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## WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES BUSHFIRE RECOVERY EXPERT PANEL COMMUNIQUÉ 17 APRIL 2020

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Over the last three weeks the Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel has met several times via video and teleconference to finalise the provisional lists of plants and invertebrates requiring urgent management intervention.

471 plant and 191 invertebrate species have been identified as the highest priority for intervention taking into account information such as the geographic range of the species, the amount of their habitat impacted by fire, the species response to fire and where applicable, the effects of other stressors such as drought.

The plants span a variety of vegetation types and include rainforest trees and shrubs like Monga Waratah (*Telopea mongaensis*) and plants from subalpine vegetation, such as the Critically Endangered Bredbo Gentiana (*Gentiana bredboensis*). Some species, like the Forrester's Bottlebrush (*Callistemon forresterae*) are at imminent risk of extinction because all of their known range has been burnt and they are exposed to compounding pressures such as drought, high fire frequency, or disease.

Invertebrates most impacted include species of freshwater mussels, shrimps, burrowing crayfish, land snails, spiders, millipedes, bees, dragonflies, caddisflies, mayflies, bugs and butterflies. These species occur in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Assessing the impacts of fires on invertebrates was particularly challenging, because for many species there is so little known about where they live and how they respond to fire. As a result of these data limitations, an additional 147 species have been identified as priorities for further assessment and investigation. The Expert Panel believes these additional species have been impacted.

The Panel would like to acknowledge the contributions of everyone involved in the development of these lists – from the institutions who provided access to their databases and research, through to individual experts who shared their years of expertise to ground truth the results. The Panel would also like to extend a special thank you to Dr Rachael Gallagher for her work in coordinating and leading the finalisation of the priority plant list.

The release of these lists and the opening of tranche 2 of the open grants component of the Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Program are significant milestones in the work of the Expert Panel and the broader bushfire recovery process. Along with the previously released lists of priority fire-affected wildlife and ecological communities, these lists will help guide priority management responses for priority action species at priority sites.

The Expert Panel acknowledges there are a broad range of actions that can support the recovery of impacted plants and invertebrates. A one size fits all approach is unlikely to help the recovery process. As part of the published invertebrate priority list, general actions that could support the recovery of impacted species have been identified – from rapid survey to assessing the extent of loss and location of remaining populations through to rescuing critical populations and aiding the critical habitat. For impacted plants, the Panel notes their traits can provide insight into the types of actions that could assist in recovery – from weed control to seed collection, irrigation and removal of herbivores.

The release of these lists is only the first step in determining the impacts the bushfires have had on plants and invertebrates. Further research and information gathering is needed to help fill the information gaps that proved problematic during the assessments, and the lists will be updated as information improves.

The provisional lists are available on the Department's bushfire recovery website: <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery>.

The Panel also considered an initial assessment by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment of the impacts of the bushfires on wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. Five of these wetlands had at least 5% of their extent within the 2019-20 bushfire preliminary analysis area. A further 34 Ramsar wetlands are within 50 km downstream of the fire area. The Panel provided advice on progressing the assessment of fire impacts on these internationally significant wetlands. Three wetlands have been identified as targets for further assessment – the Macquarie Marshes, the Gwydir Wetlands and the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar sites. The assessment will focus on how the bushfires have impacted and potentially changed the ecological character of these wetlands, as well as identifying potential management interventions.

The Government has announced an additional \$2 million for scientific research through the Threatened Species Recovery Hub of the National Environmental Science Program to help guide wildlife recovery efforts and habitat rehabilitation following the bushfires. The Expert Panel will provide advice on research needs and project proposals and to this end endorsed five priority research areas: assessment of impacts on species and ecosystems, prioritisation of actions for those species, priorities in bushfire recovery for Indigenous Australians, monitoring and investigation and lessons for the future.

The Expert Panel acknowledges the impact the COVID-19 virus is having on the delivery of on-ground, ex situ recovery and research actions being undertaken in response to the bushfires. The delivery of the bushfire recovery package continues to be a priority. While on-ground recovery actions are continuing to be implemented in a modified format or are momentarily paused, there is also an opportunity for planning and preparing for when impacted areas can be accessed again and teams can go back out into the field.

The next Panel meeting will be in early May 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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### **Professor John Woinarski**

Charles Darwin University  
National Environmental Science Program –  
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### **Professor Sarah Legge**

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

### **Dr Stephen van Leeuwen**

Indigenous Advisory Committee

### **Dr Libby Rumpff**

University of Melbourne  
National Environmental Science Program –  
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### **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)