



WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES BUSHFIRE RECOVERY EXPERT PANEL FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel (the Panel) held their 20th and final meeting on 25 September 2020. Since their first meeting in January, the Panel has sought to fulfil its terms of reference in providing high quality scientific advice and information to guide the Australian Government’s response to the 2019–20 bushfires.

In doing so the Panel has assessed bushfire impacts, identified the species in most urgent need of management intervention and provided advice on priority actions to protect and recover our bushfire affected native species, ecological communities and natural assets, including those of cultural significance for Traditional Owners.

This critical information has informed the Government’s initial emergency bushfire response and will play a key strategic role in setting the direction for the next stages of the recovery process, in particular the work of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee with species assessments and through the National Environmental Science Program with their bushfire related research projects.

This final communique highlights the key outcomes from the Expert Panel’s work.

Objectives

At its first meeting, 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.

These objectives have been at the core of the Panel’s activities and advice throughout its tenure.

Priority matters for urgent management interventions

In collaboration with many experts, the Panel has identified 810 priority species and ecological communities for urgent management intervention. These priority matters were derived from a rapid assessment of thousands of taxa (across vertebrates, invertebrates, and plants) and nationally-listed threatened ecological communities, and required the application of rigorous scientific criteria, while simultaneously taking a pragmatic approach to knowledge gaps, uncertainty, and the pressing need to act.

The Panel began this work while the fires were still burning and has progressively updated the list of priority matters as new information became available. The latest lists of priority matters are available here:

[Priority animals](#) (vertebrates and some invertebrates)

[Priority invertebrates](#)

[Priority plants](#)

[Priority Threatened Ecological Communities](#)

Advice on management interventions

In January, the Panel also identified the following [priority activities](#) required immediately to meet the objectives guiding our recovery efforts:

- Rapid on-ground assessment for species and communities of concern.
- 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.
- Supplementary shelter, food, and water for animals where appropriate.
- Protecting unburnt areas within or adjacent to recently burnt ground that provide refugia.

While many of these activities remain priorities, [additional actions](#) have also been identified to support medium to longer-term recovery and resilience, including for specific priority [animals](#), plants, and nationally-listed [Threatened Ecological Communities](#).

The Panel has also provided advice and guidance on the emergency response proposals from state and territory governments, regional Natural Resource Management organisations and applications through the [Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Program](#).

The Australia Government's initial \$50 million investment is already benefitting more than 300 of the priority matters identified by the Panel (see figure below). This is expected to grow over time as the Government rolls out its next phase of investment.

The Panel has supported the co-design process that has been undertaken by the Government to identify investment priorities for its [\\$110 million regional funding](#). Through seven region-focused workshops, over 200 stakeholders have been engaged in identifying priority recovery actions, informed by the work of the Panel, the aspirations of local stakeholders and the recovery actions and investments already underway.

Future science for informing bushfire recovery action and preparedness

Building on the Panel's work, scientific research is underway to guide ongoing approaches to bushfire recovery, such as new research projects being undertaken through the National Environmental Science Program's Threatened Species Recovery Hub.

Similarly, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's (TSSC) [10 point Bushfire Response plan](#) incorporates and builds on the objectives identified by the Panel back in January. The priority matters identified by the Panel will continue to provide foundational information for the TSSC's deliberations on the identification of species to assess (or reassess) for listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

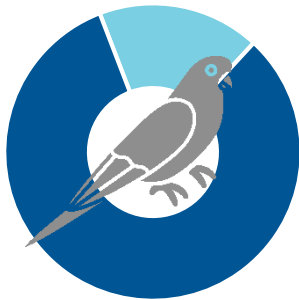
Panel members will remain closely involved in bushfire recovery and continue to provide advice on the bushfire response over coming years, including through roles on the TSSC, the Indigenous Advisory Committee and in the National Environmental Science Program.

PRIORITY MATTERS FOR URGENT INTERVENTION

>26,000 matters assessed by the Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel

810 priority matters identified as needing urgent management intervention following the 2019–20 bushfires

313 priority matters are already benefitting from projects funded through the Australian Government's \$200 million investment in wildlife and habitat recovery (as at 30 Sep 2020).



BIRDS

17 species identified as priority matters

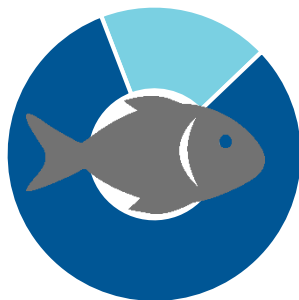
14 benefitting from Australian Government funding



AMPHIBIANS

16 species identified as priority matters

15 benefitting from Australian Government funding



FISH

16 species identified as priority matters

13 benefitting from Australian Government funding



PLANTS

486 species identified as priority matters

95 benefitting from Australian Government funding



MAMMALS

20 species identified as priority matters

20 benefitting from Australian Government funding



REPTILES

23 species identified as priority matters

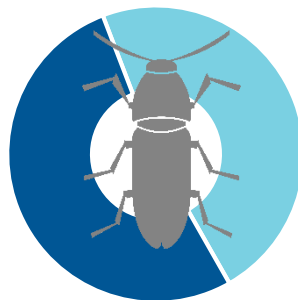
18 benefitting from Australian Government funding



CRAYFISH

22 species identified as priority matters

22 benefitting from Australian Government funding

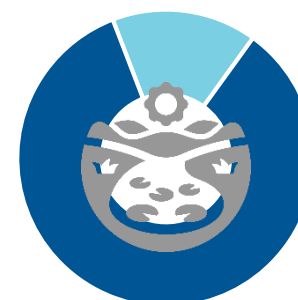


OTHER

INVERTEBRATES

191 species identified as priority matters

100 benefitting from Australian Government funding



THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

19 communities identified as priority matters

16 benefitting from Australian Government funding

The Expert Panel – a novel response

The Panel was rapidly convened as fires were still burning and amid the realisation that fire-related biodiversity losses were likely to be catastrophic.

In establishing the Panel, the Government selected members from across diverse scientific disciplines and with strong linkages and networks to other organisations. These networks proved crucial, as they assisted the Panel to quickly develop collaborative and productive relationships with governments, the scientific community and on-ground groups to deliver novel, fit-for-purpose and timely scientific information and advice, with a nationally inclusive scope.

Representatives from state and territory agencies were integral to Panel meetings to ensure knowledge exchange and coordination was maintained.

The work of the Panel reflects the collective efforts of countless individuals and organisations who provided input and support over the past nine months. These efforts have helped constrain biodiversity losses, helped guide and support the recovery of the most fire-affected species, ecological communities and places, and helped coordinate the engagement of the community in healing our natural environment.

To help guide future recovery responses, the Department is preparing a 'blueprint' document that will capture the successes, experiences, and lessons learned over the life of the Panel. This will be completed over coming months with the support of all Panel members.

Thank you

The Panel members would like to thank the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, and the Australian Government for their foresight in convening the Panel and providing members with the opportunity to support and help inform the Government's response.

The Panel would also like to thank the Bushfire Recovery team and many departmental staff who provided support and expertise, the state and territory agencies who collaborated so willingly and effectively, and the many researchers and other stakeholders who contributed their knowledge so generously.

The Panel continues to be inspired by the collective response to the devastating fires of 2019–20, and wishes the Government, the state and territory agencies, and broader community well in their ongoing efforts to support the recovery and long-term resilience of our precious environment.

- 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

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National Environmental Science Program – Threatened Species Recovery Hub
Threatened Species Scientific Committee

Professor Stephen van Leeuwen

Indigenous Advisory Committee

Dr Libby Rumpff

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

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Dr Jenny Gray

Zoos Victoria

Dr Dan Metcalfe

CSIRO Land and Water

Advisers

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