

Mr Brendan Moon AM
Coordinator General
National Emergency Management Agency
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Dear Mr Moon

Disaster impacted livestock and companion animals requiring veterinary care – Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. The AVA consists of over 8500 members who come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

The AVA is writing to you regarding the current review of the 2018 Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA). The AVA requests the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) include emergency veterinary care for owned disaster impacted animals as an eligible measure for relief and recovery assistance in the revised DRFA.

At least 69 percent¹ of Australians households own one or more pets and Australian farms have an estimated 90 million² cattle and sheep livestock.

Whilst it is the responsibility of owners to care for their animals in times of disasters, often assistance is needed to ensure animal welfare needs are met, regardless of an owner's financial capacity. It is a requirement of veterinary registration to render first aid to all animals who require it. Owned animals are often caught up in disasters along with people, so veterinarians have an important role in disaster response and recovery activities.

It's essential to urgently address animal welfare needs following a disaster such as bushfires and floods to prevent prolonged suffering. Veterinarians play an important role by assessing the requirements of animals needing veterinary care, including euthanasia of those severely injured, to ensure animal welfare is indeed met. Veterinary hospitals are also important in reuniting companion animals with their owners, a well-accepted expectation of society.

Both the obligations of veterinary registration and the expectations of society by the standards detailed in legislation, set an expectation that veterinary care is provided if required. Often the financial burden of a disaster response to treat impacted animals is imposed onto veterinarians, through community and government expectations. However, funding of these expectations is currently inadequate, such that veterinary care is often provided by veterinarians out of their own pocket or at reduced cost. No other Australian businesses have such a significant and sustained cost shift onto its sector for providing mandatory services to support community and government disaster recovery activities.

¹ Animal Medicines Australia 2021

² Australian Bureau of Statistics Agricultural Commodities 2020-21

To ensure veterinary services provided to disaster impacted animals is adequately funded, the AVA strongly believes that funding arrangements need to be recognised at a national level through the DRFA to assist state and territory arrangements and establish assistance measures for animal welfare.

Recent disasters impacting on animals:

- November 2022 – Victorian and New South Wales Floods. Currently evolving and impact TBA.
- 2022 – New South Wales Northern Rivers Floods: The NSW Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area received 3,403 calls to the Agriculture and Animal Services hotline, with 2,011 requests for assistance.
- 2022 – South Australia Ex-Tropical Cyclone Tiffany: Animal welfare issues and veterinary assistance with blowfly strike in sheep³.
- 2021 – Western Australia Wooroloo Bushfire: Over 100 veterinarians and nurses worked across the six days that the response was active. Teams operated with search and rescue officers to identify and assess animals found in the fire grounds. In total, over 700 animals were triaged and treated where needed. Most were found alive and well. Approximately 80 were provided treatment and a small number required euthanasia. Injured animals brought into the animal evacuation control centre were also cared for by veterinarians⁴.
- 2019-20 – Australian Bushfires: Its estimated nearly 3 billion⁵ native animals were impacted by the bushfires. In NSW thousands of farms were affected by significant livestock losses⁶, and over 11,000 animals were registered at evacuation centres and animal safe places.

Occasionally the loss of livestock is captured in reported disaster assessments, for example 11,000 farm animals died⁷ in the Victorian Black Saturday fires. However, the injury of livestock and the death or injury of companion animals and wildlife are consistently excluded in disaster reporting. This does not change their requirements for veterinary attention. The absence of reporting the impacts of disasters on owned animals has resulted in a lack of awareness and associated necessary support. The AVA suggest NEMA include in its AIDR [annual major incidents reports](#) the disaster's impact on owned animals such as pets and livestock.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the DRFA further and how including veterinary care for disaster impacted animals would create improved community and animal welfare outcomes in line with what society expects of a disaster response. Please contact AVA Senior Advocacy Officer Liz Gemes at liz.gemes@ava.com.au for more information.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Bronwyn Orr
AVA President

³ AIDR Major Incidents Report 2021-22

⁴ AIDR Major Incidents Report 2020-21

⁵ WWF, Australia's 2019-2020 bushfires: The wildlife toll

⁶ AIDR Major Incidents Report 2019-20

⁷ Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission 2010