



CUTE AND CUDDLY: The Federal Government will declare koalas in Queensland as vulnerable. **Picture:** Sarah Marshall

State's koalas are given helping hand

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KOALA populations in Queensland will receive greater protection after the Federal Government moves today to list them as vulnerable under national environment law.

Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke said he accepted koalas were under serious threat from habitat loss, urban expansion, vehicle strikes, dog attacks and disease.

"Koala numbers vary significantly across the country, so while koala populations are clearly declining in some areas, there are large, stable or even increasing populations in other areas," he said. "In fact, in some areas in Victoria and SA, koalas

are eating themselves out of... habitat. But the Queensland, NSW and ACT koala populations are clearly in trouble, so we must take action."

The long-awaited decision will impact on those who want to clear koala habitat - particularly developers, miners and graziers.

Australian Koala Foundation chief executive Deborah Tabart, who has campaigned for the listing for 16 years, called on State Environment Minister Andrew Powell to immediately list southeast Queensland koalas as critically endangered.

Mr Powell said southeast koalas were already listed as vulnerable and the Government would assess Mr Burke's move before taking any decisions.

Ms Tabart said although a listing would see clearing laws tightened, there was no reason why developments could not go ahead so long as offsets were included.

University of Queensland researcher Jon Hanger said the state-wide nature of the listing would bring in areas such as the coal-rich Bowen Basin, where major open-cut projects were cutting a swathe through koala habitat.

Any new projects would have to offset habitat loss.

Dr Hanger said wild dogs, foxes and disease were probably having a far greater impact on koala numbers than many scientists realised.

Ms Tabart said she opposed Premier Campbell Newman's

demands earlier this month to have federal environment powers administered at state and local level because councils did not have the staff, resources or knowledge to protect animals such as koalas.

"Councils often do rely on developers' consultants to give them information and that's a bit like putting the fox in charge of the hen house," she said. "Some things are so important they have to be done at federal level. Councils are there to look after rates and rubbish and I'll debate that with Newman any day."

Koala numbers in the Redlands, east of Brisbane, have collapsed by 68 per cent from 1999 to 2010 and a further 13 per cent last year.