

Animals in Emergencies: South Australian Framework Project

Background

Animals are important in our lives: they contribute to our quality of life, well-being, livelihoods, culture and traditions. Every year, animals are injured or killed in major emergencies. For example, in last year's Pinery bushfire in the Mid-North of South Australia over 72,000 animal lives were lost. This loss of life is tragic in itself, but it often carries a hidden cost by affecting animal owners' ability to recover emotionally and financially.

In South Australia, emergencies affecting animals can include bushfires, severe storms, floods and heatwave events. There is also the potential for serious harm from earthquake and major chemical or oil spills.

At all times the responsibility for animal welfare remains with the person in charge of the animal(s), however a range of groups can play a role in helping owners and carers exercise their responsibility for their animals, before during and after emergencies.

The *Animals in Emergencies: South Australian Framework Project* was developed to progress a range of issues relating to animal management in emergencies. These include:

- better planning for animals in emergencies by owners to avoid poor last-minute decision making during emergencies (which can lead to dangerous or fatal consequences for both animals and their owners/carers)
- clarification and promotion of who provides services in relation to animal management in emergencies (for livestock, wildlife, pets and assistance animals)
- strategies to address occurrences of non-authorized individuals accessing unsafe cordoned-off areas to assist animals (given that the safety and welfare of people is the overarching priority at all times)
- information regarding where to take animals on days of elevated risk or during an emergency
- clarification around the roles and responsibilities of animal owners, councils and government agencies to manage stray animals and safely dispose of carcasses after an emergency event.

The project does not aim to solve detailed operational problems but rather to clarify emergency management arrangements for managing the welfare of animals in emergencies, including owner responsibilities. No single publically available document exists in SA that identifies the broad involvement and responsibilities of animal owners, agencies and organisations for managing animals in emergencies and in forecast emergency conditions.

By January 2017, the project will develop, document and publicly publish a guide (or 'framework') explaining the South Australian arrangements for the management of animals in emergencies. The guide will incorporate the *National Planning Principles for Animals in Disasters*, which was endorsed by the State Government in 2014. In addition to publishing the guide an 'Implementation Plan' will be developed which will outline strategies to assist the community to understand the agreed arrangements and help animal owners/carers to take responsibility to plan ahead. The end result will be improved welfare of animals and their owners during and after emergency events.

Contact

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