

TWEED HEADS

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Habitat corridor will save koalas

Nikki Todd | 01:01pm May 7, 2012



THE Tweed's endangered koala population has received a lifeline, with a multimillion-dollar pledge to protect key habitat areas along the coast.

The five-year deal involves \$2 million being distributed over five years through the Federal Government's new Biodiversity Fund. The money will be used to link key koala habitats along the Tweed and Byron coasts.

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Working in conjunction with private landowners, the funding will be used by the Tweed Shire Council to plant 30,000 koala trees and 25,000 riparian and rainforest trees in 100ha of protected land to be created on the coastal strip linking the Tweed and Byron shires.

Revegetation will also take place in a further 225ha of existing koala habitat.

A study released by the Tweed Shire Council last year showed the koala population on the Tweed Coast had dived to an estimated 144 individuals -- well below the estimated survival threshold of 200 koalas.

"This is a great opportunity for our koala population," Richmond MP Justine Elliot said of the project.

"This project will link core koala habitats, enhance endangered ecological communities and improve connectivity."

Tweed Shire Council biodiversity program leader Dr Mark Kingston said the funding would help implement a new koala management plan for the Tweed.

"This will be able to provide welcome funds to works needed to try and bring the koalas back from the brink of local extinction," Dr Kingston said.

"We are basically at the point where they are either going to continue to go down or we are going to turn them around. We need to increase the amount of habitat and the ability for koalas to be able to move around between areas."

Your Say

"who needs schools, hospitals or libraries when you have koalas..."
loki

Dr Kingston said the funding would be spent mainly at the southern end of the Tweed Coast, around Pottsville and Wooyung, linking into the Byron Shire.

He said the koala population north of the Tweed River was almost extinct and it would not be viable to create more protected areas there to link into the southern Gold Coast around Currumbin.

Team Koala president Jenny Hayes said the funding had restored her hope in saving the marsupial.

"I didn't think there was any hope but now I feel there is some hope," she said.

The grant will help fund the employment of two officers for the project and help in the training of two local indigenous youth.

The funding coincided with a decision by Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke last week to list the koala as vulnerable in NSW, Queensland and ACT.

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