

Listing positive for CQ koalas

Central Queensland koala conservation groups are optimistic on news the koala has been added to the threatened species list in the states of Queensland, New South Wales and the ACT.

Increased development and mining operations have posed a massive threat to local koala habitats in recent years.

Central Queensland Koala Research Centre Research Coordinator Alistair Melzer says listing the koala as a threatened species will mean a more holistic approach to protecting koalas will be taken.

"One of the things that this Federal listing does is to ensure that not only individual mines but all developments that require Commonwealth approval need to take account of the fact that koalas are now listed as vulnerable," says Dr Melzer.

"So what we would like to see now is a cooperative collaborative approach to the management of koalas.

"Not so much a regulatory one but one where the industries are working in conjunction with rural landholders to ensure the koalas and koala habitats are first of all maintained but hopefully even expanded."

"There have been some areas where in fact koala populations are doing quite well but they're quite localised," he says.

"Over most of the region, koala populations have either disappeared or have declined and really they could be in quite some trouble unless some action is taken."

He says at the moment there's not a lot of coordinated efforts in central Queensland to protect the koala.

"There are two areas in particular, Blair Athol Coal Mine near Clermont and their new mine is working on mine rehabilitation for koalas and I believe that's working.

"In the Springsure area Xstrata Coal is funding a program to try and work out ways of restoring koala habitat along streams where it all died in the drought in the 1990s.

"What we need to do is to broaden that into landscape scale koala management programs."

He says the weather can have a severe impact on koala populations.



Koalas (Alice Roberts - ABC Local)

"Koalas are very dependent on maintaining a very low metabolic rate so they have to keep calm, keep slow and keep cool particularly when temperatures get up to the high thirties or low forties in summer," he says.

"Recent drought in the 1990s where if you remember there were quite extensive areas of tree deaths in central Queensland saw a number of koala populations severely stressed and particularly around the Springsure area, the populations crashed."

He says of course increased development is also taking its toll on koala habitat.

"Many decades ago it was broad acre land clearing," he says.

"Koalas need trees and if there are no trees there's no koalas but since then we've now seen a wave of mining and industrial development across the region.

"With that you lose more koala habitat but you also impose barriers to koala movement, things like highways and mining roads that have very high intensity traffic become effective barriers to koalas, they get killed when they try and cross them.

"They're the sorts of issues we have to try and deal with now."

He says to promote the issue locals should be talking to their State members.

He says it's also important to report sightings of koalas to CQ University and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

If koalas are spotted on roads they should be reported to the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

"The more awareness there is of where these problems are then we can work to fix it," he says.

"They can also join community groups that are interested in the conservation of koalas and their habitat and that may be groups like the Central Queensland Koala Volunteers or maybe the local Wildlife Preservation Society and helping Greening Australia or others like that."

