



AS IT IS

Australia Lists Koalas as Endangered

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Koalas were declared **endangered** Friday in eastern Australia. More koalas are dying from disease, lost **habitat** and other threats.

Earlier, koalas had been considered a **vulnerable** species.

Federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley lowered their **conservation** status on the country's east coast in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The government's Threatened Species Scientific Committee recommended the change.

Many koalas in Australia suffer from chlamydia. The disease causes blindness, infections and infertility.

Last year, the Australian Koala Foundation said the country has lost about 30 percent of its koalas in the past three years. In 2020, a parliamentary investigation warned the species might become **extinct** before 2050 without immediate help.

The number of koalas in Queensland has fallen by half since 2001 because of lack of water, fires and deforestation. Some are killed in attacks by dogs, or hit by cars.

“Koalas have gone from no-listing to vulnerable to endangered within a decade. That is a shockingly fast **decline**,” said Stuart Blanch. He is a conservation scientist with the World Wildlife Fund-Australia.

Blanch added that koalas will go extinct if new laws are not passed to protect forests.

The Australian Koala Foundation estimates that there are less than 100,000 Koalas left in the wild. There may be as few as 43,000. Summer forest fires in 2019 and 2020 killed at least 6,400 of the animals. Rescue workers tried hard to save them and treat their injuries.

“There have been many pressures on the koala. The Black Summer fires, of course, was a **tipping point**. But we know the koala is vulnerable to climate change and to disease,” Ley told reporters Friday.

Ley said the government is working to protect the animal. She said vaccines are being given to koalas to prevent and treat chlamydia, and drones are being used to study them and rebuild their habitat.

The government says that listing koalas as endangered will bring attention to them and help address threats. But conservation groups argue more has to be done to prevent their extinction.

The Australian Koala Foundation has called for legislation to protect them and prevent land clearing and mining projects that are destroying their habitats. It says koalas are also in danger across Victoria and South Australia.

Changing their status to endangered does not really help, said Deborah Tabart. She is the head of the foundation.

“Behind all the photo opportunities and political **rhetoric** they (the federal government) continue to approve the destruction of koala habitat,” she said.

I’m Dan Novak.

Dan Novak adapted this for VOA Learning English from reporting by The Associated Press and Reuters.

Words in This Story

endangered — *adj.* used to describe a type of animal or plant that has become very rare and that could die out completely

habitat — *n.* the place or type of place where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives or grows

vulnerable — *adj.* easily hurt or harmed physically, mentally, or emotionally

conservation — *n.* the protection of animals, plants, and natural resources

decline — *n.* the process of becoming worse in condition or quality

extinct — *adj.* no longer existing

tipping point — *n.* the point at which a series of small changes become a larger, more important change.

rhetoric — *n.* language that is intended to influence people and that may not be honest or reasonable
