

Environment and Communications References
Answers to questions on notice
Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Committee: Environment and Communications References
Inquiry: Australia's faunal extinction crisis
Question No: 1
Hearing Date: 25 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Treasurer's announcement of an initial \$50 million for emergency wildlife and habitat recovery
Question Date: 9 September 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Green asked:

A. With reference to the Treasurer's announcement of an initial \$50 million for emergency wildlife and habitat recovery on 13 January 2020:

1. How much of the \$50 million has been allocated? And to which organisations?
2. How much of the \$50 million has been expended? And by which organisations?
3. How much of the \$50 million has gone out the door and been spent by the organisations funded?
4. What environmental outcomes have already been achieved with these funds? Please provide a list of the work that has already been undertaken, including environmental outcomes achieved, the habitat restored and corresponding location.
5. What environmental outcomes are expected to be achieved by the end of September 2020? By the end of December 2020? By the end of June 2021? By the end of December 2021?

B. With reference to the Treasurer's announcement of an initial \$50 million for emergency wildlife and habitat recovery on 13 January 2020:

1. How many organisations have reported successful use of the funds?
2. How many animals were assisted as a result of this funding?
3. How many hectares of land has been rehabilitated as a result of this funding?
4. What are the requirements for each organization to report to the Department in relation to these funds?

C. With reference to the Treasurer's announcement of an initial \$50 million for emergency wildlife and habitat recovery on 13 January 2020 and the recipients of this funding:

1. Has the department received any expression of interest (informal or formal) from organisations that did not receive part of this \$50 million in funding? Please provide the details of that interest, including but not limited to, name of organization interested in funding, and location.

Answer:

Part A.

1. *How much of the \$50 million has been allocated? And to which organisations?*
2. *How much of the \$50 million has been expended? And by which organisations?*

Information on organisations funded by the Australian Government and expenditure against contracted milestones is available at: <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/funding-support>

3. *How much of the \$50 million has gone out the door and been spent by the organisations funded?*

To report on funding spent by third party organisations, the Commonwealth relies on the contracted parties to provide financial reports in accordance with the milestone schedules in their funding agreements. These financial reports are yet to be provided for most funding recipients.

4. *What environmental outcomes have already been achieved with these funds? Please provide a list of the work that has already been undertaken, including environmental outcomes achieved, the habitat restored and corresponding location.*

The funding has supported a range of outcomes and work is continuing. Highlights of environmental outcomes achieved to date and reported to the Australian Government is provided at: <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/activities-and-outcomes>

5. *What environmental outcomes are expected to be achieved by the end of September 2020? By the end of December 2020? By the end of June 2021? By the end of December 2021?*

Environmental outcomes achieved out to December 2021 are expected to be an extension of those reported to date. This includes: improved understanding of the bushfire impacts on species and ecological communities to inform recovery actions; protecting and restoring habitat; reducing threats by controlling feral pests and weeds; and establishing seed bank initiatives and insurance populations of species at risk.

Part B.

1. *How many organisations have reported successful use of the funds?*

Reports on use of funds have been received from 16 regional NRM organisations and six other contracted organisations to date.

2. *How many animals were assisted as a result of this funding?*

In March 2020, the Expert Panel identified 119 animal species requiring urgent management intervention. To date, 102 of these animals will benefit from funding under the Government's initial \$50m bushfire recovery package, with further species to benefit as further funds are contracted.

3. *How many hectares of land has been rehabilitated as a result of this funding?*

To date, this funding supported management interventions to protect species over 1,000,000 hectares.

4. What are the requirements for each organization to report to the Department in relation to these funds?

All contracted third parties are required to report to the Department regularly, usually through the Department's Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Tool. Reportable information includes progress in delivering funded activities, adherence to budget, issues, delays, and work health and safety. Specific reporting requirements for individual organisations can differ, depending upon what has been agreed in their formal arrangements with the Commonwealth.

Part C.

1. Has the department received any expression of interest (informal or formal) from organisations that did not receive part of this \$50 million in funding? Please provide the details of that interest, including but not limited to, name of organization interested in funding, and location.

Unsolicited and informal requests for funding, such as those received via the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's 'bushfire recovery' inbox, have been directed to the open, competitive grant opportunities that were available, such as the Wildlife and Habitat Recovery Bushfire Program.

The Wildlife and Habitat Recovery Bushfire Program was open for two tranches.

In total, 294 applications were received across both tranches. 19 were successful under Tranche 1 and have received their first payments. Tranche 2 projects will be finalised shortly. Once announcements are made unsuccessful applicants will be notified.

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Committee: Environment and Communications References
Inquiry: Australia's faunal extinction crisis
Question No: 2
Hearing Date: 25 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Government's announcement of \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants
Question Date: 9 September 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Green asked:

A. With reference to the Government's announcement on 12 May 2020 of \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants:

1. How much of the \$150 million has been allocated? And where will this funding be spent?
2. How much of the \$150 million has been spent? And how has this funding been spent?
3. How many extinctions will be prevented with these funds?

B. With reference to the Government's media release from 12 May 2020 of \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants, in which "\$110 million will be directed to strategic on-ground support for the most impacted native species in vulnerable bushfire-affected regions."

1. What kind of "on-ground" support has been provided through this funding?
2. What environmental outcomes have been achieved through this "on-ground" support?
3. What organisations will be funded to provide "on-ground" support and where will this support be provided?
4. Please provide a map of the area that will be rehabilitated through this funding.

C. With reference to the Government's announcement on 12 May 2020 of \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants:

1. Will any of this funding be used to implement recovery plans? If so, how will those plans be implemented, how much funding will be used to implement them, and for which animals?

D. With reference to the Government's announcement on 12 May 2020 of \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants:

1. How much funding will be allocated to an ecological audit?
2. How much funding will be allocated to address gaps in data?

E. With reference to the Government's announcement on 12 May 2020 of \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants, how much of these funds formed part of the Environment Restoration Fund?

1. How much of the Environment Restoration Fund being used for bushfire recovery?

Answer:

PART A

1. *How much of the \$150 million has been allocated? And where will this funding be spent?*

\$150 million has been made available over two years from 1 July 2020. This includes:

- a. \$110 million for strategic on-ground support for the most impacted native species across seven bushfire-affected regions (see below for further details).
- b. \$10 million for projects to engage local communities in conserving their local environment and driving recovery of plants, animals and other natural assets from the bushfires. We anticipate allocating this funding via a competitive grants program.
- c. \$2 million to support knowledge exchange on Indigenous fire and land management. We anticipate allocating this funding via a competitive grants program.
- d. \$28 million will resource further scientific assessment and planning coordination for our most at-risk species under Australia's environmental law and support the Department in their advisory and implementation roles.

2. *How much of the \$150 million has been spent? And how has this funding been spent?*

The Australian Government is currently undertaking a co-design process with stakeholders to identify priority recovery outcomes for each region as well as finalising grant programs for the additional investment that was announced in May.

3. *How many extinctions will be prevented with these funds?*

The package aims to prevent extinctions and limit declines of bushfire-affected native animals and plants.

PART B.

4. *What kind of "on-ground" support has been provided through this funding?*

5. *What environmental outcomes have been achieved through this "on-ground" support?*

Across 7 identified regions, the Australian Government is currently undertaking a co-design process with stakeholders to identify priority recovery outcomes for each region. These priorities will be informed by the Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel, the aspirations of local stakeholders, and build on work already underway and funded by the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments and other partners.

6. *What organisations will be funded to provide "on-ground" support and where will this support be provided?*

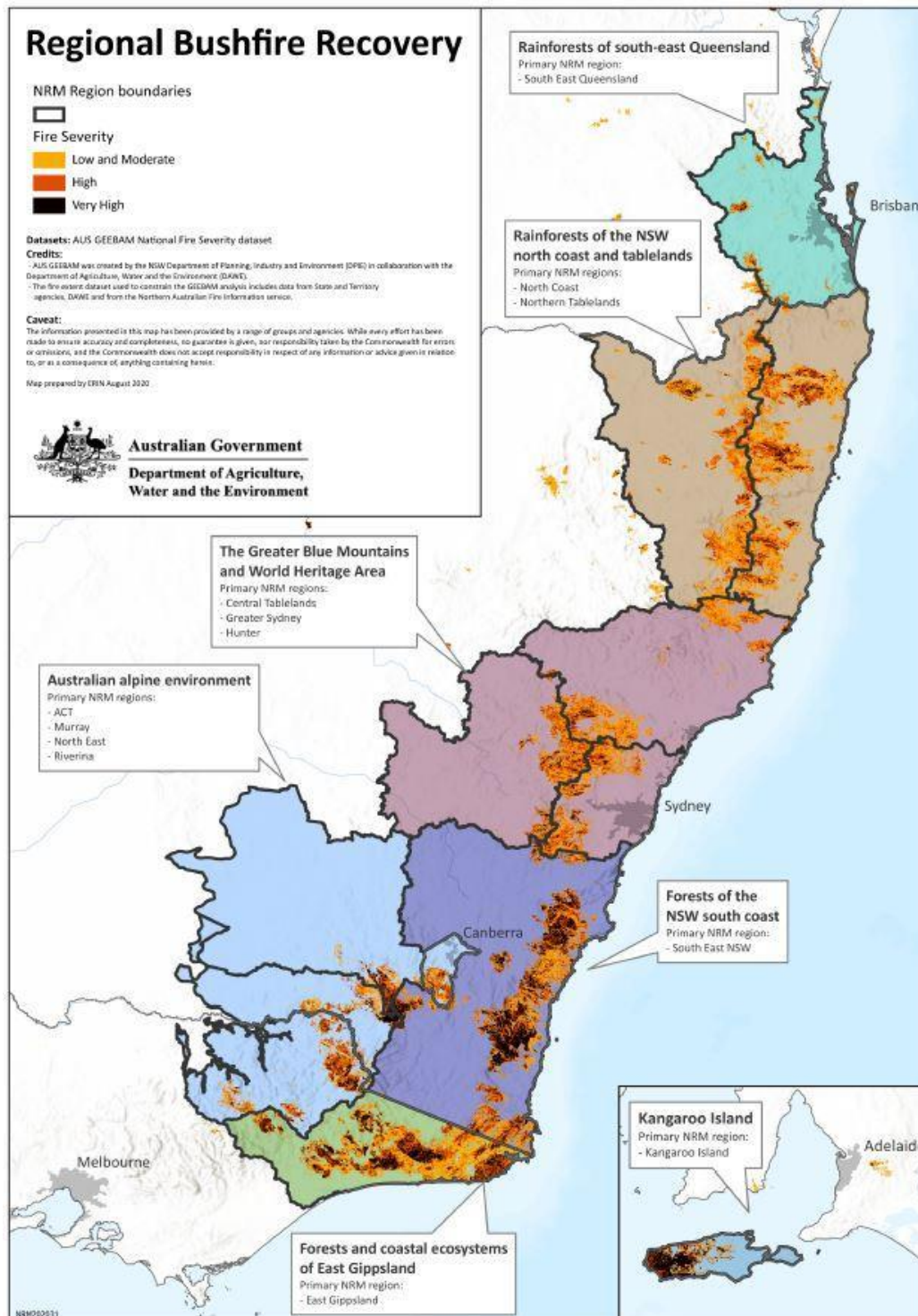
7. *Please provide a map of the area that will be rehabilitated through this funding.*

Organisations to be funded will depend on priorities for action identified in workshops for each of the 7 regions. Partners are likely to include State and Territory Governments and natural resource management organisations.

Funding for this element of the package will be focused on 7 regions:

- a. Rainforests of south-east Queensland
- b. Rainforests of the NSW north coast and tablelands
- c. The Greater Blue Mountains and World Heritage Area
- d. Australian Alpine Environment
- e. Forests of the NSW south coast
- f. Forests and coastal ecosystems of East Gippsland.

A map of the 7 regions is below. Priorities for management intervention, including areas prioritised for rehabilitation, within each region are yet to be determined.



PART C

8. *Will any of this funding be used to implement recovery plans? If so, how will those plans be implemented, how much funding will be used to implement them, and for which animals?*

Many threatened native plants, animals and ecological communities will benefit as a result of next phase of the Australian Government's investments in bushfire recovery for wildlife and their habitat. This will include addressing threats and implementing management actions identified in Recovery Plans.

PART D

1. *How much funding will be allocated to an ecological audit?*
2. *How much funding will be allocated to address gaps in data?*

The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel has undertaken a robust assessment of the native animals, plants and threatened ecological communities impacted by the 2019–20 bushfires. They have identified priority species and ecological communities for urgent management intervention following the bushfires, including over 300 animals and 470 plants. Further, the Expert Panel has published its analysis of priority management interventions and actions to support the recovery of the priority vertebrate species identified.

Through the initial \$50 million package, funding has been provided to a number organisations, including state governments and universities (through the *Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery* program), to undertake on-ground assessments of bushfire impacts on native animals and plants.

To support these on-ground assessments, the National Environmental Science Program's Threatened Species Recovery Hub has developed guidance to highlight design considerations for conducting post-fire reconnaissance surveys to assess fire severity, habitat condition and threats, as well as the status of priority threatened species and ecological communities.

This package will support the Department to deliver further scientific assessment and planning coordination for our most at-risk species, with priorities being determined in consultation with experts and through the regional co-design process.

PART E

9. *How much of the Environment Restoration Fund being used for bushfire recovery?*

The \$150 million for bushfire affected wildlife and plants is not part of the Environment Restoration Fund. Environment Restoration Fund projects will continue and in some instances will support bushfire recovery, such as the \$6 million investment in koala hospitals and habitat protection in Northern NSW and South-east Queensland.

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Committee: Environment and Communications References
Inquiry: Australia's faunal extinction crisis
Question No: 3
Hearing Date: 25 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Wildlife affected by the recent bushfire crises
Question Date: 9 September 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Green asked:

How many species has the department determined perished in the national bushfire crisis?

How many of these species were threatened, vulnerable or critically endangered species?

How many threatened species and ecological communities require a recovery plan? Of those, how many plans have been completed since 2013?

With reference to wildlife affected by the recent bushfire crisis:

1. How many uplistings or changes to listings have taken place since, and in response to, the recent bushfires?

Answer:

The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel identified over 770 priority species that require urgent management following the bushfires, as well as 19 priority Ecological Communities.

Of the species and ecological communities listed under the EPBC Act, 99.9% have a recovery plan or conservation advice in place to guide recovery efforts. Since January 2013, 120 species and 6 ecological communities have been covered by 47 Recovery Plans.

Listing assessments for fire-affected species are being prioritised by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, consistent with their Bushfire Response Plan and in accordance with statutory requirements for listing processes. To date the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, has made a decision to retain three fire-affected mammals in the Endangered category because of the effects of the fires. These three species were being assessed by the Scientific Committee prior to the fires for potential downlisting to the Vulnerable category.

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Committee: Environment and Communications References
Inquiry: Australia's faunal extinction crisis
Question No: 4
Hearing Date: 25 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Recovery plans
Question Date: 9 September 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Green asked:

With reference to recovery plans:

1. How many recovery plans will require updating as a result of the national bushfire crisis?
2. How many recovery plans for species have been developed or implemented in the last 12 months.
3. What funding is available to implement recovery plans for threatened species?

Answer:

There are a significant number of animal and plant species requiring urgent management intervention as a result of last summer's bushfires. Consistent with its 10-point Bushfire Response Plan, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee is reviewing the Recovery Plans and Conservation Advices in place for listed threatened species to determine which require updating of actions in response to the fires.

Of the more than 1,800 threatened species and ecological communities listed under the EPBC Act, 99.9% have a recovery plan or a conservation advice in place to guide recovery efforts. There have been no new recovery plans made or adopted under the EPBC Act in the last 12 months (September 2019 - August 2020).

The development and implementation of recovery plans is a collaborative process involving multiple partners; funding to support recovery action is therefore a shared responsibility across the implementation partners. Many threatened native plants, animals and ecological communities will benefit as a result of the next phase of the Australian Government's investments in bushfire recovery for wildlife and their habitat. This will include addressing threats and implementing management actions identified in Recovery Plans and Conservation Advices. The exact species to benefit will be subject to the outcomes of the co-design workshops (in relation to the \$110 million regional funding) and successful applications through the open grants programs.

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Answers to questions on notice
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Committee: Environment and Communications References
Inquiry: Australia's faunal extinction crisis
Question No: 5
Hearing Date: 25 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Wildlife and threatened species bushfire recovery Expert Panel
Question Date: 9 September 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Green asked:

With references to the Wildlife and threatened species bushfire recovery Expert Panel:

1. How often does the panel interact with the Minister's Office and what is the nature of those interactions.
2. When was the last time the panel interacted with the Minister's Office? And what was the nature of that interaction?
3. How often does the panel interact with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee and what is the nature of those interactions.
4. When was the last time the panel interacted with the TSSC and what was the nature of that interaction?
5. What, if any, recommendations have been made by the panel to the Minister, and of those, how many have been implemented.
6. How long after a meeting of the expert panel is a Communique published.

Answer:

Minister Ley and her staff attended the first meeting of the Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel on 15 January 2020. The Department has briefed the Minister's Office following subsequent meetings, including through sharing the Panel's communiques, and has provided other updates as needed on the work and recommendations of the Expert Panel.

The Expert Panel has provided advice and made recommendations on:

- the objectives and actions required for species recovery (both animals and plants) from the bushfires
- species and other natural assets that should be prioritised for urgent management intervention
 - Since February 2020, the Expert Panel has identified lists of priority animals, invertebrates, plants and ecological communities. These lists are on the Department's website at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery

- a range of project bushfire recovery proposals funded under a \$25 million emergency intervention fund as part of the first phase \$50 million of the Government's bushfire response.
 - The Panel assessed, reviewed and provided feedback on all project proposals submitted to date by bushfire affected states and territories as part of the \$13 million allocated to support the delivery of on-ground emergency interventions and priority recovery activities in their respective jurisdictions.
 - The Panel also assessed and made recommendations to the Department on project proposals submitted under tranches 1 and 2 of the \$12 million Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Program open grants process.
- research proposals submitted under the \$2 million allocation to the Threatened Species Recovery Hub of the National Environmental Scientific Science Program for bushfire related scientific research.

The Expert Panel is also providing advice on the design of the Australian Government's second phase of its response to the bushfires; specifically a \$110 million investment in strategic on-ground support for native species most impacted in seven bushfire-affected regions.

The Expert Panel has published its advice and communiques on the Department's website <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/expert-panel>.

While the Expert Panel and the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) have a common focus on threatened species and threatened ecological communities, the roles of the two committees are clearly defined and distinct. The Expert Panel leads the prioritisation of fire-affected species and ecological communities for emergency response. The TSSC leads on prioritisation and formal assessment of species and ecological communities for listing or transfer between listing categories under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

A protocol for interaction between the Panel and the TSSC has been agreed and guides how they interact on listings, conservation advices, as well as collaboration and communication about topics of mutual interest. Departmental officers responsible for the TSSC Secretariat provide technical support to the Expert Panel and support communication between the two committees. The Threatened Species Commissioner (who Chairs the Expert Panel) has provided verbal briefing to the TSSC on the work of the Expert Panel and the Australian Government's bushfire response. An Expert Panel member is also a member of the TSSC. This further enables both committees to be kept up to date with each other's activities.

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Committee: Environment and Communications References
Inquiry: Australia's faunal extinction crisis
Question No: 6
Hearing Date: 25 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: "10-point plan" for species impacted by bushfires
Question Date: 9 September 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Green asked:

With reference to the "10-point plan" for species impacted by bushfires

1. What are the ten points in the plan? Please list them in order from 1 to 10.
2. What points of the plan (from 1 – 10) have been implemented?
3. When does the department expect each point to be implemented? Please provide dates.
4. How much funding will be allocated to implementing each of the points of the plan? Where will this funding come from?

Answer:

1. What are the ten points in the plan? Please list them in order from 1 to 10.

Full details of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's 10-point Bushfire Response Plan are available from the Department's website at:

<http://environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/threatened-species-scientific-committee-bushfire-response-plan>

2. What points of the plan (from 1 – 10) have been implemented?

Work has commenced on all 10 points within the plan. This work will be ongoing, and a focus of the Committee for at least two years. Science to enable effective prioritisation of species and delivery of the plan commenced rapidly and will inform iterative implementation of the plan. Progress updates will be provided on the Department's website.

3. When does the the Department expect each point to be implemented?

See question 2.

4. How much funding will be allocated to implementing each of the points of the plan?

The Australian Government has committed \$200 million to help native wildlife and their habitats recover from the devastating impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires across southern and eastern Australia. Of that, \$28 million will resource further scientific assessment and planning coordination for our most at-risk species under Australia's environmental law.