

**Inter-agency and community
coordination for better animal welfare
outcomes during bushfire disasters.**

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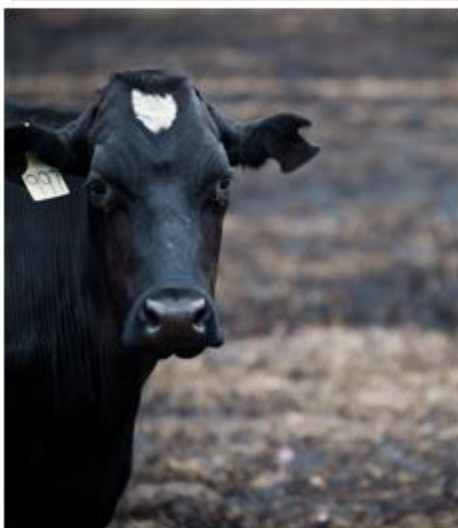


Introduction.

I was part of the small team at AA responsible for coordinating our on the ground response to the Black Summer fires.

I am also a wildlife carer and have been licenced to rescue, raise, rehabilitate and release wildlife over the last 10 years in both VIC and NSW. Good insight into issues affecting wildlife welfare

Who is Animals Australia?



Investigations

- Live Export
- Greyhound racing live baiting

Campaigns

- Factory farming
- Public awareness and education

Advocacy

- Government liaison
- Legal representation
- Corporate engagement

The Issue



- Owned animals like livestock= Department of Agriculture
- Domestic animals (pets) RSPCA and local council inspectorate
- Under the Animal Welfare Act 2002 there is no person responsible for wildlife injured in an emergency and therefore no accountability for managing their current and ongoing welfare
- The emergency response for wildlife was severely lacking

Who's job is it anyway?

Animal Welfare Act WA 2002

Animals are treated as property under the Act. The fact that WA's wildlife are not the property of anyone (except the Crown) means that, aside from instances of cruelty, their ongoing welfare is not taken into account in the current Animal Welfare Act.

Under the Act there is no person responsible for wildlife injured in an emergency and therefore no accountability for managing their current and ongoing welfare. There is no clarity in the Act as to who is responsible for treating or euthanising injured wildlife in a disaster, and who is responsible for feeding wildlife/providing water if their natural food sources are destroyed.

This is an issue not only in emergencies, but throughout the year, for instance during years of drought. And it is at complete odds with the values and expectations from the broader community, and the world.

Black Summer.

Wildlife largely left out of emergency planning. This was fairly consistent across the states where animals aren't 'owned'. It was our experience that this was in direct contrast to livestock and domestic animals. Unlike owned animals, there is no inclusion for preparing for bushfire preparedness with wildlife. Believe there are some positive changes afoot with your Committee for Animal Welfare in Emergencies (CAWE) having some representation for wildlife under the State Support Plan for Animal Welfare in Emergencies.

Just like in VIC the state Department of Environment / Ag (DPIRD) is equivalent to the department of Ag have the jurisdiction of activating emergency response plans for wildlife.

I'll speak today to our experience specific to VIC and in some instances NSW where the response was similar.

Mallacoota VIC, Blue Mountains, Southern NSW



Summary of the situation- the firegrounds were 'out of bounds'- essentially no search and rescue efforts allowed on the scale that they were needed.

Wildlife officers were deployed but they generally speaking, lack species specific knowledge- speciality is policy and enforcement rather than handling and assessment.

First responders weren't trained to assess wildlife

Vets weren't seeing animals, because no one was searching

Wildlife carers were fireground trained but not utilised

The community and private land owners reached out asking for assistance for survivors.

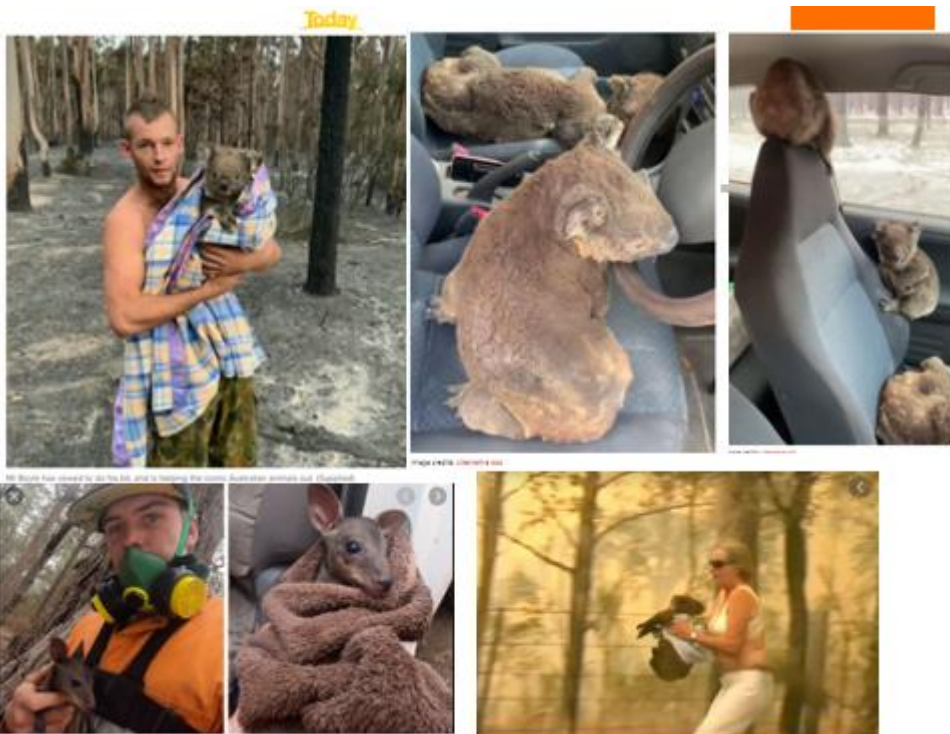
Everyone was asking, everyone was ready, no one was permitted. So we did what we could.

Where to start?



Where is the greatest need?

Prioritise accessibility/ lack of, and areas where complete decimation haven't happened where pockets of surviving animals are likely to be. Be ready for limited road and infrastructure. Where are supplies needed? Feed, veterinary supplies.



If wildlife aren't included in emergency planning. Caring locals will take matters into their own hands, and they did. Preferable to have trained and experienced personnel on the ground. Pictured - Mallacoota, Kangaroo Island,

Veterinary response



Official response from DELWP was to set up triage stations staffed by vets from Zoos Victoria under DELWP's direction. Two major issues with this were 1. the response time and 2. there was no search and rescue operation coordinated alongside the triage stations. Members of public were out searching.

Army, Parks, DELWP and MFB/CFA weren't equipped to spot /search for wildlife.

Wildlife groups/ carers were trained and resourced but not called upon. Lack of coordination and rapid response.

Community response was enormously strong. Carers had all of the infrastructure but no animals.

We flew vets from organisation Vets for Compassion into Mallacoota. Assisted vet triage teams to deploy in Blue Mountains region and Southern NSW.



These animals were awaiting rescue in Mallacoota despite numerous calls for help from locals who know the area well.

Veterinary response



Skilled search and rescue



Darters for chemical immobilisation

Licensed shooters for humane euthanasia

These two are most critical and proved most difficult to gain access. Essential to organise access and authorisation well in advance.

Other key roles:

Drone operators were invaluable for inaccessible and large areas (be aware of no fly zones around firegrounds)

Wildlife carers

Wildlife experienced vets

Work with the local shelters

Skilled search and rescue



Scenes like this required licensed arborists

Immediate relief for survivors— food and water



Immediate relief for survivors– food and water

The screenshot shows a news article on the 9NEWS website. The main headline is "Victoria's native wildlife at risk of starving to death unless government drops food, vets say". Below the headline is a photograph of a kangaroo standing upright in a forest. To the right of the main article is a "Top Stories" sidebar with several other news items. The website's navigation bar at the top includes categories like "Just in", "Coronavirus", "US Election", "Politics", "World", "Business", "Analysis", "Sport", "Science", "Health", "Arts", "Fact Check", and "Other".

With the help of the AVA we called on the Environment Minister to activate areal food drops via several media stories. We pledged \$100K to assist. We enquired at army logistics centres asking if they could fill their cargo planes with feed and were referred to the relevant Ministers and Premier. After media pressure & emergency talks with the VIC govt and a commitment was finally made.

Getting images of hungry survivors out there seemed to assist. There was widespread frustration and distress that these animals weren't been seen and therefore not being prioritised- reflected by the broader community.

In NSW the dept of environment eventually activated food drops for endangered brush tailed rock wallabies.

Immediate relief for survivors– food and water



We conducted our own feeding programs via community and wildlife groups. Prioritised those who could cover large scale or areas where there were pockets of life.

Chartered planes of feed into Mallacoota for private land owners and the golf course where many kangaroos had sought safety.

Project water for wildlife



There was a higher priority given to welfare of listed threatened species, over common species. From a welfare perspective this inequity isn't acceptable.

We launched project Water for Wildlife for local councils and wildlife groups. COVID has delayed this project from being finished.

We utilised local communities for distribution and local business helped with logistic systems for distribution across AUS.



Immediate relief for survivors– food and water



Men's shed. TAFE tradies. Local businesses logistical support.

Local community groups got stuck into feed station monitoring. Good way to activate and embrace community goodwill. Need to be mindful of what you're putting into the bush and what length of time you're looking to support feed. Issues with cruelty at feeding stations. Also needs long term management.

Immediate relief for survivors– food and water



As survivors emerge, it may well be days without feed/water. Don't leave this as an afterthought- plan early! Supplement feeding should be on the agenda of every council to coordinate.

Groups like ARC are great- need guidance to avoid double handling donations ect.

Immediate relief for survivors– food and water

Help Wildlife SURVIVE BUSHFIRES

RINGTAIL POSSUMS

- ✓ FEED IN SMALL AMOUNTS**
 - Native plants and flowers
 - Small amounts of sweet potato or corn
- ✗ DO NOT USE**
 - Fruit or too much starchy vegetable is harmful
- TIPS:**
 - Place in bark of tree other than
 - They are primarily arboreal leaf eaters
- ⚠️ Feed should ONLY be provided in periods of emergency circumstances - in all fire-affected areas where there is no alternative, if vegetation is available, provide water only**

Help Wildlife SURVIVE BUSHFIRES

KANGAROOS WALLABIES PADMELONS

- ✓ FEED IN SMALL AMOUNTS**
 - Kangaroo pellets (from local supply stores)
 - If kangaroo pellets are not available: horse pellets (not high performance) or macropod meal
- ✗ DO NOT USE**
 - Rice, seeds or proffer based pony mixes
 - Lucerne
 - Brassicas, such as cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower
- TIPS:**
 - Do not hand feed
 - Scatter feed early morning and evening in small amounts - only replace as needed
 - Provide fresh water
- ⚠️ Feed should ONLY be provided in periods of emergency circumstances - in all fire-affected areas where there is no alternative, if vegetation is available, provide water only**

We published public resources- feeding guides for 10 common species. These guides are intended to be used as guidance for short term emergency feeding for wildlife. They are available on our website if anyone would like to utilise them.

Ongoing recovery- helping the helpers



Local rehabilitation and care for survivors. WA has great coverage of wildlife rescue organisations in WA. The structure is similar to VIC in that volunteers are skilled passionate and willing to give time and energy to assist wildlife in need.. **Engage them, utilise them.**

Need good coordination among the various groups and individual approaches (ie viability, treatment options ect) and this is difficult but possible via supervision and guidance from the veterinary community.

Ongoing recovery- helping the helpers



We provided infrastructure and emergency grants for those in need- to quickly channel donations from the public to carers who needed it. The ongoing cost for longer term burns rehab is high. We provided vehicles for vet teams for difficult terrain when we heard that vets were using their own cars and damaging them in the process.

In summary

- **Include wildlife in emergency response planning**
- **Prepare early!**
- **Training for first responders and coordination of triage locations**
- **Engage local veterinary and wildlife caring community and appoint leadership**
- **Get first responders trained in basic wildlife rescue awareness**
- **Local wildlife groups are resourced and supported**
- **Local community have access to education and information on supporting wildlife**





VIDEO – [Watch here](#)

Animals Australia
for a kinder world

Questions?

Thank you.

PHOTO: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media

Contact me at louise@animalsaustralia.org for any questions at all or if you'd like to discuss any aspects of this presentation.

Thanks so much for being part of this webinar!