

Time for action to save koalas

By LIZZIE STIPCEVIC

THE future is looking bleak for koalas.

Koalas have now made the International Union for Conservation list, and it's up to the community to come together and support the new Living With Koalas program to help prevent the iconic furry marsupial from extinction.

"All the research I've been doing shows that within 50 years koalas will be extinct in the wild," said Living With Koalas director G Henshaw.

The Living With Koalas program launches on September 7 which is Threatened Species Day, the day in 1936 when Australia let the Tasmanian Tiger become extinct in an Australian zoo.

"The Tasmanian tiger died of neglect and lack of food in a zoo," said Mr Henshaw.

"Now we're seeing an 80-90 per cent reduction in koala numbers because we are taking their food source, the eucalypt trees. History is repeating itself.

"Unlike the Tasmanian Tiger, the koala isn't even a pest. It doesn't kill any farmer's animals or crops, it just climbs trees and eats leaves."

Port Macquarie and its surrounds is seen as one of the country's most vibrant koala populations in terms of location and the amount of eucalypt trees that used to grow there, but koala numbers are still dropping rapidly.

"Since the Koala Hospital has been in Port Macquarie for 40 years, it is estimated there was initially up



Above: Australia's iconic koala - their numbers are dropping rapidly in the Port Macquarie region. Above right: Living With Koalas director G. Henshaw



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"All koalas eat is eucalypt leaves, so by removing the trees we are killing them," he said.

"Lake Cathie Public School, Coowarra Park Pre-school, Newman Senior Technical School and many more are getting involved with the program by planting eucalypt trees."

The program will give every student at a school a tube stock, a young eucalypt plant producing nutritious leaves, and the local nurseries will deliver them and show the teachers and children how to report them.

It is their mission to look after them for the next year. Within a year they will grow to two metres high and will be planted where koalas need the trees the most.

The aim of the program is to create food tree corridors connecting known koala habitats in the Port Macquarie and Hastings areas.

The Living With Koalas program's motto is: "For koalas in the wild the difference between human action and inaction is extinction."

Mr Henshaw said this program makes it easy for anyone to take action.

"People say 'it's not my problem it's the government's problem'. It actually is our problem," he said.

"There's 101 things on the website that you can do to help a koala.

"For example, a snooker club is doing a competition raising money for this cause. Everyone can do their little bit."

Living With Koalas will be selling merchandise through events and online shops and a percentage will go towards buying a food tree.

For more information about the program and to help save our iconic koala visit <http://livingwithkoalas.com.au>

to 20,000 koalas in this region and now there are less than 2000," Mr Henshaw said.

Mr Henshaw said the solution was simple – plant more koala food trees than we are cutting down.

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