



WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES BUSHFIRE RECOVERY EXPERT PANEL COMMUNIQUÉ JULY 2020

Over the last two months the Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel has met several times via videoconference to discuss and provide advice on a range of bushfire related funding proposals and areas of ongoing research.

Assessing impacts and prioritising actions

The Expert Panel has been working in partnership with other scientists and the state and territory advisers to:

- identify possible candidate species for captive breeding programs to provide an eventual boost to bushfire-impacted wild populations
- further prioritise the ecological communities impacted by the 2019–20 fires for recovery action
- develop species-specific guidance on priority actions needed to support the immediate survival and long-term recovery and resilience of fire-affected animals.

These projects will continue to be areas of focus for the Panel over the coming weeks.

The Expert Panel has also continued to provide advice on project proposals funded through a \$2 million allocation to the Threatened Species Recovery Hub of the National Environmental Science Program for bushfire related scientific research.

This included ‘On-ground Assessment Guidelines’, which have been developed to support post-fire surveys of fire severity, habitat condition and threats, as well as the status of threatened species and ecological communities. These guidelines, which were developed by a team from the University of Melbourne led by Dr Darren Southwell, are now finalised and have been made available to state and territory governments, regional natural resource management agencies, non-government organisations, research institutes and grant recipients to support their on-going efforts to document the wildlife impacts of the 2019–20 bushfires. A copy of the report is available at:

<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/research-and-resources>

Providing advice on funding proposals

The Panel has considered and provided specialist advice to the Department on project proposals submitted under Tranche 1 of the Australian Government’s \$12 million Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Program. Over the course of several meetings, members considered the grant applications and provided advice on how they aligned with the national

bushfire recovery objectives. The 19 successful projects will receive a total of \$6.9 million. Together, these projects will benefit 79 (66%) of the priority animals and 10 (50%) of the priority threatened ecological communities identified for urgent management intervention.

The projects will involve on-ground actions to support the recovery of priority species and surveys to understand the impact of the fires on their populations. This includes collecting Environmental DNA¹ in water samples from fire-affected river basins to look for animals such as Platypus and Spotted Tree Frog, and scent-detection dogs to find endangered antechinus in the World Heritage listed Gondwana forests. A list of the successful projects is available at: <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/open-grant-program>

The Expert Panel's attention has shifted to reviewing proposals submitted under Tranche 2, which closed on the 28 May. Tranche 2 called for proposals that focussed on priority plants and invertebrates, as well as priority vertebrates and ecological communities. There were many quality projects that could not be funded through Tranche 1 but will be re-considered along with Tranche 2 projects.

The Expert Panel has continued to consider and provide advice on proposals from state and territory governments for on-ground bushfire recovery actions, including from the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmanian and South Australian governments. Supported by Australian Government funding, these recovery actions include pest plant and animal control and assessment of impacts on threatened animals, such as the Broad-toothed Rat and Reik's Crayfish.

The Expert Panel has been impressed by the quality of the applications received to date, both through the open grants process and from the states and territories. The Panel notes that the portfolio of projects, and state agency actions, have made (and will continue to make) significant and strategic progress towards meeting the objectives of preventing extinction and ensuring the recovery of fire-affected species, ecological communities, and other biodiversity assets; and to the provision of critical knowledge to help inform future recovery and preventative actions.

The Panel will be meeting again in August 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 –
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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

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Advisers

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

¹ When species move through the environment, they leave behind traces of their DNA. This Environmental DNA (eDNA) can be sampled and analysed to allow simple and rapid collection of data on species presence.