



WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES BUSHFIRE RECOVERY EXPERT PANEL COMMUNIQUÉ 15 JANUARY 2020

The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel met for the first time on 15 January at Parliament House in Canberra.

The ongoing bushfires are an ecological disaster. While the full extent of the impacts on species and natural assets will not be known until the fires are out and it is safe to access affected areas, we know they will be extensive and severe.

The Panel received briefing from the Minister for the Environment on the Australian Government's \$50 million initial commitment to emergency wildlife and habitat recovery, and updates from state government representatives on efforts underway in their jurisdictions.

The Panel was briefed on preliminary mapping that identifies the nationally listed threatened species that have been in the path of recent fires and noted that this initial assessment would be made publicly available shortly. The Panel provided guidance on further analysis required to identify species of most concern, recognising that the impacts of fire differ greatly between species and communities.

The Panel recognised the urgency of responding to the immediate needs of wildlife, threatened species and ecological communities. Once species are made extinct, we cannot bring them back.

The Panel set a series of objectives to guide immediate recovery efforts, specifically to:

- Prevent extinction and limit decline of native species.
- Reduce the immediate suffering of native animals directly impacted by the fires.
- Maximise the chances for long term recovery of native species and communities.
- Ensure learning and continual improvement is at the core of the response.

The Panel identified priority activities required immediately to meet these objectives. These are:

- Protecting unburnt areas within or adjacent to recently burnt ground that provide refugia.

- Feral predator and herbivore control to reduce the pressure on native species where appropriate.
- Emergency salvage of plant and animal species for ex-situ conservation or wild-to-wild translocation.
- Rapid on-ground assessment for species and communities of concern.
- Supplementary shelter, food, and water for animals where appropriate.

The next step is to prioritise which species and locations these actions will be targeted at, in collaboration with others. This prioritisation will be informed by spatial assessments that identify the species and communities likely to have been most impacted by bushfire.

The Panel emphasised that these objectives and priority activities are to guide to initial actions, but will change over time.

While there are urgent decisions that need to be taken, the Panel also acknowledged that the recovery of native species, ecological communities, natural assets and their cultural values for Indigenous Australians will require a sustained and strategic long-term recovery effort that we need to plan for. It will also require a coordinated and collaborative approach across jurisdictions, sectors and organisations.

At a time of devastation for our environment, there is also cause for hope and optimism. The Panel is truly inspired and heartened by the outpouring of support and willingness of the community to be part of the recovery effort.

The next meeting of the Panel is proposed for the week starting 20 January 2020.

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

Panel members

Dr Sally Box (Chair)

Threatened Species Commissioner
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National Environmental Science Program –
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Dr Jenny Gray

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Dr Stephen van Leeuwen

Indigenous Advisory Committee

Advisers

Representatives from fire-affected states and territories (Victoria, NSW, WA, SA, Queensland, Tasmania)