# Environment and Communications Committee - Budget Estimates 2020-21: November 11 2020

**Opening statement from Professor Helene Marsh (Chair, Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC))**

Thank you for inviting me here today.

I apologise for not being available to attend your meeting in October. As you will appreciate, I attend these meetings by invitation only. The TSSC Secretariat in the Department received this invitation after I had left for a trip to a remote area of Western Queensland where I did not have access to the telephone or internet facilities required to appear before you.

The priority area of work for the TSSC at present is, understandably, the response to the 2019-2020 bushfires. I say understandably because many species and ecological communities, which were not considered threated prior to the fires, now urgently require statutory protection, and many listed threatened species and ecological communities need re-assessment because their conservation status has deteriorated. The exact numbers are a work in progress as more information becomes available.

I would like to tell you about progress with the 10-point Bushfire Response Plan developed by the TSSC in February 2020.  The work is ongoing and will dominate our work for several years. So far the Committee has:

* agreed to consider public nominations of fire-affected species and ecological communities at any time and have determined an efficient approach for considering these nominations
* prioritized the listing of fire-affected species and ecological communities that were already being assessed prior to the fires
* started updating conservation advices with fire information and recovery actions – a project that is ongoing
* collaborated with the States and Territories through the Common Assessment Method to progress assessment of fire-affected species
* focused our advice to the Minister regarding the 2020 Priority Assessment List on fire-affected animal species requiring assessment or reassessment following the bushfires. We are in the process of making further recommendations to the Minister about this list as more information becomes available
* progressed the assessment of the fire-affected species, which were prioritized in 2020, including the Koala and Greater Glider
* engaged with the IUCN and other expert groups to expedite this work. For example, an expert-led assessment of fire-affected freshwater crayfish has been funded through the Bushfire Recovery Grants
* collaborated with the Bushfire Expert Panel, the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, the Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner and other areas of DAWE to align and integrate the investment, communication and statutory elements of the bushfire response.

The Australian Government has provided funding to support these assessments as a priority activity in Bushfire Response Phase 2 funding package.

Thank you.