the koala was being announced, hectares of their habitat were being cleared in Port Stephens.

The Port Stephens Koala Preservation Society president said yesterday's move to declare koalas a vulnerable species in Queensland, NSW and the Australian Capital Territory would not mean any more carers to help injured and dying animals, and she feared it would not stop habitat clearing.

Carers in Port Stephens are few and far between as the species, she says, reaches a tipping point.

Carers are usually of retirement age, they have to pay for their own petrol and transport and get up in the middle of the night if there's an emergency call.

"At two in the morning it's just me in my pyjamas, with a torch stuck down my pants," Mrs Swain said.

"I am hoping it [the listing] will change things."

There are four carers in the society.

Mrs Swain said two more were needed but strict rules and conditions could limit who was suitable.

Society education officer Fran Gamble has Prince, a car accident victim, in her care at the moment.

Ms Gamble's husband and daughter are carers too, which helps to spread the workload in an emergency.

The koala's new status came as research showed numbers had dropped by 40 per cent in Queensland and by a third in NSW over the past two decades.

Native Animal Trust Fund president Audrey Koosman said residential and mining developments were the biggest threat to Hunter koalas.

"In some areas, including the Hunter, it [the listing] has come far too late but it is better than nothing," Ms Koosman said.

The NSW government welcomed the move, saying it brought Commonwealth law in line with NSW legislation.

NSW Environment Minister Robyn Parker said the state government first listed the koala as vulnerable in 1992.

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