



ARAS (All Rescues Are Special) Medal - proudly sponsored by The Saltiest Dog

Bear, Border Collie x Koolie, Sunshine Coast QLD

Nominated Charity Recipient: IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare)

“A new award in the 2025 Awards - the ARAS (All Rescues Are Special) Medal, is proudly sponsored by The Saltiest Dog. The Medal celebrates incredible rescue dogs and the humans behind them,” says Awards Founder Kerry Martin.

“This award goes to Bear, who highlights the power of second chances and the extraordinary potential within rescue animals when they are given the love and support they need. I couldn’t have imagined a more fitting inaugural winner. Thank you to The Saltiest Dog for their heartfelt support of this special new award in 2025!”

Bear’s original guardians got him as a puppy but soon had to surrender him as he was a handful. After ongoing issues with several families, Bear’s last guardians were threatened with eviction from the damages he was creating in the home. The family contacted the University of the Sunshine Coast’s Detection Dogs for Conservation team, who was actively looking for their next detection dog to be trained with finding koalas (in collaboration with IFAW).

Bear found his ‘forever home’ with the director of the Detection Dogs for Conservation, Dr Romane Cristescu, who said, “Quickly we knew Bear was ‘the one’, ready for the challenge of finding live koalas. While many dogs are able to find koala scats, not many can find live koalas as they are resting high in trees. Now, Bear is an integral part of search and rescue efforts to locate koalas suffering from vehicle hits to bushfires to diseases. He has saved over 100 koalas!”

Bear’s work is also important for research into the resilience of koalas after fires. Bear was on the ground during Black Summer. In many areas local koala populations were decimated by the fires, so every animal Bear saved made a difference; many were released back into the wild and some since had joeys. Bear’ work has been featured in documentaries, and even in his own called “Bear, Koala Hero”.

Dr Cristescu says Bear’s story is about “the bond between dogs and humans, and how special working together as a team is. I’d like every child to know, there is a place where you will shine. It is not because you feel that you don’t fit in, that later you won’t find your way to be a star. Bear went through several families and places where he didn’t fit, and in the end, he not only has fun, helps koalas but also has his own movie as a hero! Bear’s story is one of second chances and finding your tribe.”

The Saltiest Dog’s Owner/Founder Kate Opitz says, “I truly believe that the right dog finds us when both need each other the most. This is why the ARAS Award is so special to me. My soul dog, Lulu, found me exactly when I needed her the most, and we got to share over a decade together – a pure, unconditional love between a dog and their human. Bear is the perfect example of finding the right place, the right home and the right family at the right time. All rescues are special, and every dog deserves a chance to find the place they belong.”