

Summary of the 2021/22 fire season

Introduction

This is a summary of activity undertaken in relation to preparing for and managing wildlife response arrangements and welfare issues arising from fire over the 2021/22 fire season. Like 2020/21, a wetter and cooler summer resulted in reduced fire activity and wildlife impacts, with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) only needing to deploy a single team to one fire over the season.

Wildlife Emergency Support Network

Following on from the establishment of the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN), an Expression of Interest was undertaken to recruit an organisation to lead the WESN Coordinator role for 12 months, up until June 2022. Zoos Victoria (ZV) were the successful applicants.

The WESN Coordinator plays a supportive role for DELWP and the WESN as a central contact point for members, undertaking key 'out of season' activities as well as an active role during an event, where they assist DELWP in filling the resource requests to support the state-led wildlife response during fire.

The coordinator also maintains contact with WESN members, including pre-season updates. Last year WESN members were invited to attend a pre-season engagement session. The session was held in person, hosted by Zoos Victoria, an additional online session was held to ensure as many members could participate as possible.

During the session, the WESN Coordinator talked about preparedness for the upcoming fire season, ran through the deployment arrangements and opened the session up for a 'meet and greet' of other members and facilitated discussion about past experiences during fire, to support those less experience, allowing them to hear from members with more experience. Confirming volunteer availability for the fire season and ensuring all Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was in good condition and up to date was also completed.

Agency Preparedness

DELWP delivered preseason briefings across the state and the general fire fighter training course was updated with information on wildlife response arrangements on firegrounds, including the reporting process for sightings of injured wildlife. A review of deployable resources in each region resources was also undertaken.

DELWP has purchased a further two trailer units for its wildlife triage kits, bringing the total to four mobile modules. These allow for the secure storage and quick mobilisation of the kits when required. In addition, two oxygen concentrators were purchased, which removed the need to source or carry bottled oxygen in two of the kits.

ZV undertook a preseason audit and maintenance of the contents of the wildlife triage and veterinary drug kits prior to the fire season, making updates as required.



Figure 1: DELWP wildlife triage kit

Wildlife Response

With a wetter than normal fire season in 2021/22, wildlife impacts were minimal, with only one fire requiring a wildlife response to be initiated. This fire occurred in the Langkoop area on the South Australian border over the New Year period, burning through grassland and scrub. Once deployed, the wildlife coordinator and initial field team were focused on gathering intelligence on known wildlife populations in the affected area, as well as undertaking wildlife assessments, however the presence of wildlife in the impacted area was low. Of the 88 animals sighted and assessed in the field, five required euthanasia, while the remainder were uninjured.

Communications

Zoos Victoria, Wildlife Victoria, Australian Veterinary Association, International Fund for Animal Welfare, RSPCA Victoria, University of Melbourne, Parks Victoria and DELWP have come together as part of a collaborative communications working group to develop pre-approved wildlife welfare messaging to be deployed for effective and efficient communications during an emergency event.

The communications working group has also started delivering a series of live webinars under the banner of 'Together for Wildlife', aimed at supporting and educating wildlife volunteers and the animal welfare sector on a suite of wildlife activities to support best-practice outcomes for wildlife welfare in Victoria.



Figure 2 : Together for wildlife banners

To register for webinars and to be notified about other projects and initiatives in the wildlife health and welfare sphere, please submit your details at <https://forms.office.com/r/2rak4M1bsD> or scan below:



Wildlife Welfare Sector Liaison

The Wildlife Welfare Sector Liaison (Wildlife Liaison) roles also commenced, as one of the agreed actions from the Wildlife Welfare Roundtable. As detailed in the *Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impacted by Fire*, this position is engaged to observe and communicate the strategic wildlife response arrangements with key welfare organisations alongside the State Controller (wildlife) during Level 3 wildlife incidents arising from fire.

Drawn from the wildlife welfare community within Victoria, this role is responsible for undertaking observations of the strategic wildlife response arrangements during Level 3 wildlife incidents arising from fire. The role may also be deployed for level 2 emergencies on a case-by-case basis. Up to four individuals can be appointed to this position at any one time. This allows for the role to be fully operational at peak periods.

Following a competitive recruitment and selection process in the second half of 2021, DELWP appointed Louise Bonomi, Jennifer Ford and Natasha Bassett to undertake this role over through to the 30 June 2022. Induction and training were provided to the Liaison officers both face to face and virtually, covering the scope of their role, rostering and activation, as well as stepping through DELWP's responsibilities and response procedures.

Due to the nature of the fire season, the role wasn't activated over the summer, but the Wildlife Liaisons have contributed to several activities including chairing the Together for Wildlife webinars. In May, Louise, Jennifer and Natasha were reappointed to their roles for another 12 months.

Wildlife Emergency app

The Wildlife Emergency app provides a straightforward way to report wildlife impacted by fire in Victoria to DELWP. The app allows members of the public to submit reports over the fire season by providing information on location, suspected injury and species identified in addition to adding photographs (if appropriate). If your device is not connected to the internet, you can still create a report and will be prompted to submit it when your device has an internet connection.

Public reports made through DELWP's Customer Service Centre or Wildlife Victoria's call centre in response to bushfires are to be directed into the app database, ensuring DELWP receives all relevant details as quickly as possible.

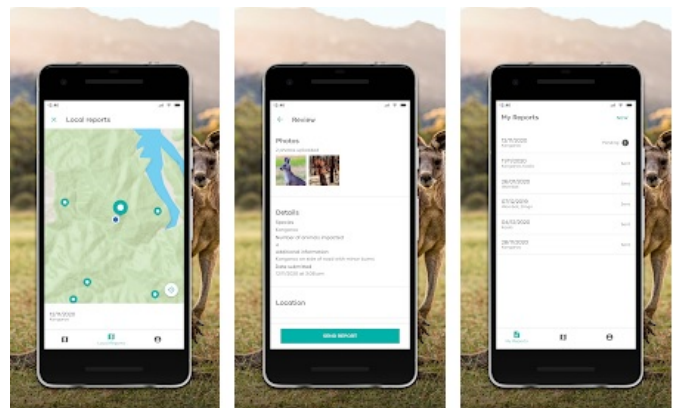


Figure 3: Wildlife Emergency app screens

Preparing for the 2022/23 bushfire season

DELWP has commenced a range of activities to prepare for the 2022/23 fire season. This will occur through into the fire season. Key activities to be undertaken include:

- Review of the wildlife "model of cover" which defines the number of trained people required for various roles across Victoria
- Undertake an Expression of Interest (EOI) process for the coordination of the WESN for 2022/23
- With the WESN, undertake targeted recruitment of volunteers and veterinary teams
- Review and update training programs to ensure they meet training needs and audit requirements
- Targeted training for agency staff, volunteers and veterinary teams
- Preseason briefings and updates
- A targeted exercise to test response procedures.

The WESN and broader wildlife community will be engaged as the various activities are rolled out.

Further Information

Further information on wildlife emergencies can be found at <https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/wildlife-emergencies>

The *Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impacted by Fire* can be accessed [here](#).

The Wildlife Emergency App can be download from [Google Play](#) or [Apple Store](#).

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