

# Koala sex threat 'critical'

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ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

**SOUTHEAST** Queensland koalas are at similar risk of being wiped out by disease as Tasmanian devils, says a research scientist.

Despite this, Queensland has allocated only \$400,000 for koala disease research and the Commonwealth \$785,000, compared with \$22 million for work on a facial tumour disease killing Tassie devils.

In a submission to a Senate inquiry into koalas, Australia Zoo researcher Jo Loader says up to 67 per cent of sexually active female koalas in some areas are infertile due to chlamydia.

Ms Loader said the level and severity of disease was almost unprecedented compared with other species.

"The application of more funding for disease research is critical," she said.

State Environment Minister Kate Jones said yesterday \$45 million was being spent on koala projects, with most of the money going to buy and rehabilitate habitat.

Of that money, about \$400,000 had been allocated to disease research and she hoped the Federal Government would contribute.

"I recognise research is the

smallest component of the funding but I took guidance from the Koala Taskforce and they set the priorities," she said.

"They wanted the bulk spent on habitat."

Ms Jones said if funding priorities had changed she would be keen to hear about it from scientists.

Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke said that over six years the Australian Research Council had provided \$785,000 to investigate the origin of the retroviral invasion of the koala genome, investigate transmission of the retroviral invasion and for research into developing an chlamydia vaccine.

A submission by Central Queensland University koala specialist Alistair Melzer said disease in any wild species was normal and had a role in keeping populations in check.

Dr Melzer said koalas would remain at risk until population growth and resource extraction either plateaued or declined.

He said a consequence of development was an unrelenting mortality from road deaths and dog attacks as koalas moved across habitat that had been separated by high-volume traffic corridors.

Dr Melzer said long-term drought in the 1990s, tree decline and fire had hit regional koala populations hard.



**FUNDS NEEDED:** Scientists are undertaking research to develop an chlamydia vaccine.