



WWF-AUSTRALIA BUSHFIRE RESPONSE

April 2020 update

For months, Australia was ravaged by the most devastating bushfire season the country has ever seen. Record-breaking temperatures and months of severe drought have fuelled flames in every state. Since the fires commenced in October 2019, more than 10.7 million hectares of land have been burned.

Now we face the additional pressures and future impact of the COVID-19 virus that is affecting us all.

The bushfire tragedy is still front of mind and our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones, homes, and possessions. While we and our partners adjust on-ground conservation work, our bushfire recovery efforts continue, supporting our wildlife responders, protecting unburnt habitat, and restoring priority landscapes.

We are remaining flexible and adaptable throughout these uncertain times to deliver on our on-the-ground conservation work. We are working to support our partner wildlife rescue and care organisations to progress with the work in bushfire zones. We are adjusting some of our work and monitoring the situation with a view to do everything we can to ensure that the health and wellbeing of our staff and partners are safeguarded and that nature is protected.



Utilising technology, our teams and our partners remain connected. Minimising the interruption to our conservation work and enabling us to continue to manage and deliver the important projects our supporters have allowed us to scale over many years – whether that is on-the-ground conservation work, or in changing policies and practices.

As our world continues to deal with the momentous challenges that lay ahead for us all, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank you, once again, for your dedication to conserving nature.

Our bushfire recovery work is a massive, long-term effort that will require support over many years. We continue to welcome this support from around the world as we now move to protect, restore and future-proof our landscapes to benefit both people and wildlife for now, and future generations.



WWF-Australia's Response Framework

WWF-Australia's national bushfire response framework is progressing in waves. Immediately during and following the fires, we ensured emergency on-ground work could happen at scale and are continuing our work to protect and restore the affected species and landscapes for the long-term.

We will remain flexible and adaptable throughout these uncertain times to deliver on our on-the-ground conservation work. While we and our partners adjust on-ground conservation work, our efforts continue to focus on supporting wildlife responders, protecting unburnt habitat, restoring priority landscapes and drawing upon traditional owner knowledge and new technologies to assist efforts to future-proof Australia as our climate warms.

As a result of world-wide support, we are confidently continuing our Australian wildlife and nature recovery work to:

Respond: Respond to the needs of fire-impacted wildlife and species with urgency.

Protect: Protect what remains and deploy interventions that mitigate the processes that will increase the frequency and severity of both current and future fires.

Restore: Restore Australia's scorched landscapes drawing upon leading climate adaptation science so that our flora and fauna can flourish, and Australians can rely on vital ecosystem services long into the future.



Wave 1: Wildlife Response

Up to and now during the COVID-19 restrictions, we are working to support our partner wildlife rescue and care organisations to progress with their work in bushfire affected zones. We continue to support bushfire response and recovery efforts across all fire affected states and territories with the list of priority impacted species being identified via rapid species assessments still ever-growing despite the fires now being extinguished.

We are working to reach as many priority species and landscapes as possible with work already underway across locations such as Kangaroo Island, North Coast NSW and Great Eastern Rangelands.

The support provided by WWF, Woolworths and Foodbank NSW/ACT was used to feed 50 different Brushtailed Rock-wallaby colonies within the Northern tablelands region.

In addition, 210 kg were hand delivered by NPWS staff to accessible colonies near Wollombi and Dangars Falls. Really, really importantly on the last feeding run we saw multiple rock wallabies in places we hadn't seen them before that had been heavily burnt. Giving them more feed has definitely assisted with keeping them alive while the grass grows.

Piers Thomas, Senior Conservation Officer, National Parks & Wildlife Services



- Emergency food drops have been flown by helicopter into NSW national parks to assist isolated threatened species at risk of perishing due to depleted food sources. In partnership with Woolworths, Foodbank and NSW Government.
- Zoos Victoria Australian Wildlife Health Centre, Phillip Island Nature Park Sanctuary and RSPCA QLD are closed to the public, but vets are still caring for animals
- Work on Kangaroo island with black cockatoos has not been impacted at this stage. We have footage of chicks which we will be able to share with you shortly.
- Ecotourism Australia partnership outreach to councils is continuing. They have moved to delivering remote presentations.
- The first large-scale bushfire impact assessment has commenced to assess the impacts of the fires on key river-to-estuary systems in NSW. Results will provide important data required to sustain the ongoing management and health of these systems, as more extreme and frequent bushfire events are predicted in the future.
- Camera traps and drones continue to be utilised to help identify threatened species impacts, with partners ranging from scientists to traditional owner groups assisting this work.

We would like to thank the generous support of WWF for contributing to the highly successful food drops after the recent bushfires.

Without doubt, this help enabled large numbers of endangered brush-tailed rock-wallabies and many other native animals to survive in burnt areas. These populations can now begin to rebuild with the new green pick after the recent rains.

Deborah Ashworth, Species Coordinator,
Brush-tailed rock wallaby, Saving our Species

Wildlife response partner case studies

Zoos Victoria

A total of 25 Zoos Victoria veterinary staff were deployed over a period of 40 days to three locations across Victoria to provide emergency veterinary response for wildlife recovered from the fire zones. Over 215 individual animals were assessed at these triage centres over this period, including a range of species from sugar gliders to lace monitors, but by far the most common patient was koalas (139 out of the 215 animals assessed).

Koalas require very specialist veterinary skills because of their unique life history traits and biological requirements. As such, it was critical to have the State's leading wildlife veterinary staff working for these animals during this period.

After the intensive treatment period was complete, many animals have been transferred to Phillip Island Nature Parks for rehabilitation before they will be released back into the wild. At the Nature Park these animals are living in semi-wild habitats but remain under specialist care/observation throughout their recovery. As soon as suitable habitat is found in the wild, they will be released back to these areas.



Bonorong

Our partnership provides funding to Bonorong's essential services during Covid 19 pandemic.

Bonorong's rescue service saw over 11,000 animals needing assistance last year and their wildlife hospital is the only dedicated wildlife hospital in Tasmania. While these activities are resource heavy, we want to guarantee that wildlife is not forgotten.



Wildcare

WWF-Australia partnered with Wildcare to assist it to rescue, provide emergency treatment for and/or rehome Australian native animals injured or affected by bushfires within the Wildcare area and to assist with the recovery of the respective species where feasible.

Wildcare's work focused on providing support feeding for surviving wildlife. Collaborating with 40 local property owners adjoining the Tallaganda National Park, including Calabash Fire Trail and Clear Range Fireground and covering a total of 54,092 ha

Each week, Wildcare members and volunteers from the public distributed food. Wildcare was providing 40 bales of hay and a pallet of Economix to wildlife displaced from Tallaganda National Park bushfire each month.

This feedstock was selected to support the range of species in the area. Hay and vegetables for larger mammals, namely Red-Necked Wallabies, Swamp Wallabies, and Southern Bare-Nosed Wombats. Selected fruit and vegetables; cut native vegetation referred to as 'browse' for tree dwelling species particularly Brush Tailed Possums and gliders; and a mixed birdseed.

It is estimated that each food station was supporting 600 – 900 animals and 250 – 500 birds.



Biolink

WWF-Australia, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), and Humane Society International HSI commissioned consultancy Biolink, led by specialist koala ecologist Dr Stephen Phillips, to write two reports. The reports examine the conservation status of koalas in Queensland and in New South Wales. The reports show a severe proportional reduction in the koala population size in both states.

The reports objectively quantify the impacts of recent fire events on koala populations during the Spring and Summer of 2019 -2020, in the context of broader population trends.

The reports provide invaluable research that informed our submission to the government's review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and to request to change the federal environmental law to list koalas as 'endangered' in eastern states.

It's time to strengthen and ensure compliance against the EPBC Act or we risk losing this species across Eastern Australia.

Right now, the Australian Government is running a once in a 10-year review of the EPBC Act. [We have] to make our voices heard.

Dr Martin Taylor
WWF-Australia conservation scientist

WWF-Australia is calling for the establishment of an independent national Environmental Protection Authority to ensure that governments and businesses do the right thing for our wildlife and wild places.

Koala populations in Queensland, NSW and the ACT were listed as "vulnerable" under the federal government's EPBC Act in May 2012. Since then, koalas have suffered relentless ongoing pressure.

Land clearing and climate change have supercharged the reduction of koala habitat, increasing koala deaths as their feed trees die-off and waterways where koalas drink dry out.

Biolink's new report conservatively estimates Queensland's koala population has crashed by at least 50% since 2001 because of deforestation, drought, and the recent bushfires. It found forest fires in QLD killed a minimum of 672 koalas between August and December 2019.

A parallel analysis found the New South Wales koala population has also suffered a decline of between 33% and 61% since 2001, with a conservative estimate of 6,382 koalas killed in the 2019-20 bushfires up to 13 February.

We call on the Australian environment minister to use federal environmental law to list koalas as 'endangered' in eastern states to increase legal protections for forests and woodlands where koalas live.

Dr Stuart Blanch
WWF-Australia conservation scientist

Uplisting the koala in QLD and NSW to "endangered" would increase protection for forests and woodlands where koalas live, mobilise funds and increase public support for the species and their habitat.

The federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley, in the wake of the fires, has asked the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to consider whether koala populations in NSW, Queensland and the ACT should have their status reassessed.

Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife

With funding from WWF-Australia, Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife installed sensor cameras to help survey and monitor the critically endangered Kangaroo Island dunnart.

Before the devastating bushfires, it was estimated that between 300-500 dunnarts lived on Kangaroo Island. More than 90% of their habitat was scorched in the fires, prompting fears for their survival.

Kangaroo Island dunnarts have been captured on camera at a new site that escaped surrounding bushfires, giving hope to conservationists working to bring the species back from the brink of extinction. Sensor cameras have spotted the tiny mouse-sized marsupials at three locations on the 550-acre private property in the De Mole catchment on the north-west of Kangaroo Island.

These images prove that this property is supporting a dunnart population. It's exciting and a credit to farm fire units and firefighters that this critical habitat escaped the flames.

This species has a bumpy road ahead, but if we can keep working with landholders to identify dunnart sites and reduce the impact of feral predators then I think there's reason to be hopeful

Heidi Groffen, an ecologist with Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife.

Bushfires can destroy the understorey and all the little hiding places that species like the dunnart rely on. Making the surviving animals particularly vulnerable to feral predators such as cats. Feral cat management is underway, and Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife has installed shelter tunnels on another fire-affected site.

The tunnels appear to be working, as new camera sensor photos show dunnarts using the shelters on the private property called the Western River Refuge. The tunnels provide additional protection while the burnt bushland regenerates.

Continuing its monitoring work in line with COVID-19 restrictions, Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife is working with conservation partners and local landholders to establish a robust threat reduction program across the De Mole catchment.



Corporate partner case studies

In addition to deploying funds and partnering with wildlife response partners we have formed corporate partnerships where we work together to empower people to support bushfire recovery of all scale. As well as building on existing partnership to deliver innovative on-ground response to the needs of fire-impacted wildlife and species.

Koala Sleep Pty Limited

Unified in a common goal to protect threatened and endangered wildlife, Koala and WWF have been in partnership since August 2017.

Koala is furthering our work with Natural Resources Kangaroo Island to protect and recover the Kangaroo Island Glossy Black Cockatoo.

The team has been able to get survey work underway and will soon start work on post-fire habitat restoration as a direct result of this funding.

Andrew Heinrich
New Landscape Board Presiding Member

Kangaroo Island's glossy black cockatoo population is the focus of a special recovery program, which began in 1995 when the population was at a low of just 158 individuals. Prior to the recent fires it was one of the most successful conservation projects in Australia, more than doubling the population in SA.

Kangaroo Island was estimated to have about 370 glossy black cockatoos prior to the bushfires that began on 20 December. Up to 75 per cent of this population, only found on Kangaroo Island, lived within the 210,000 hectare area that was burnt.

Many cockatoo pairs rely entirely on artificial nesting boxes to breed. The burned area also contained nearly 60 per cent of cockatoo feeding habitat and 93 of 130 artificial nest boxes. Together we are assessing the damaged sites to determine what habitat and nests remain.

Whilst surveying the affected habitat, glossy black cockatoos were sighted nesting in burnt out bushland. We have located three female cockatoos in artificial nest boxes that survived the fires in Latham Conservation Park on the north coast of the island.

The team is also monitoring glossy black cockatoos in habitat that escaped the fires and they observed several pairs feeding and mating during a visit to Cygnet Park. With a group of approximately 14 cockatoos seen in one tree.

Installing artificial nest boxes will be vital in the coming months as the breeding season runs until to July.

Natural Resources Kangaroo Island will also be planting drooping sheoak trees to replace those lost in the fires, as the cockatoos feed almost exclusively on the seeds of these trees.





Bushfire Response Work Plan

We are now moving from Wave 1. Nationwide Wildlife Response to Wave 2: Restoration and Protection and Future-Proofing.

Through Wave 1 we:

- Directed funds to wildlife response and care organisations
- Conducted rapid threatened species assessments within fire affected areas to determine which species have been lost, which required urgent recovery interventions and which species once believed to be common are now likely to be listed as vulnerable, threatened or endangered.
- Leveraged this approach to call on respective governments to prioritise rapid threatened species assessments across all fire affected areas.
- Established the number of wildlife deaths caused by the fires using scientific methodology to estimate the approximate wildlife death count and release a nationwide report to ensure accurate reporting and public awareness of Australia's devastating mass loss of native wildlife.

Moving into Wave 2 we face the additional concerns COVID-19 has brought to the world. Our communities are confronted by further hardships and we all working to ensure that interventions benefit and protect both people and wildlife.



Wave 2: Restoration and Protection | Future-Proofing

Aim 1: Habitat

Protect critical unburnt habitat through sharing advice informed by science to key stakeholders as well as accelerating WWF-Australia's Towards 2 Billion Trees 10- Point Plan.

Aim 2: Nature Laws

Harness the once in a decade opportunity presented in 2020 through the Review of the Australian Nature Laws (EPBC Review) to ensure a strong case is made through the review process to enhance the effectiveness of Australian law in protecting our natural assets, in light of the increased risks of early, more frequent and more severe fires.

Aim 3: Species Recovery and Adaptation

Climate Change is worsening Australia's species Extinction Crisis. WWF will draw on innovative solutions to identify key species across high risk landscapes within each Australian bioregion to identify and trial solutions that will better enable recovery, community preparedness, species adaptation and increased species resilience to warming.

Aim 4: Restoration

Work to restore what we have lost with urgency and mobilise Australia behind WWF-Australia's vision Towards Two Billion Trees.

**Aim 5: Climate**

Draw on leading Climate Science to assist Australia in mobilising critical and urgent interventions to help stabilise our climate and support WWF International Climate initiatives. The primary focus will be on helping Australia seize the opportunity to become a world leading exporter of renewable energy by 2030.

Aim 6: International links

Ensure strong links into WWF International Climate Campaigns

Aim 7: Indigenous Ranger Capacity

Enhance the number of indigenous rangers on country, bolster the capacity of indigenous ranger groups where feasible prioritizing high risk and fire affected landscapes, and harness opportunities to draw on traditional owner knowledge to assist with fire preparedness.

Aim 8: Innovation

We will identify and support innovative regenerative solutions from around the world to be implemented in priority Australian bioregions. In the process we will position Australia as the testbed for impactful, innovative and regenerative solutions capable of replication and scaling globally.

List of confirmed wildlife response partners

- Zoos Victoria Australian Wildlife Health Centre
- Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife
- Kangaroo Island Natural Resources Management
- FAWNA (WA)
- Native Animal Rescue (WA)
- RSPCA QLD
- Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary
- Biolink
- Ecological Australia, ELA
- OWAD Environment
- University of Sydney
- WildCare (NSW)
- Australian Veterinary Association
- Rewilding Australia (Booderee National Park, Jervis Bay)
- NSW National Park & Wildlife Service
- Friends of the Koala Hospital (Lizmore)
- ACT Wildlife Incorporated
- Phillip Island Nature Park
- Douglas Thron (Emergency Response Infrared drone detection)
- University of New South Wales
- Ecotourism Australia
- Australian National University
- Deakin University
- Birdlife Australia

THANK YOU

WWF's mission is to build a world in which people live in harmony with nature. This is our moment. We are privileged to be given a gift by our amazing supporters to seize this moment to innovate – to both rethink and create a new future for Australia.



WWF advancing environmental protection in Australia since 1978

TREE-CLEARING

WWF-Australia campaigns alongside farmers, industry and local and state governments to help see excessive tree-clearing in Queensland and New South Wales significantly reduced.

FOOD

WWF works towards having sustainable food more widely available than ever before while striving for deeper reductions in food wastage.



SPECIES

WWF focuses on bringing some of our most-loved Aussie wildlife species, including the black-flanked rock-wallaby, green turtle, quokka, and koala, back from the brink of extinction.

LOW-CARBON FUTURE

We promote innovative, low-carbon and zero carbon solutions to achieve a more climate-resilient future before 2050.

PROTECT OUR MARINE LIFE

We work with partners, governments, Indigenous communities and corporate partners to protect the marine migratory pathways of our turtles, whales, penguins and other marine species.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

wwf.org.au

WWF-Australia National Office

Level 1/1 Smail Street,
Ultimo NSW 2007
GPO Box 528
Sydney NSW 2001

Tel: +1800 032 551
enquiries@wwf.org.au
[@WWF_Australia](https://www.facebook.com/WWF_Australia)
wwf.org.au