



WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES BUSHFIRE RECOVERY EXPERT PANEL COMMUNIQUÉ 11 MARCH 2020

The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel met in Melbourne to discuss ongoing work to prioritise species and Threatened Ecological Communities requiring urgent intervention because of the impacts of the 2019-20 wildfires, to provide ongoing advice to the Government on the use of the Emergency Intervention Fund, and to discuss the medium to long-term strategy for the post-fire recovery of species and ecological communities.

The Expert Panel welcomed the recent workshop on short and long-term recovery strategies for the wildlife and plants of Kangaroo Island. The workshop identified a range of potential priority actions for fire-affected species and the Island's landscapes more broadly. The Panel noted that similar workshops for other fire-affected areas of the country with distinctive ecological characteristics could be beneficial.

Analysis of the impacts of the fires on plants and invertebrates is progressing and preliminary lists of species in these groups that are in greatest need of intervention will be available in April. The Panel recognises there is a significant amount of work involved in the development of these lists and would like to acknowledge the time and effort being put in by numerous experts and agencies assisting with this critical task.

The Panel also noted that further evidence of fire impact has led to some minor re-assessments of preliminary the list of 113 priority fire-affected vertebrate (and spiny crayfish) species published on 11 February 2020. These refinements involve eight species being added to that initial list (Gang-gang Cockatoo, South Eastern Glossy Black-Cockatoo, Kangaroo Island Western Whipbird, Kangaroo Island Southern Emu-wren, Mainland Dusky Antechinus, Oakview Leaf-tail Gecko, Kate's Leaf-tail Gecko and Ringed Thin-tail Gecko), and two species being removed from that initial list (Swan Galaxias and Tyler's Toadlet).

The Expert Panel recognises that recovery will require not only immediate emergency needs but also long-term commitment and planning. In the medium term (6 months–2 years after the fires), the Panel has recommended a focus on the following responses (noting that not all will necessarily be appropriate for all sites, species and situations):

Assessment and prioritisation:

- Continuing on-ground assessment of impacts and prioritisation of species, for both short- and longer-term management, where necessary.

- Identifying the locations of key unburned refuge sites.

On ground action

- Continuing rehabilitation of injured wildlife and provision of shelter, nest boxes, and artificial hollows.
- For some animal species, captive breeding, genetic rescue, and translocation of animals for population management.
- For some plant species, seed banking, genetic rescue, and translocation of plants for population management.
- Continuing strategic feral predator and herbivore control, and weed control, at key sites.
- For some species and ecosystems, active revegetation and regeneration.
- Protecting unburnt refugia within burnt landscapes, including from further fire.

Monitoring

- Appropriate and coordinated, monitoring impact, recovery and management effectiveness, and investigation of changes to ecosystem processes and ecological transitions.

Policy, leadership

- Identifying biodiversity assets for explicit inclusion in planning documents for future fire management and suppression.
- Identifying research gaps.
- Identifying opportunities to improve preparedness and response capacity.
- Developing best practice guidelines to build capacity and the available evidence base for future fire responses.

In the longer term (2-10 years after the fires), the Panel has recommended continuing these actions, with a focus on population management, predator and weed control, and restoration at key sites, minimising the risk of future fires burning refugia, monitoring, and building capacity to respond to future fires.

These considerations will help inform the medium to long term workplan for the bushfire response. To this end, the Panel endorsed a project funded by the National Environmental Science Program to review existing monitoring programs, and develop new designs where needed, for priority fire-affected threatened species and Threatened Ecological Communities. In some cases, this work will also help assess the effectiveness of the management actions undertaken after this unprecedented fire event. The work also aligns with the rapid assessment surveys already underway that aim to describe the immediate impacts of the fires.

The Panel also agreed they would draw on the lessons from this recovery effort to develop guidance on the data needs, planning tools, coordination functions and rapid intervention activities that could help inform future environmental responses to natural disasters. This may be undertaken through development of a series of 'best practice' guidelines.

The next Panel meeting will be in late March 2020.

- Dr Sally Box, Chair of the Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel.

Panel members

Dr Sally Box (Chair)

Threatened Species Commissioner
Australian Government

Professor John Woinarski

Charles Darwin University
National Environmental Science Program –
Threatened Species Recovery Hub

Professor Sarah Legge

Australian National University
University of Queensland
National Environmental Science Program –
Threatened Species Recovery Hub
Threatened Species Scientific Committee

Dr Stephen van Leeuwen

Indigenous Advisory Committee

Dr Libby Rumpff

University of Melbourne
National Environmental Science Program –
Threatened Species Recovery Hub

Assoc Professor Dale Nimmo

Charles Sturt University

Dr Jenny Gray

Zoos Victoria

Dr Dan Metcalfe

CSIRO Land and Water

Dr Dick Williams

Charles Darwin University

Advisers

Representatives from fire-affected states and territories (NSW, VIC, WA, SA, QLD, Tasmania, ACT)