

Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
Answers to questions on notice

Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Committee: Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
Inquiry: Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cat
Question No: 1
Hearing Date: 26 August 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Loss of native wildlife during bushfire events
Question Date: 10 September 2020
Question Type: Written

The Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy asked:

1. During last summer's bushfires, reports emerged of the significant loss of native wildlife across Australia. It has been reported that more than 100 native species were in need of assistance to survive following these fire events [<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-12/113-native-animals-in-urgent-need-of-help-after-bushfires/11956016>].
 - a. How does the estimated loss of native wildlife during Australian bushfires compare to the loss of native wildlife as a result of predation by feral cats?
 - b. How do wildlife services, such as WIRES in NSW, engage with emergency services organisations, like the NSW RFS, to assist in protecting native animals during bushfire events or other natural disasters?
 - i. What legislative or regulatory frameworks exist across Australia to allow this assistance?

Answer:

1(a). The Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel identified more than 770 species that require urgent management following the bushfires, as well as 19 priority Threatened Ecological Communities.

Researchers from the National Environmental Science Program's Threatened Species Recovery Hub have estimated about 1.6 billion reptiles, birds and mammals are killed by feral cats each year, and over a billion invertebrates (<https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/news/our-cute-killers-cats-kill-more-than-1-5-billion-native-animals-per-year-in-australia>).

These figures are estimates and any comparison between native wildlife losses from bushfires or feral cat predation is difficult. Bushfires, for example, are highly variable, with impacts differing across landscapes and vegetation types, and influenced by seasonal variation, scale and severity.

1(b) and 1(b)(i). Wildlife care and protection during natural disasters are matters for the state and territory Governments. Arrangements vary from state to state.