



WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES BUSHFIRE RECOVERY EXPERT PANEL COMMUNIQUÉ 21 FEBRUARY 2020

The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel met in Canberra to continue its assessment of the impact of the bushfires and finalise its process for providing advice to the Government on use of the Emergency Intervention Fund for post-fire recovery of species and ecological communities.

The Panel welcomed the release of preliminary analysis on the impact of the bushfires on [World Heritage Areas](#) and [Threatened Ecological Communities](#) since their last meeting. [Maps](#) released of three World Heritage Areas show that approximately 54% of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, 81% of the Greater Blue Mountains Area and 99% of the Old Great North Road has been affected by fires. Other World Heritage Areas (Budj Bim Cultural Landscape (Vic), Fraser Island (K'gari) (Qld), Wet Tropics (Qld) and Tasmanian Wilderness) have also been affected.

The fire-affected ecological communities of greatest initial concern and highest priority for detailed impact assessment, include the:

- Upland Basalt Eucalypt Forests of the Sydney Basin Bioregion (in the Blue Mountains region of NSW)
- Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone (in the Blue Mountains region of NSW)
- Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia (in north-eastern NSW and South East Queensland)
- Illawarra-Shoalhaven Subtropical Rainforest (in south-eastern NSW)
- Alpine Sphagnum Bogs and Associated Fens (in the alpine regions of the ACT, NSW and Victoria)
- Eastern Stirling Range Montane Heath and Thicket (in southern WA)
- Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia (east coast of Qld, NSW and Victoria).

The Panel also welcomed the release of the [National Indicative Aggregated Fire Extent Dataset](#) that brings together information on areas burnt in the 2019-20 bushfires to help us understand cumulative national impacts and inform recovery actions. This national map has been critical to the work of the Panel. As well as informing the [highest priority vertebrates and spiny crayfish for emergency action](#), the national fire extent map is being used in similar

assessments to identify the plant and invertebrate species that most need urgent interventions.

The Panel considered approaches for seeking input on the impact of the fires on Indigenous cultural values and opportunities for Indigenous participation in on-ground recovery actions. The Panel agreed this work will need to be ongoing throughout the bushfire recovery effort.

The Panel provided advice on the approach for identifying priority actions to inform the selection of projects under the Emergency Intervention Fund. Members of the public should register with GrantConnect to be made aware of future grant opportunities.

The Panel considered and assessed further proposals from state governments for emergency on-ground actions to be supported with funding from the Australian Government. The Panel is providing advice on these proposals to ensure they align with the Panel's national bushfire recovery objectives agreed on 15 January 2020 and are targeted at management responses for species and places in most urgent need of support.

The Panel endorsed the South Australian Government's initial recovery priorities from its \$1.5 million in Commonwealth financial support for urgent interventions on Kangaroo Island. They include:

- The identification and support of surviving populations of small mammals, birds, bats, plants, reptiles and invertebrates.
- The deployment of multi-disciplinary teams to assess habitat suitability for those areas untouched by fires.
- Feral predator controls.
- Emergency salvage of 'at-risk' species.
- Collaboration with local community groups to carry out rapid on-ground assessments of the affected areas ensuring the protection of unburnt 'refugia'.
- Direct support for injured and distressed wildlife.
- Support for the creation of animal shelters.

Kangaroo Island is rich in unique biodiversity and about half of the island was impacted by the 2019-20 fires. Many threatened species were affected, including the Kangaroo Island Dunnart and Glossy Black Cockatoo. Because of this impact, these species were on the Panel's provisional list of animals requiring urgent management intervention.

The Panel also endorsed the Western Australian Government's key recovery priorities for \$1 million in Commonwealth financial support for:

- On-ground surveys and rapid assessment of threatened species.
- Additional acoustic recording units and intensive monitoring of Western Ground Parrot.
- Protection of regenerating habitat through fencing, watering and feral animal, invertebrate pest and weed control.
- Seed collection and establishment of seed production areas for threatened plants in the Stirling Ranges.
- Development of critical care response capacity at Perth Zoo for fire-affected threatened species.

The Stirling Range and Cape Arid National Parks were significantly affected by fire, with impacts on many threatened and endemic plants, such as the Cactus Dryandra, Maroon-flowered Daviesia and the Yellow-leafed Gastrolobium.

The Panel, and state and territory government representatives also met with Professor Graeme Samuel, the Independent Reviewer of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to discuss how the Act could better support the recovery of the environment following significant bushfire events.

The next Panel meeting will be on 11 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
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Advisers

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