

By gum, four million thanks but we need help



MARSUPIAL'S FRIEND: Environment Minister Kate Jones has announced further funding to protect koalas. **Picture:** Sarah Marshall

Brian Williams
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

PRESSURE is mounting on the Federal Government to urgently list the koala as a threatened species as the State Government pours another \$4 million into habitat protection.

State Environment Minister Kate Jones told Parliament yesterday that the latest funding in the second round of Koala Nature Refuge funding would be for local

landholders to rehabilitate and expand southeast Queensland's koala habitat.

It will be for work such as planting new koala food trees, removing weeds and installing koala-friendly fencing. About 100ha is already protected.

Priority areas were Pine Rivers and the Koala Coast – primarily in the Redlands – as well as properties within the Sunshine Coast, Moreton Bay, Brisbane, Logan, Ipswich and Gold Coast regions.

Federal Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt last week wrote to the Government, urging that the scientific assessment of the koala's status be brought forward from October.

He told Environment Minister Tony Burke the koala would be placed at serious risk unless action was taken.

A Senate inquiry in Brisbane last week was told mulga land koala numbers had fallen by 95 per cent and southeast colonies

also were in freefall. An AIDS-like virus was sweeping through colonies, making koalas more susceptible to disease such as chlamydia. Climate change could push the species towards the east coast, where they were under attack from over-development, vegetation clearing, car hits and dog attacks.

Mr Burke asked if the Opposition wanted him to ignore the Threatened Species committee's advice.