



# Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

Submission of the  
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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## Table of Contents

The Australian Veterinary Association.....	2
Discussion.....	2
Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.....	2
Public Awareness.....	3
Animal Disaster Impact Reporting.....	4
Contact.....	4

## The Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak professional association representing veterinarians in Australia.

Our members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, and quarantine systems while other members work in industry, research, and teaching. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

We empower the veterinary profession to thrive by providing a voice, education, community, and support.

## Discussion

The AVA thanks the Senate Select Committee on Australia’s Disaster Resilience for the opportunity to voice concerns and propose meaningful solutions to improve Australia’s disaster resilience.

At least 69 percent of Australians households own one or more pet and Australian farms have an estimated 90 million cattle and sheep livestock. In addition to this, animal related industries are important contributors to the Australian economy. In 2022, the gross value of livestock disposals was some \$25 billion, of which 61.2% (\$15.3 billion) was from the cattle industry. A further \$9.1 billion flowed from livestock products such as wool, milk and eggs.

Disasters pose significant threats not only to human lives but also to animals, both domestic and wild. In such circumstances, veterinarians and veterinary nurses play a pivotal role in disaster response, treating affected animals, and when necessary make informed decisions regarding euthanasia for severely injured animals.

This submission advocates for improvements to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, increased public awareness, and incorporating animal impacts into disaster reporting data.

## Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

The AVA recognises the significant importance of the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), a cost-sharing initiative between the Australian Government and State/Territory Governments. This arrangement provides much-needed financial aid to individuals, businesses, and communities affected by disasters. However, a critical gap exists in the DRFA provisions, as it fails to include emergency veterinary care for disaster affected animals as an eligible relief and recovery measure.

While it is the responsibility of pet and livestock owners to ensure the welfare of their animals during disasters, assistance is frequently required, often beyond the owner's financial capacity.



The absence of clear provisions for disaster impacted animals in the DRFA has led to a patchwork of government support for animal welfare in disaster situations, with support varying greatly across jurisdictions and often being inadequate or non-existent.

This inconsistency has created confusion among veterinarians, pet owners, farmers, wildlife rescues organisations, the general public, and emergency management personnel leading to uncertainty in crisis times when clear information is critically needed. The lack of clear and accessible information regarding the DRFA's coverage for animal welfare in disasters exacerbates this issue in States and Territories.

For veterinarians, this ambiguity around government support arrangements poses significant financial and operational challenges, often obliging them to shoulder the financial weight of disaster response for treating both owned, displaced and wildlife animals. This obligation and public good is not only imposed by community and government expectations, legislative regulations but is also rooted in their veterinary professional ethics and codes of conduct. 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. This situation leads to a financial strain on private veterinary practices which in the short term can delay essential care for animals, potentially resulting in prolonged suffering. For animal owners, the confusion can exacerbate the stress and anxiety already associated with disaster events. In the longer term the inability to recoup costs associated with delivering public good threaten the viability of veterinary profession, a profession that is almost exclusively privately funded. Operationally this means an overall reduction of veterinary services available to the community.

To address these challenges, the AVA strongly advocates for a revision of the DRFA to explicitly include provisions for emergency veterinary care for disaster impacted animals. This inclusion is crucial for ensuring the provision of necessary veterinary services in disaster-stricken regions, safeguarding animal welfare and reducing the financial strain on private veterinary businesses, farmers, wildlife organisations, and pet owners.

The AVA also emphasises the need for clear, concise, and accessible information regarding these provisions to be made available to the public and relevant professionals. This would help in standardising the interpretation and application of the DRFA across all jurisdictions, eliminate confusion, ensure consistency in animal welfare support, and ultimately better protect the welfare of animals during times of disaster.

**In summary, the AVA appreciates the intent behind the DRFA but stresses the need for its expansion to include emergency veterinary care for disaster impacted animals, alongside the dissemination of clear information about these provisions, to enhance national resilience and animal welfare in the face of natural disasters.**

## Public Awareness

The AVA highlights the critical role that public awareness plays in ensuring animal welfare during disasters. There is a pressing need for increased government funded public awareness campaigns specifically tailored towards animal disaster preparedness.

Preparedness is the first line of defence against the detrimental effects of disasters. By Governments investing in public awareness campaigns, we can equip livestock and pet owners with the knowledge and tools needed to safeguard their animals' wellbeing.

Such campaigns should focus on educating the public about the importance of creating disaster plans that include their animals, the value of microchipping and tagging for identification, evacuation arrangements, and knowledge what to do if their animal is injured or dies from the disaster. These



measures can greatly assist in the event of a disaster and significantly reduce the pressures on emergency and veterinary services.

Moreover, wildlife is often the forgotten victim in disaster situations. A public awareness campaign could help highlight the role citizens can play in protecting local wildlife, including understanding how to respond if they come across an injured wild animal in a disaster response.

The AVA believes well promoted and expanded public awareness campaign will not only enhance the overall readiness of our community in times of disasters but also go a long way towards ensuring the welfare of domestic, commercial and wild animals. For example, the NSW Department of Primary Industries videos #getreadyanimals

[https://www.youtube.com/@NSWDPI\\_Ag/search?query=getreadyanimals%20](https://www.youtube.com/@NSWDPI_Ag/search?query=getreadyanimals%20)

**The AVA urges governments to consider increasing public awareness for animal disaster preparedness and response arrangements as an integral part of our nation's disaster risk reduction strategy.**

## Animal Disaster Impact Reporting

Current disaster reporting frequently fails to account for the wide-ranging and devastating effects on animals, including livestock, companion animals, and wildlife, by omitting comprehensive statistics on animal injuries and fatalities.

This oversight in disaster reporting contributes to a systemic underestimation of the impacts on animals, leading to a lack of government and public awareness, and consequently, insufficient support. While occasional disaster assessments do acknowledge the effects on animals, these instances are sporadic and lack a standardised approach. For instance:

- The loss of 11,000 farm animals in the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday fires.
- During the 2019-20 bushfires, thousands of New South Wales farms endured significant livestock losses, with over 11,000 animals sheltered at evacuation centres and animal safe places. The widespread devastation of these fires led to nearly 3 billion native animals being impacted across Australia.
- In the 2021 Western Australia Wooroloo Bushfire, over 100 veterinarians and nurses dedicated six days to identify, assess, and care for affected animals alongside search and rescue officers.
- The 2022 New South Wales Northern Rivers Floods resulted in 3,403 calls to the NSW Agriculture and Animal Services hotline, with 2,011 requests for assistance.

The above examples demonstrate the profound effect disasters can have on animal populations, yet such figures are not consistently included in official disaster impact reports. This lack of recognition hinders our collective understanding of the full scope of disaster impacts and the associated support requirements.

**To rectify this, the AVA suggests all disaster impact reporting should include data on animal injuries and deaths. Such animal welfare information would provide a more accurate reflection of the disaster's impacts, thereby prompting a more suitable response from government, veterinarians and the public.**

## Contact

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