

Koalas no more in our bush

BY NICK SOON

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KOALA habitats were believed to have been wiped out in Blacktown — the fastest developing local government area in Australia.

A NSW Environment and Heritage Office spokeswoman said there hadn't been any confirmed sightings in the Blacktown LGA since the 1970s.

But a 14-year survey conducted by wildlife scientist Robert Close to record koala sightings in Campbelltown found koalas in other parts of western Sydney.

Associate Professor Close from the University of Western Sydney said he sighted koalas at Darling Mills Creek in Baulkham Hills, Kurrajong in Richmond, Cranebrook, Dural and Berowra during the study.

Professor Close estimated there are 300-800 koalas in the Campbelltown area but he was unsure about other areas.

He welcomed the federal government's decision to list the marsupial as vulnerable in NSW, Queensland and ACT, but said he was disappointed the listing excluded other states.

"The listing is good for Queensland and ACT but will not make a difference in NSW as its current wildlife protection law is pretty good," Professor Close said.

Environment Minister Tony Burke, who announced the listing at Featherdale Wildlife Park in Doonside, said at-risk koala populations in the three states would now be included on the national list of threatened species.

He said developers would now have to account for koala listings when making applications.

Featherdale Wildlife Park marketing manager Kellie Ames said the park had about 50 koalas aged three to 12.

Environment Minister Robyn Parker said an additional \$700,000 had been allocated for koala conservation and recovery work on top of \$404,000 awarded this year through the NSW Environmental Trust for habitat restoration.

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