

Unmet Recovery Needs – Wildlife. Suggestions from Wildlife Health Australia (WHA).

1. From your perspective, do you see any unmet 2019-20 bushfire recovery needs?

Unmet needs for wildlife revolve around preparedness to underpin future response and recovery and include:

- Agreed national standards and documentation for rehabilitation and veterinary assessment, treatment and care for wildlife including policy, standards and protocols.
- Relevant and consistent documentation including: protocols for deployment of wildlife carers and wildlife professionals; policies including those for insurances such as professional and public liability and workers compensation, access to fire control centres and fire grounds; training materials including those specific to wildlife care and treatment, and; guidelines and technical references for wildlife carers and professional. This documentation is needed for both the on-ground cadre of wildlife responders and the managers of those responders.
- Documentation including guidance on the handling of wildlife for fire personnel or similar to ensure any proposed actions take account of animal welfare, zoonotic disease risk and biosecurity risks.
- Increased understanding of emergency management arrangements and structures by wildlife responders and their managers. It is particularly important that wildlife responders understand where they fit in the overall response arrangements and structures and what the priorities of the emergency managers.
- Understanding of the arrangements relating to bushfire affected wildlife, and the resources that could be made available to support the immediate and subsequent care of the wildlife.
- Training and use of wildlife carer volunteers to a consistent standard. Training of spontaneous volunteers (volunteered at the time). Coordination and planning for the training and use of volunteers from across the various jurisdictions and State based agencies. A clear pathway or guide that shows wildlife carers how to volunteer safely and effectively.
- A process for how wildlife carers and first responders for wildlife can be trained, mobilised and managed within an all-hazards-type framework to support the work of our response agencies.
- National coordination of wildlife carers and professionals and their relevant resources. A central hub to facilitate the meeting of the needs across Australia. Where the fire agencies have the National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC), there is no equivalent for those involved with wildlife. A coordination hub would also be a key focus for the collection, collation and dissemination of information and in so doing encourage active appropriate and targeted support to the jurisdictions.

Though work is underway in some jurisdictions, these areas remain as unmet needs. If the intention is to identify what will be most effective for future bushfire or other disaster events, then these preparedness activities need to be given a very high priority. For more detailed suggestions see the

attached *National Preparedness for Emergency Response to Wildlife Affected by Bushfire – Gaps and Activities*.

2. Are these needs location-specific, sector-specific, group-specific, timeframe-specific or structural?

Sector-specific and structural: wildlife health and welfare, national infrastructure. Required to be in place prior to the next catastrophic bushfire season.

3. Are these needs related to a lack of specific support programs, a lack of funding, a combination of both, or a result of other factors?

A lack of specific support programs and a lack of funding. The space is ready to be organised but requires support to do so. Investment in recovery has been heavy. There has been little investment in preparedness. A well prepared sector supports recovery.

4. What would be needed to address these needs?

Priority activities to develop preparedness to underpin response and recovery activities include:

- Documentation - Develop veterinary and care documentation for wildlife including policy, standards and protocols to support an effective, consistent and timely emergency response.
- Training - Identify and train a key on-ground cadre of wildlife responders and supporting managers in incident response:
 - Integration of wildlife health and welfare activities within the government led response is critical for success.
 - Wildlife responders need to develop an understanding of where they fit in the overall response and the priorities of the emergency services.
 - Development and adoption of dedicated wildlife roles, with supporting role statements, underpinning skill prerequisites and training is needed.
 - Completion of the existing training as provided to other non-firefighting agency personnel that allows the safe access to fire grounds as approved by incident management.
- Undertake engagement with emergency management agencies to embed wildlife response activities as part of response as soon as practical and safe to do so.

Development of a coordinated and consistent national component of emergency response that could integrate wildlife responders into the emergency management arrangements of each jurisdiction is an important longer term objective and opportunity and would require considerable work.

To be successful, this work would need to be led nationally and supported by the relevant jurisdictions. Current arrangements for national emergency management coordination could be considered as models.

There is an opportunity to use the bushfires to facilitate development of an all-hazards-type approach to organise wildlife responders such that they can be available to assist if needed for any wildlife emergency or incident involving wildlife. (See “5. Future activities on page 10 of the attached document.)

Attachments: *National Preparedness for Emergency Response to Wildlife Affected by Bushfire – Gaps and Activities Required* – Separate electronic file.