

## ■ TALKING POINT

### Genome mapping could aid koalas

AUSTRALIA'S dwindling koala population could receive better treatment for diseases, thanks to research that has mapped out their genetic blueprint.

The research, led by Dr Rebecca Johnson from the Australian Museum and Professor Peter Timms from the Queensland University of Technology, has worked out the initial sequencing of the koala genome.

Prior to that, very little was known about the immune system of Australia's "honorary citizen", Professor Timms said yesterday.

The data was helping researchers understand why Queensland and NSW koalas had been crippled by the spread of chlamydia, while Victorian populations remained virtually unaffected.

"Chlamydia is a major killer of koalas and it also makes them infertile," Professor Timms said.

"We were pretty much working blindfolded in chlamydia treatment before but this new research will advance vaccine development significantly."

The research also revealed that the majority of koala genomic sequences shared similarities with other marsupials, such as the Tasmanian Devil.