

Integrating animal welfare into emergency management

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Events requiring an emergency response such as fires, floods, cyclones and earthquakes have the potential to affect animals. Previous incidents have identified that a lack of adequate planning for animals and their welfare in emergencies can result in poor last-minute decisions and have resulted in dangerous and fatal consequences for both animals and their carers. In Western Australia (WA), fatalities occurred in the 2015 fires in Esperance while carers were attempting to move a horse. Post-incident reviews of this event and others¹ identified a need to improve the management of animals and their welfare during emergency events.

Under the direction of the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC), WA adopts the 'all-hazards, all-agencies' approach and, in accordance with the *National Planning Principles for Animals in Disasters*, the SEMC has committed to integrating the welfare of animals into emergency management. While the responsibility for an animal's welfare remains with the person in charge of the animal, better planning and coordination can contribute to better outcomes for animals, communities and the livestock industry. In March 2018, the SEMC assigned the role and responsibility for the coordination of animal welfare in emergencies to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). DPIRD has appointed a State Animal Welfare Emergency Coordinator and has drafted the State Emergency Animal Welfare Plan (SEAWP), which is due for endorsement in December 2018.

WA accounts for approximately one-third of Australia's land area, yet only an estimated 10 per cent of Australia's population.² The natural hazards identified for emergency management in WA include fires, floods, earthquakes, cyclones, storms and tsunamis. WA spans diverse climatic zones and the consequences of a given hazard can vary greatly depending on where in the state it occurs. This presents challenges to effective emergency management; approaches successful in other Australian locations may not be transferable. Coordination, collaboration and cooperation play a significant role in WA's emergency management framework, which uses a three tiered structure and aligns to the shared responsibility concept.³

Applicable to all managed hazards in WA, the aim of the SEAWP is to identify the state-level arrangements that provide for a coordinated approach to supporting animal welfare in emergencies. The SEAWP follows the concept of shared responsibility. It acknowledges the role of the person in charge of an animal and identifies this person's

responsibilities in the preparation and response phases of emergencies. The next level of responsibility is with the community and local government. Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMAs) that identify animal welfare considerations and ways to support people with animals are the first steps in providing a coordinated response.

The SEAWP identifies six categories of animal and assigns an Emergency Resource Support Organisation (ERSO) for each category. It is the role of the ERSO to provide support when the capability and capacity of the person in charge of an animal, and any LEMAs, are no longer sufficient or effective. DPIRD maintains overall responsibility for the coordination of animal welfare in emergencies and provides support to the ERSO as required.

Coordination, collaboration and cooperation are vital. The size and diversity of WA means that some areas are better resourced to support local arrangements, while others need more and earlier assistance from the ERSO and DPIRD. A lack of understanding of the role and concerns about taking responsibility and resource implications can be barriers in achieving collaboration and cooperation. DPIRD is establishing a Committee for Animal Welfare in Emergencies with membership including the ERSOs, as well as representatives from local governments and animal welfare service providers. The committee will provide a forum to progress the integration of animal welfare in emergency management, identify issues and promote collaboration.

Our understanding of animal welfare needs in emergencies and our responsibilities for them are increasing. While DPIRD has been assigned a coordination role at the state level, only through shared responsibility, collaboration and cooperation can we expect to protect animal welfare in emergencies and, in turn, improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of those responsible for animals. WA faces challenges along the way but the benefits to animals and communities will make it worthwhile.

1 Parkerville-Stoneville-Mt Helena bushfires in 2014 and the Waroona fires in 2016.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics. At: <http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?databyregion>.

3 National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. At: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergencymanagement/Documents/national-strategy-disaster-resilience.pdf.

4 Title to be approved by the SEMC.