

# Wildlife and fire response

## Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN) Fact sheet for veterinarians 2023



### Introduction

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) is the lead agency for managing wildlife welfare arising from bushfire.

Where required, DEECA will instigate a response operation that will be integrated into the Incident Management Team (IMT) established to manage the fire incident.

The Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impacted by Fire (the Plan) defines how DEECA will work with its partner agencies, contractors, wildlife welfare groups and volunteers in responding to wildlife welfare issues arising from the fire incident. The Plan sets out the standards, policies and processes for the wildlife response to occur in a structured and coordinated way.

As defined under the Plan, the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN) is a partnership for the targeted recruitment, training, accreditation and pre deployment coordination of veterinary services and wildlife rehabilitator or rescue volunteers, who can assist DEECA in undertaking response activities when requested.

This WESN approach seeks individuals from across the wildlife welfare sector including Zoos Victoria,

RSPCA Victoria, Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), other veterinarians, veterinary nurses, Wildlife Victoria and wildlife rehabilitators and rescuers to participate in training and accreditation for possible deployment. It should be noted that training and accreditation does not guarantee deployment in a season or to any incident.

DEECA is developing a “Model of Cover” which determines the required number of positions that are required in each region across the State. This will be finalised in the coming months.

In 2022/23 the WESN Coordinator will be hosted by Zoos Victoria and is the key contact point for queries about how you can look to participate.

### WESN Accreditation

Utilising the WESN, DEECA is looking at having trained and accredited veterinarians located across the state who can assist in the welfare of wildlife during fires when required.

To do so, veterinarians must successfully complete several mandatory training programs to allow them to be deployed and operate as a member of a team either on the fire ground or within a triage unit. This

training includes online as well as face to face components.

## Roles for Veterinarians

Veterinarians are integral in a successful wildlife response. Veterinarians are utilised either on the fire ground or within triage units.

### Fire ground

Wildlife Field Assessment Teams are deployed on to and adjacent to the fire ground. They undertake the on-ground observation and assessment, euthanasia or capture and transportation of wildlife to a triage unit. As part of this team, a veterinarian would assist in these activities as well as the chemical immobilisation (darting) of animals. There is no veterinary treatment of animals in the field.

### Triage units

Where required, DEECA will establish a triage unit at a facility close to the fire ground, but away from any fire operations. It will be equipped with veterinary equipment and consumables that DEECA has on hand for these types of events.

The triage veterinarian is responsible for the triage, euthanasia or treatment of wildlife in the unit, as well as the management of scheduled drugs and other veterinary consumables in line with relevant legislation.

Activities at triage units are supported by both veterinary nurses and triage assistants who have undertaken relevant training and accreditation.

The triage unit is led by a DEECA appointed staff member.

## Deployment process

The wildlife welfare response during fire is managed by the IMT. When the IMT determines that veterinary and volunteer resources are required, a request will be made to the State Control Centre.

The request is then sent via the State Duty Officer Wildlife Emergencies to the WESN Coordinator. The WESN Coordinator will then seek to fulfil the request. (Refer to Figure 1).

Confirmation of health and physical fitness will also be required at the time of deployment.

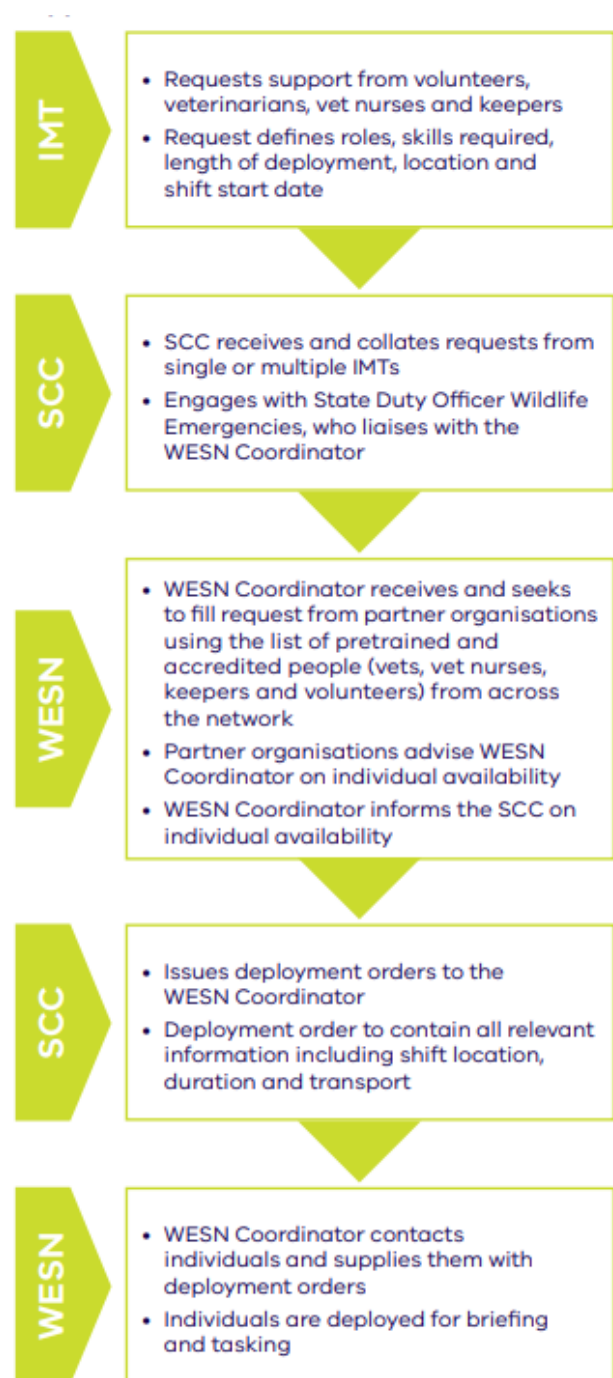


Figure 1: Deployment process of personnel through the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (source [Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impacted by Fire](#)).

## Payment

As part of becoming part of the WESN, Veterinarians will be contracted to DEECA and be paid where they have been formally deployed to an emergency response incident. Payment will be for their time and consumables (where services are provided within their clinic).

Rates have been adopted that are consistent with the Commonwealth Government for emergency response activities. These are outlined in the following table:

Item	Rates
Veterinary services	\$220/hour*
Travel	\$0.78/km
Consumables (including drugs)	At cost

\*2022 rate subject to review, inclusive of GST

## Length of deployment

Deployments will vary according to the location and size of the incident. For smaller fires within your region, you may be requested to be deployed anywhere from several hours to a number of days.

For larger or “campaign” fires which may occur over a period of weeks and where you may be asked to travel to another part of the State, deployments are generally for up to seven days. This includes five days working, with a day of travel either side.

This is consistent with other DEECA roles being undertaken as part of the response. It also aids in shift planning and allows for better fatigue management during larger incidents.

## Meals and accommodation

Accommodation and meals are provided for the duration of your deployment, if required, at no cost. This may include camp accommodation.

Travel to and from the incident may also be arranged depending on the location.

## Safety first

Veterinarians deployed to fires are required to work within established emergency management structures which include registration, communication and reporting procedures, as well as the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the adoption of hazard specific safety measures where appropriate.

Any safety issues should be reported immediately to your team leader.

For veterinarians undertaking field based roles, fire ground PPE will be provided to you at no cost.

## What is not permitted?

As a member of the response team, you must not do the following:

- be engaged in fire suppression activities, or operate in proximity to an active fire
- drive agency vehicles
- undertake tree climbing activities
- engage with the media (unless approved by the Incident Controller).

## Initial veterinary support

During or after a small fire, DEECA may engage local veterinarians to undertake immediate welfare assessment of a small number of impacted wildlife within clinics. When this occurs, the veterinarian will be able to access wildlife veterinary expertise through Zoos Victoria to assist in making the appropriate assessment of the injured animals.

The cost of agreed services provided by the veterinarian will be covered by DEECA through the IMT. Wildlife taken to private veterinary clinics by members of the public are not covered by this arrangement.

## More information

The [Victorian Response Plan for Wildlife Impacted by Fire](#) provides further relevant detail including:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Standards, including
  - Workplace Health and Safety
  - Fatigue
  - Zoonotic diseases
  - Critical incident stress
  - Medicals and fitness
  - Insurance
  - Working at night
- Wildlife response procedures, including:
  - Initial assessment and activation
  - Fireground assessment of wildlife.

For more information about wildlife response during emergencies or wildlife rehabilitation, please visit

<https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/wildlife-emergencies/wildlife-fire-emergencies>.

© The State of Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action 2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. You are free to re-use the work under that licence, on the condition that you credit the State of Victoria as author. The licence does not apply to any images, photographs or branding, including the Victorian Coat of Arms, the Victorian Government logo and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA) logo. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ISBN 978-1-76136-204-12 (pdf/online/MS word)

### Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you, but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

## Accessibility

If you would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, please telephone the DEECA Customer Service Centre on 136186, email [customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au) or via the National Relay Service on 133 677 [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au). This document is also available on the internet at [www.deeca.vic.gov.au](http://www.deeca.vic.gov.au).