

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Program 1.2

Question No. 67

Senator BACK asked the following question at the hearing on 22 February 2011:

Senator BACK—... My final question is totally unrelated to this, but there is a flow-on from natural disasters, starting with the bushfires in Victoria a couple of years ago and the recent floods. It is to do with the emergency treatment of livestock and wild animals particularly, especially with regard to those needing euthanasia by veterinarians or others. The question I have is: do we yet have an emergency management plan around the welfare of animals consequent to major disasters such as fires, floods et cetera?

Mr Wilkins—I am not sure specifically, but I would be surprised if there were not plans around those issues within each of the hazards that we deal with.

Senator BACK—I understand that initially this is a states and territories issue, but there are other concerns, and that is across borders. As in the Queensland floods, emergency management coordinates the activities, for example, of the RAAF with air movement—again, veterinarians, drugs et cetera have got to be able to be mobilised and moved quickly. I guess what I am putting on notice is: if there is not yet a national plan or a national approach, I would certainly encourage this becoming part of the national planning process.

Mr Wilkins—We will take that on board. As you would appreciate, we have just been talking about the resilience strategy, so we can take that up through the NEMC with the states and territories. Clearly there would be extensive provisions in relation to quarantine issues, in relation to some of the hazards around pandemic.

Senator BACK—There are indeed. That is certainly part of it.

Mr Wilkins—But it would be more related to the particular hazards. We can certainly see what, if anything, is in there about the treatment of animals in relation to the floods, fires et cetera.

Senator BACK—Euthanasia is the big one in terms of the legal implications. Thank you. That completes my questions.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

Emergency planning affecting livestock animals is coordinated through state and territory departments with responsibility for livestock and agriculture. This is largely based on arrangements under the Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN) framework for preparedness and response for disease emergencies. This framework provides managed national plans, training, networks and structures to share skilled resources across jurisdictions.

There is no national coordinated approach or agreed arrangements for dealing with the welfare of other animals under emergency management arrangements. The experiences of the Victorian Bush Fires confirmed a lack of clear management arrangements for companion animals and wildlife rescue and management. The Primary Industries Ministerial Council's Animal Welfare Committee is convening a national workshop in May 2011 to review current arrangements for companion animals in natural disasters.

In relation to domestic animals the Attorney-General's Department provides a community awareness product in the form of an Action Guide – 'Pets in Emergencies'. The Guide is widely distributed to communities through state and territory emergency management agencies. The Guide emphasises that it is the responsibility of the owner to prepare for the safety and welfare of their pets in case of an emergency.