

The determination and compassion of veterinarians, wildlife carers and volunteers working in response to the bushfires is one of the most inspirational demonstrations of wildlife conservation in Australian history. The combined efforts of these individuals, federal, state/territory and local governments, universities and wildlife advocacy and care organisations, has been instrumental in the ongoing bushfire recovery efforts. More information on these efforts can be found within the Australian Veterinary Association's [Bushfire crisis resource hub](#).



*possum with burns recovers in a veterinary hospital.
Photo ©Andrew Ottley/Ulladulla Veterinary Hospital*

The Australian Government has [pledged \\$200 million](#) to help native wildlife and their habitats recover from the devastating impacts of these bushfires. This is being used for research, planning and field conservation work in bushfire-affected regions, especially targeting vulnerable and severely affected species. For example, a recently announced [\\$18 million package](#) will fund a national census of koala populations, as well as supporting vital health research, veterinary care and targeted habitat conservation for the iconic species. National coordination is assisted by the [National Bushfire Recovery Agency](#), which was established to lead and coordinate the government-supported recovery.

A Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements was established immediately following the fires to examine coordination, preparedness for, response to and recovery from disasters in Australia. The recently released [report](#) lists 80 recommendations to help make Australia safer. Efforts to pursue improvements are being driven by a variety of institutions and projects, such as Melbourne University's [Centre for Emergency Response](#) which aims to revolutionise Australia's response to animal emergencies.

The Black Summer bushfires represent one of the most significant ecological disasters in Australian history, the effects of which will be felt for years to come. However, they have given a new impetus to protect vulnerable and threatened species. They have also charged innovations to improve Australia's coordinated response to animal emergencies in the future.



*The day after bushfires on a family farm in Corryong, VIC.
Photo ©Cath Hill,
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.*



Veterinarians respond to calls to check injured animals in bushfire paths. Photo ©Andrew Ottley/Ulladulla Veterinary Hospital

In a similar way, coordinated and innovative approaches are needed worldwide to reduce the impact of emergencies at different levels. Natural disasters have increased dramatically in the past 20 years according to the United Nations, taking a heavy human and economic toll, but also severely impacting animal health and welfare. To support countries in their responses to disaster events, whether they are natural or man-made, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has developed [Guidelines on disaster management and risk reduction in relation to animal health and welfare and veterinary public health](#). These guidelines identify intersectoral and multidisciplinary approaches as essential principles. And Australia's experience has clearly proven how they can make a difference in disaster management.