

RSPCA's Emergency Response Plan - Kangaroo Island Bushfires



The situation

Kangaroo Island is one of Australia's most important wildlife sanctuaries, renowned for its biodiversity. The island is home to Australia's only chlamydia-free koala population, the endangered KI dunnart marsupial and glossy black cockatoos, along with many other rare, threatened and vulnerable bird, reptile and native animal species.

On January 3, 2020, lightning strikes in Flinders Chase National Park sparked a blaze that quickly grew out of control. Extreme heat and high winds on January 9, 2020 created yet another fire storm, with firefighters unable to stop multiple fire fronts from spreading, devastating the island.

It is estimated at least one-third of the island has burned, with the 326 square kilometre Flinders Chase National Park particularly hard-hit.

Livestock losses are already mounting into the tens of thousands. The cost to Kangaroo Island's wildlife is likely to end up being far higher.

The initial response

RSPCA South Australia and other emergency response agencies and charities have been working on Kangaroo Island since early January to rescue, triage and treat as many native animal survivors as possible.

A SAVEM (South Australian Veterinary Emergency Management) temporary field hospital has been set up at the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park, where dozens of burned koalas and other native animals are being treated.

Teams of RSPCA South Australia veterinarians, inspectors and animal handlers have been rotating through Kangaroo Island on a seven-day roster, aiding local rescue and recovery efforts.

But with huge swathes of the island's habitat destroyed, wildlife that survived the fires is now at high risk of succumbing to starvation and dehydration.

RSPCA South Australia fears a "second wave" animal welfare disaster is looming. Urgent action is needed now to save surviving animals.



RSPCA's three-month Emergency Response Plan

As we enter Stage 2 of our response, RSPCA South Australia has identified two primary needs for wildlife on Kangaroo Island:

1. Veterinary care for injured native animals.
2. Feed and water for surviving native animals.

Our Emergency Response Plan aims to provide support to native animals to address both of the above needs, with an assumption that we will need to provide support for three months (subject to actual identified need).

Three teams of three RSPCA volunteers will be stationed on the island to enact this plan at any one time, working to seven-day rotating rosters under the leadership of a dedicated project manager.

This ongoing emergency response is being funded by public donations made to RSPCA South Australia's Bushfire Appeal.

It is important to note that RSPCA is unable to solve all of the issues and deal with all of the animals in need on Kangaroo Island – the area is just too large. But we will do whatever we can with the resources we have.

Our response will also evolve as needs are better identified and coordination improves, but action is required immediately as animals are in urgent need.

Responding to need 1: Veterinary care for injured animals

RSPCA will continue to provide veterinary support to Kangaroo Island with:

- One vet and one vet assistant.
- Operating on rolling five-day rosters.

Our specialist team will continue to provide triage and treatment to injured and burned native animals, ensuring they have the best chance of survival.

Responding to need 2: Feed and water for surviving animals

Our focus will be in two categories:

1. Macropods (kangaroos, wallabies, etc) and possums.
2. Koalas.

These species are least able to adapt to the changed landscape caused by the widespread fires. They have specific dietary needs and have been significantly negatively impacted by the bushfires.

Macropods and possums:

With so much natural habitat and sources of feed destroyed, macropods and possums that survived the bushfires now face starvation and dehydration. RSPCA will coordinate volunteers to provide feed drops to help surviving animals as the landscape regenerates:

- A food depot(s) where locals can pick up information and food to offer to wildlife on their own properties.
- Food drops and distribution by two RSPCA volunteer teams of three persons each, working a seven-day roster.
 - * Their role will be to take food out into the field and leave for animals.
 - * Locations will be determined by animal sightings.
 - * Proximity to water sources preferred.
 - * Sites will be monitored and replenished.
 - * Food to be supplied through KI suppliers where possible, or trucked from Adelaide.
 - * Volunteers and locals must accept that it is unlikely these teams will be able to service the entire island and meet all needs.
 - * A secondary role will be collecting injured animals and bringing them to the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park field hospital when returning from the fire grounds.

Koalas:

With thousands of koalas affected, there is also a daily need to collect and provide eucalypt leaves as they recover. RSPCA will coordinate:

- A third team of three volunteers, also working a seven-day roster.
- Food will be collected on the island, as mainland eucalypts cannot be taken over to the island.
- Branches will be supplied to koalas in fire-impacted areas.
- Uninjured or rehabilitated koalas may also be relocated to properties that have indicated a preparedness to accept them.



Apply to join the Emergency Response team

RSPCA South Australia is accepting expressions of interest from members of the public who would like to join our Emergency Response team.

Given the nature of the emergency situation on Kangaroo Island, anyone wishing to volunteer will need to meet strict criteria.

Essentials:

- Able to cope with the distressing reality of severely burnt wildlife – both deceased and alive.
- Able to work a minimum of one seven-day roster, located on Kangaroo Island for seven consecutive days.
- Physically fit and capable of lifting heavy feed bags.
- Driver's license.
- A team player as well as capable of working independently with minimal supervision.
- Have confidence in making quick and rational decisions.
- Adaptable can do attitude.

Desirable:

- Preference will be given to volunteers already living on Kangaroo Island.
- Up-to-date First Aid Certificate.
- Animal handling experience.
- 4WD experience.

**Note: mobile phone reception is poor in some bushfire affected areas.*

All transport, food and accommodation costs will be covered, funded by donations made to RSPCA South Australia's Bushfire Appeal.

Find out more about volunteering & other ways to help:

www.rspcasa.org.au/ki-bushfires-plan

More information

For more information about RSPCA's Emergency Response Plan – Kangaroo Island Bushfires:

Call - 1300 4 777 22

Email - bushfires@rspcasa.org.au

Stay in touch

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