

Victorian response plan for wildlife impacted by fires

Summary

On Tuesday the 22nd of December 2020, a discussion exercise “Deep Impact” was conducted by Shepherd Consulting Services Pty Ltd on behalf of the Department of Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to explore the newly developed Victorian response plan for wildlife impacted by fire.

The aim of Exercise Deep Impact was ***‘to explore and validate the strategic structure, governance, roles and functions of all agencies and organisations incorporated within the Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impacted by Fire’***.

The four key objectives of Exercise Deep Impact were:

1. To explore and validate the initial notifications, activations and initial planning and strategic decision-making actions as detailed in the Plan in response to a fire and wildlife emergency,
2. To discuss and validate the initial deployment and response activities in response to the fire and wildlife emergency with particular focus on role and responsibilities as detailed in the Plan,
3. To discuss the connectivity/communications between agencies and organisations at the strategic level during the response phase, and
4. To explore and discuss the management of donations in response to a fire and wildlife emergency.

This report provides DELWP’s responses to the notable outcomes, lessons and insights reported by Shepherd Consulting Services. The exercise provided an opportunity for participants to work through the Plan through a scenario of developing complexity. The Aim and Objectives were achieved in that all topics were discussed and explored with a high degree of participation and inclusion. The exercise was successful in providing an opportunity for participants to test and contribute to the Plan and provide their insights and inputs.

Actions in response to outcomes, insights, and learnings

| Outcomes, insights and learnings | Learning Outcomes | Response |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1. Outcome: Validation that the structure and content of the Plan is sound</p> <p>During the course of the exercise and at its conclusion, it was evident that there were no identifiable issues, comments, nor perceived problems with the structure and content of the Plan nor the role and functions of the key positions contained within the Plan.</p> | <p>The exercise participants provided validation that the Plan’s structure and content is ready for implementation.</p> | <p>No action required</p> |
| <p>2. Insight: Volunteer training and accreditation</p> <p>The issues relating to volunteers and their deployment into the emergency area was discussed on multiple occasions and was identified as one of the most significant discussion points through the entire exercise.</p> | <p>The development of a “model of cover” defining the number of volunteers needed to give state-wide coverage and is required.</p> <p>Training and accreditation of volunteers needs to continue to meet the model of cover noting the impact that Covid-19 has had on the ability to provide that training.</p> | <p>DELWP to develop a model of cover by region and work with the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN) on appropriate recruitment and training</p> |
| <p>3. Learning: Volunteer Resourcing Model</p> <p>The need for a centralised resourcing model for appropriately skilled and accredited volunteers was identified as an opportunity to enable a systematic and methodical manner for planners to efficiently source, manage and deploy volunteers to relevant emergency areas.</p> | <p>The Wildlife Emergency Support Network has been identified as the mechanism for the efficient management of volunteers.</p> | <p>Following the development of the model of cover, DELWP and the WESN will work together to identify efficiencies and improvements in the deployment and management of the volunteer resource process.</p> |
| <p>4. Insight: Deploying non-accredited volunteers</p> <p>On several occasions during the exercise and in line with several key questions, the issue regarding the deployment of non-accredited volunteers was raised.</p> | <p>There will be numerous members of the public who are well versed and trained in fire response, however, without being trained and accredited for volunteering for wildlife activities</p> | <p>The Communications Working Group (CWG) is overseeing the development and distribution of messages and communications products to raise awareness of the major risks and new processes. This will include the issue of the accessing of fire-grounds by individuals not attached to the incident management team.</p> |

Exercise “Deep Impact”

5. Insight: Triage team readiness

The opportunity to have triage teams on standby and ready for deployment was identified during the exercise as an important consideration.

Placing triage teams on standby presents an opportunity to ensure rapid and methodical deployment of such teams.

DELWP to consider triage readiness and the need for standby arrangements, including triggers. To be undertaken in consultation with the Wildlife Emergencies Support Network.

6. Learning: Communications

On multiple occasions throughout the exercise issues and ideas regarding communications were raised with six specific learnings identified.

There is a need for an efficient and structured communications protocol to be finalised that encompasses all aspects of communications and information sharing.

In addition to the existing Emergency Management processes at an IMT and SCC level, the CWG is finalising a protocol to support improved communication across the sector during fire events.

A Communications Plan Master Document which will provide a single point of truth to be shared across organisations, centralising information, messages and protocols.

7. Outcome (Early deployment of Wildlife Coordinator)

Discussions included the need for a Wildlife Coordinator to be deployed into the IMT from the outset to ensure that coordination is being proactively managed

IMT's need to consider the deployment of the Wildlife Coordinator role into the incident IMT at the earliest time possible.

DELWP to develop and provide advice to regions on the deployment of wildlife coordinators. This will also be incorporated into internal training and preseason briefings.

8. Insight (Regional Readiness and Response Plans)

A discussion was held around the need for regional readiness and response plans to be enhanced for the regions, given their geographical, environmental, wildlife and habitat considerations across different landscapes throughout the State.

There is an opportunity to consider enhancing the current versions of the Regional Readiness and Response Plans.

DELWP Regional Readiness and Response plans to be updated to include changes and arrangements defined in the new Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impact by Fire and consistent with the model of cover required for various incident levels.

9. Learning (Aerial euthanasia of wildlife)

Discussions surrounding the euthanasia of wildlife was discussed as per normal procedures, however the topic of euthanasia of wildlife from helicopters (aerial) was posed for consideration.

There is an opportunity and need for an exploration of the option of aerial euthanasia of wildlife.

Learnings on aerial euthanasia from other jurisdictions and other aerial intervention activities will be reviewed along with of the viability of each approach in the wildlife welfare context to be completed by DELWP.

Exercise “Deep Impact”

10. Insight (Wildlife response incident levels)

Discussions surrounding activation triggers to guide scale of wildlife response was discussed.

Whilst some participants raised questions about the animal impact numbers in themselves, the impact section of the table appears to be sound.

DELWP will review activation triggers at the conclusion of the fire season.

11. Learning (Early activation of Wildlife Sector roles)

It was discussed that early activation of operational wildlife roles, was important to ensure that the response was streamlined and efficient s.

Early activation of operational wildlife roles with the IMT teams and commencement of roles was critical.

DELWP to develop and provide advice to regions on the deployment of wildlife teams (in conjunction with point 9). This will also be incorporated into internal training and preseason briefings.

12. Insight (Wildlife Emergency Support Network)

It was validated by several participants that the management of the Wildlife Emergency Support Network by Zoos Victoria was a sound decision and an efficient model.

The decision to task Zoos Victoria with the role of managing the Wildlife Emergency Support Network was validated by numerous participants.

No action required

13. Outcome (Donations)

issues relating to donations, included their management and the type of donations that are sought after (i.e. financial, material and medical) were raised.

Learning Outcome

The issues and opportunities relating to donations should be explored to identify the desired processes, plans, structures and communications regarding donations.

As described in the Response Plan, messages for the public are being developed by the Communications Working Group, along with a strategy for ensuring these messages are easily and effectively shared when appropriate to do so.

14. Insight (Wildlife Sector Liaison Officer)

The role of the Wildlife Sector Liaison Officer was discussed on several occasions through the exercise. It appeared that some participants were not clear on the role and functions of the position, nor how it links to other roles and functions.

Learning Outcome

There is an opportunity to provide further and more detailed information regarding the role of the Wildlife Sector Liaison Officer.

Further information including frequently asked questions about the Wildlife Welfare Sector Liaison Role will be available on DELWP’s website once approved by the Secretary.