

Attn: Inspector-General Emergency Management

Dear Tony,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide preliminary feedback on the preparedness and response to the recent and pending bushfires.

Though I had stepped down from the Board of Animal Evac New Zealand Trust, I was requested by the Board to deploy as the charity's Response Manager so ended up going to NSW leading our team of veterinary and disaster management responders.

Some of these are just initial observations, so they may not be accurate:

- There appears to be no inter-state plan or forum for animal emergency response
- There appears to be no plan or forum for coordinating/receiving international animal emergency response (especially trans-tasman)
- There appears to be no standards for animal emergency response team accreditation meaning bona-fide teams were not requested as seen as "backpackers who like animals" as opposed to highly trained teams with rural fire safety, veterinary and disaster management qualifications/credentials.
- Numerous animal charities had volunteers on the ground in active and burned out fire grounds with little to no PPE (no helmets, gloves, fire resistant apparel, goggles etc)
- The separation of animal rescue from fire/human rescue incident management appears to be an issue as seen in NZ. Primary Industry Departments have little expertise in major fire response.
- RSPCA said no assistance was required. However, sources at Parks/Wildlife said otherwise.
- In NSW, RSPCA when deployed by DPI are fully funded – which is good, but this discourages collaboration with other groups. Planning needs to include grass root and local groups.
- Inter-state veterinarian emergency registration may need further review for effectiveness
- Lack of available qualified animal darters (tranquiliser gun operators)
- Many small animal charities have no confidence in larger corporate animal charities, so it is important that their voices are heard and they are included in planning and funding arrangements.
- It was encouraging to see owners taking full responsibility of their animals at animal evacuation shelters i.e. co-location. This approach is sustainable and delivers higher animal welfare standards, than animal only shelters (i.e. volunteers looking after evacuee animals or emergency doggy day cares).
- There appeared to be minimal information for animal owners in public information statements.

Some initial recommendations

1. Undertake a specific review on animal emergency management for VIC
2. Create an inclusive forum for animal emergency management at the state and national level, similar to the US National Animal Rescue and Sheltering Coalition (NARSC) and trans-tasman too (inc. surge capacity)
3. Introduce a Code of Conduct for animal emergency management responders/response organisations including financial accountability (see NARSC code of conduct)
4. Introduce and encourage accreditation for animal emergency response such as the FEMA NIMS animal rescue and sheltering credentials and/or International Technical Rescue Association qualifications; and rural fire quals.

5. An immediate relief/response fund for accredited teams who are also subject to a code of conduct – accredited organisations to be listed on govt websites as approved charities to give to
6. Immigration visas (federal level) where there is a state of emergency in place anywhere in AU, that the Electronic Travel Authority asks if travellers are coming to assist with the emergency and prevent spontaneous arrivals.
7. State of emergency dispensations around emergency veterinary practitioners (i.e. any state and NZ registered vets can practice) and darting qualifications etc.
8. Common animal emergency response coordination platform (i.e. D4H or similar incident management system) for accredited animal rescue to
9. Animal rescue is a fire service responsibility to coordinate, but assisted by other govt departments and accredited agencies
10. Greater encourage to use existing AU volunteers (especially SES) than international volunteers who did not understand local culture of animals (several US responders we met were fooled by the “Drop Bear” story).
11. Veterinary professional liability and responder general liability protection for accredited animal responses during state of emergency

We hope to write up a formal After Action Report to our deployment to NSW, which I am sure will have lessons that may be applicable to VIC also.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some initial thoughts for your consideration.

Steve Glassey
Response Manager – Australia Fires
Animal Evac New Zealand