



13 June 2022

National Recovery and Resilience Agency

Dear Sir or Madam,

WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA (WHA) SUBMISSION: DISCUSSION PAPER TO INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECOND NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Discussion Paper to Inform the Development of the Second National Action Plan*. We have provided responses to your discussion questions below and limit these responses to our area of interest which is wildlife health and welfare.

Wildlife Health Australia is the peak body for wildlife health in Australia (endpiece). We have given much thought since the 2019/20 bushfires as to what we believe Australia needs to do better to prepare for emergencies impacting on wildlife health and welfare. Though much good work has been done, gaps remain.

**Overall, the single most important action is to include wildlife in future planning activities for the emergency management space at a national level. The single most important enabling mechanism is to support a transformation vision for change for the wildlife sector as identified by key wildlife stakeholders and the national coordinating body (attachment A).**

There is much to be done and we are ready to help.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and good luck with this important work.

Best Wishes,

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# WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA (WHA) SUBMISSION: DISCUSSION PAPER TO INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECOND NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

## ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### 1. What do you understand your shared responsibility to be for reducing *systemic* disaster risk (for yourself, your organisation or on behalf of others) and ideally, what should collaboration look like?

In 2021, WHA reached out to funders, stakeholders, management committee members and staff to seek feedback about our current performance. We were encouraged by these stakeholders to have courage and be bold. As a result of this consultation a strategic vision that sets the agenda for change for wildlife health in Australia was produced (attachment A). This strategic vision focusses on 8 strategic areas and their associated objectives and deliverables, which, if implemented, would transform Australia's approach to risk management in this space.

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) is the peak stakeholder coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia (see About Wildlife Health Australia – endpiece) and would play a central role in working with Australian governments and wildlife stakeholders to deliver the objectives for the nation. The level of engagement would vary with the task or activity but ideally collaboration should involve leadership and the setting of priorities and direction by the NRRRA for wildlife health with WHA working with its stakeholders to support those objectives.

WHA has just been funded by the Australian government to take on the duties of an international collaborating centre for wildlife health and biodiversity under the umbrella of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, previously OIE). **A simple mechanism to facilitate collaboration and delivery of activities would be to incorporate “Emergencies” and “Capacity Building” areas as core funded streams into the activities of this Centre.**

### 2. What examples can you share about what you are doing to prevent or limit the potential severity of future disruption arising from climate and disaster risks? What is working well, and what isn't?

To prevent or limit the potential severity of future disruption:

- Identification of priorities for the wildlife health and welfare space.
- WHA has a position on the DAWE HASEDS Group and administers the national wildlife health information system for Australian governments. This system provides early detection of wildlife health issues and events of significance for Australian governments and non-government stakeholders. The system provides risk assessment and identifies priorities for consideration for funding and action by Australian governments.
- The WHA Strategic Vision (attachment A) identifies specific activities that WHA could undertake if funded to assist in mitigating future disruption arising from climate and disaster risk. Areas of focus for WHA include:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships  
Awareness

Capacity Building  
Coordination and Collaboration  
Ecosystems  
Emergencies  
Research  
Surveillance.

What is working well?

- Current areas of focus are on biosecurity, surveillance, emergency animal disease preparedness and response, coordination and collaboration, capacity building and future proofing for these areas.

What isn't?

- Gap areas are in bringing the public and environmental stakeholders into the system (e.g., wildlife carers), a focus on emergencies involving the natural hazards, and our ability to contribute to mitigation of climate change impacts.
- The 2019/20 fire season has provided a unique opportunity for emergency response arrangements related to wildlife to be utilised and for issues and areas of improvement to be identified. The WHA board has considered this in depth and has developed the *National Preparedness for Emergency Response to Wildlife Affected by Bushfire – Gaps and Activities* in response.<sup>1</sup>
- Identified issues and deficiencies included:
  - An absence of agreed national standards and documentation for rehabilitation and veterinary assessment, treatment and care for wildlife including policy, standards, and protocols.
  - A lack of 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.
  - Absent documentation included 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.
  - A lack of or inadequate 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Available on request.

- Managers of the bushfire responses did not always understand 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.
- The training and use of wildlife carer volunteers was not always to a consistent standard. The training of spontaneous volunteers (volunteered at the time) was variable. There appeared to be varying levels of coordination and planning for the training and use of volunteers from across the various jurisdictions and State based agencies. Wildlife carers were keen to volunteer but there did not appear to be a clear pathway or guide that shows them how to volunteer safely and effectively.
- Though the immediate need now is bushfires, a bigger issue was identified as to 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.
- There was also need for the national coordination of wildlife carers and professionals and their relevant resources that may be either WHA members or resources managed by a jurisdiction. The members and their resources needed a central hub to facilitate the meeting of the needs across Australia. Where the fire agencies have the National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC), there was no equivalent for those involved with wildlife. This coordination hub would also be a key focus for the collection, collation, and dissemination of information to the WHA members, and in so doing encourage active appropriate and targeted support to the jurisdictions.

### **3. What is enabling your efforts to reduce disaster risks? Conversely, what is impeding your efforts to reduce disaster risks and why should it be addressed in the second National Action Plan?**

Enablers:

- WHA is trusted and supported by government and non-government stakeholders alike.
- WHA has national communication and coordination mechanisms that allow identification of priorities, capture, assessment, and provision of priorities to government and non-government stakeholders in an agreed and trusted way.
- There is a clear vision for the future, and;
- management is based on AIIMS principles, which simplify approach and provide common language, facilitate situation awareness, and provide common understanding for linkage and collaboration across the many stakeholder groups.

Impediments:

- Inclusion of wildlife and the need for a national approach in emergency management policy and processes at state and territory, but primarily, national level.
- Recognition of the value and need for a coordinated national approach by government.
- The sector is only just starting its preparedness journey: it does not know what it does not know.
- WHA does not have the authority to formally take on the role for national coordination.

Why should it be addressed in the second National Action Plan?

- Risk is not just likelihood consequence: it is also likelihood outrage.
- The public care about the wildlife health and welfare area as evidenced by the very large amounts of public money donated to different wildlife charities and not for profits during and after the 2019/20 bushfires.
- Much of this money remains unspent.
- Along with the many non-government stakeholders, this represents a significant source of value-add should an agreed national approach be decided: the space is ready and willing for leadership.
- Australia works to a fire, flood, drought cycle that is being significantly worsened by the impacts of climate change. Media interest is high, and there is a very high public expectation that we will “do better” next time: wildlife and response is always part of the media response.
- Though much good work has been done, it is our view that **until a coordinated national approach is in place we are exposed**. Treatment does not have to encompass a huge monetary investment. A national system to manage stakeholders is in place and there are some very simple and immediate actions that can be taken using this system that would make a very rapid and effective difference relatively quickly (below).

**4. If the second National Action Plan included ~5 nationally significant strategic initiatives or actions to focus collective efforts over the next 2-5 years, what should they be? What would make the most difference nationally?**

The single most significant strategic initiative to focus collective efforts over the next 2-5 years that would make the most difference nationally to facilitate action in the wildlife health and welfare area is to **fund the strategic vision for wildlife health as identified by WHA** (attachment A).

This vision addresses collaboration, coordination, mobilisation of stakeholders, capacity building, and future proofing on an all-hazards basis for multiple areas of need.

Priority actions over the next 2-5 years relate to the natural hazards and commencement of build of infrastructure that will be critical to successful delivery of preparedness, risk reduction and recovery needs for the wildlife health and welfare sector for Australia as identified post Black Summer Bushfires and the Bushfires Royal Commission.

Activities would form part of a proposed ten-year program of works that would be transformative in reshaping the wildlife health and welfare space in Australia by developing and implementing a framework for national preparedness for emergency management of wildlife during bushfire and other emergency events. Deliverables include:

1. Agreed national standards for remote assessment and intervention, triage, care, and rehabilitation of wildlife affected by emergency events
2. Communicated protocols and guidance on best practice in wildlife welfare during emergencies

3. A national wildlife bushfires and emergency preparedness focus group to improve communication, coordination, and progression of issues of mutual concern between government and non-government stakeholders.

The work would directly support and align with inter-agency objectives for best practise preparedness, risk reduction and recovery including a focus on support for activities that will assist in species and habitat preservation, recovery, and resilience. Longer term strategic objectives are that:

4. Veterinarians, first responders and wildlife carers can effectively contribute to all hazard emergencies affecting wildlife, and;
5. A coordinated, national network of interchangeable resources that provide swift national support on responses during all hazard emergencies affecting wildlife.

**The focus needs to be on development of a coordinated and consistent national component of emergency response that will assist in integrating wildlife responders into the emergency management arrangements of each jurisdiction.**

## **5. Anything else you would like to add?**

### **Unmet recovery needs**

Though much progress has been made following the 2019/20 bushfires, unmet recovery needs remain:

- 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.

**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. The strategic vision identified for wildlife health for Australia provides a roadmap to these and unmet recovery needs (attachment A).**



WHA reached out to funders, stakeholders, management committee members and staff to seek feedback about our current performance.

This is the message we received, consistent across all stakeholder groups:

- Strong expertise, with an incredible network of trusted relationships across multiple groups.
- Very reliable delivery partner - 'most trusted partner status'.
- Seen as an honest and trusted broker, enabler, and neutral party working in the national interest.
- An incredibly valuable player, well-considered advice, very sound science.
- Brilliant output. Amazing resources.
- Committed to collaboration and coordination with other individuals and organisations - bringing people together and breaking down barriers.
- Energetic, with a willingness to listen and to help.
- Very strong ethics. Respectful of people's information rights. A two-way approach to information where people get back as well as input.
- Highly expert management committee members.
- A productive, collegiate, respectful, and professional workplace.
- A great CEO leader who has carefully built a high-performance culture and nurtured a strong team. A collaborative style of leadership, engendering a high level of commitment and trust.

We were encouraged by these stakeholders to have courage and be bold.

This strategic vision sets the agenda for change for wildlife health in Australia.

We look forward to working together.

Rupert Woods

CEO

Wildlife Health Australia

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

**Two-way trusted partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, and peoples.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. Mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations that have close ties to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
2. Enhanced wildlife health surveillance and support for ecosystem health, through collaborative work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
3. Increased awareness across the WHA membership base of wildlife issues that are of concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project officers employed to assist WHA build trusted partnerships.

## Awareness

**Increased awareness of wildlife health, One Health, and ecosystem health.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. Impactful, compelling messages and data that demonstrate how wildlife health is crucial to human and ecosystem health.
2. A national plan for Australian wildlife health and wellbeing, updated every two years, with national, state and territory recommendations.

## Capacity Building

**Increased capacity of Australia to protect and promote wildlife health.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. A rapid response network in all states and territories to:
  - a) investigate wildlife disease events;
  - b) provide expert cross-disciplinary guidance on best practice responses.
2. Improved skills for wildlife carers through training programs and evidence-based standards for wildlife rehabilitation.
3. Enhanced technical advice on wildlife health to the nation, through the employment of wildlife epidemiologists, ecologists, and public health experts.
4. Wildlife carer groups are brought into the national wildlife health system.

## Coordination and Collaboration

**WHA leads, coordinates and collaboratively partners to deliver a nationally integrated wildlife health system for Australia.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. WHA is the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) international collaborating centre on wildlife health and biodiversity for Australia and the region.
2. An International Collaborating Centre on the Health of Antarctic Wildlife that incorporates the Australian Antarctic Territory into Australia's national wildlife health system.

## Ecosystems

**Healthy Australian wildlife in resilient ecosystems.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. Wildlife health management is integrated within national One Health and conservation strategies, including strategy, governance, and multi-sectoral information sharing.
2. Expert advice on the impact on Australian wildlife health of climate change, habitat loss and other significant environmental threats.
3. A national picture of Australia's wildlife health through linking and harmonising health information systems.
4. Expert wildlife health guidance is integrated within threatened species planning and recovery.
5. Coordinated national response to priority wildlife health issues, including iconic species such as koalas, orange bellied parrots, and frogs.

## Emergencies

**WHA is an active, trusted, and key advisor about wildlife in Australia's emergency system.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. Agreed national standards for triage, care and rehabilitation of wildlife affected by emergency events.
2. Communicated protocols and guidance on best practice in wildlife welfare during emergencies.
3. A national wildlife bushfires and emergency preparedness focus group to improve communication, coordination, and progression of issues of mutual concern between government and non-government stakeholders.
4. Veterinarians, first responders and wildlife carers can effectively contribute to all hazard emergencies affecting wildlife.
5. A coordinated, national network of interchangeable resources that provide swift national support on responses during all hazard emergencies affecting wildlife.

## Research

**A national strategic research agenda that creates positive outcomes for wildlife health in Australia.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. A prioritised national wildlife health research strategy, built collaboratively with all stakeholders.
2. Collaborative, interdisciplinary wildlife health research that uses multiple data sources.
3. Shared research findings that maximise positive outcomes and iteratively inform the national strategic research agenda.

## Surveillance

**A robust, coordinated wildlife health surveillance system that drives improvements to Australia's biodiversity, trade, human health, animal health and wildlife health.**

### Strategic Deliverables:

1. An expanded national wildlife health coordination system for wildlife disease surveillance and reporting.
2. Rapid, effective, and efficient capture, management and sharing of wildlife health information, integrated with relevant data sources.
3. An expanded national wildlife health information system, with an increased focus on:
  - a) wildlife health and disease issues impacting upon human health;
  - b) information on antimicrobial resistance in Australian native wildlife;
  - c) disease impact on conservation, biodiversity, and ecosystems for wildlife;
  - d) use of wildlife as bio-sentinels for environmental pollutants, pesticides and heavy metals;
  - e) wildlife as indicators of ecosystem health.

## ABOUT WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA

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[Wildlife Health Australia](#) (WHA) is the peak coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia. WHA provides Australia's focal point for wildlife health and representative to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Veterinary Specialist Group. Its mission is to lead national action on wildlife health including welfare to protect and enhance the natural environment, biodiversity, economy and animal and human health through strong partnerships. WHA assists Australian governments as the central part of our national wildlife health system and is trusted by government and non-government stakeholders.

WHA reports to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee (AGSOC) via the Animal Health Committee and the National Biosecurity Committee and has observer status on the Environment and Invasives Committee and the Consultative Committee for Emergency Animal Diseases. WHA is custodian of the [National Emergency Wildlife Disease Response Guidelines](#).

WHA has 40 member organisations and over 750 individual members. WHA membership operates as a network that includes government agencies including the environment, and agriculture and /or primary industries and partners from the non-government partners including universities, zoos and aquariums, private veterinarians and licenced / registered wildlife carers who are usually volunteers. WHA works with up to 120 different government and non-government agencies and organisations on a regular basis and WHA members are invariably requested to assist with any wildlife emergency occurring within Australia be it fire, flood, drought, disease, or oil spill response. This did occur during the bushfires of 2019/20.

During health and disease emergencies involving or likely to wildlife, our role is one of leadership and management of communication, coordination, linkage, and the provision of technical information to assist lead jurisdictional response agencies at local, jurisdictional, and national levels and stakeholders. We work to ensure that jurisdictional response agencies are well supported and information relating to wildlife is coordinated throughout the response and recovery.

WHA does not have any defined responsibilities in emergency management arrangements, including within local, jurisdictional, or national emergency management or recovery plans. WHA was not formally activated during the bushfires of 2019/20. However, during the fire season WHA was approached by jurisdictions, response organisations and members seeking a range of technical and scientific advice on wildlife. WHA responded to these as appropriate and led the development of supplementary feeding guidelines. In addition, WHA members were actively involved with wildlife impacted by the bushfire emergency across within Australia.

**A strategic review of WHA activities following the Bushfires of 2019/20 received a very clear message from key stakeholders and funders that WHA needed to expand its activities to include delivery of strategic objectives for the nation around Emergencies and the natural hazards (attachment A – above).**

More information on WHA is available at: <http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au>.