



UPSET: Murray Chambers from Sunshine Coast Koala Rescue disgusted with tree clearing of koala habitat

PHOTO: GEOFF POTTER

A new threat to koala's survival

By PETER GARDINER

IT IS a shocking sight to break the heart and raise the hackles of Sunshine Coast koala crusader Murray Chambers – a logged native forest which he believes is vital to the survival of Peregian's local population of struggling marsupials.

On private land just west of the Emu Mountain Rd motorway section north of Murdering Creek Road, large trees have for weeks lain where they were cut down in this koala habitat area.

For Murray, who makes up one half of the Sunshine Coast Koala Wildlife Rescue with brother Ray, the tangled swathe of sawn and broken tree trunks and limbs, is a possible koala death sentence.

"Any clearing around here should be a no-no – these are koala food trees," Mr Chambers said after last Tuesday inspecting logged trees which he estimated to be decades old.

He pointed out swamp mahogany, tallowwood and scribbly gum among the large trees felled, most likely under a forestry practice permit issued

by government authorities.

"One of the big blokes there has got to be an eighty-years-old tree – they have cut down the really big trees." Noosa is in big enough trouble now with their koalas without this," Mr Chambers said. "Noosa is special because it still has what a lot of other places on the Coast have lost – its koalas, but that is not going to last long at this rate. "Whoever gave permission for this to happen should be sacked – they should be picking up papers on the beach."

Mr Chambers said this apparent sanctioned logging operation was a demonstration of how governments at all levels were ignoring the plight of the koala, which he said was staring down the barrel of extinction locally. Two weeks ago he was called out to nearby Doonan to collect a sick koala and he has made past trips up to Murdering Creek Road and Peregian Springs to answer the call of koalas in distress.

"Koalas like to roam around in Peregian Springs and Noosa Springs up the road is a bit of a local hot spot.

"The trouble with all this clearing is that it leads to fragmentation and that causes stress in koalas, which can make them more susceptible to disease like chlamydia."

He said habitat loss also makes them more vulnerable to dog attack and car strikes if they are forced to relocate.

The land is believed to be part of 155 hectares private parcel on either side of the roadway, which was knocked back as a site for a 1200-lot residential development in 2008. Clearing on the other side of the road attracted concerns from Sunshine Coast council and Noosa MP Glen Elmes in 2009.

The State Government reply to logging concerns back then was that under the Vegetation Management Act, the wildlife habitat values of the forest must be maintained. The government response was that native forest practice must "retain, protect or provide habitat, feed, nest and shelter trees for native fauna" or face possible breach action.

Environment Minister Kate Jone's office was contacted for comment.