

The national planning principles for animals in disasters: what role for local Government?

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Abstract

There is good evidence that communities cope better during and after emergencies if companion animals are integrated into emergency planning. Despite this, Local Government Animal Management often finds it very hard to have a voice in the preparation of community disaster response plans. Animal Management at the end of the day is all about municipal health, safety and amenity. These are central issues in disaster situations and yet Animal Management is sometimes overlooked in disaster planning despite being at the frontline of animal response. Following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, the Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan was born. The National Advisory Committee for Animals in Emergencies is encouraging other states to follow suit and has developed national planning principles for animals in disasters that recognizes the key role of local government. This paper will explain how the Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan and the national planning principles link with Animal Management services in Local Government.

Introducing WSPA

At the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), we have protected animals around the globe for more than 30 years. We use our skill and knowledge to move individuals, organisations, communities and governments to transform animals' lives. Working in more than 50 countries, we create positive change by exposing animal suffering and pioneering sustainable solutions to end it for good.

Locally, we improve animals' lives and prevent cruelty by working directly with communities and owners. Globally, we use our general consultative status at the United Nations and our relationship with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to introduce animals into the most pressing global debates, and to prove the links between animal welfare and successful sustainable development.

Animals face unprecedented threats. Whether it's the millions of animals forgotten after natural disasters or the one billion cats and dogs at risk of being culled, they need our help.

This is why we work to alleviate animal suffering and ensure animals live in a state of good welfare. We do this by protecting their mental and physical welfare and use the latest scientific research in this field to argue that every animal should have a life worth living.

Beyond their intrinsic value as individuals, animals are also a vital part of our world. Their welfare contributes to ours – they offer us companionship, contribute to our livelihoods, add essential diversity to our ecosystems and feed our families.

We engage and partner with stakeholders including leading international non-governmental organisations, businesses, governments and inter-governmental bodies, as well as leading veterinary associations worldwide, exposing cruelty and offering humane and sustainable solutions.

We are the only animal welfare organisation to have General Consultative Status at the United Nations. This enables us to engage partners on a truly international stage and opens up huge potential for positive progress for animals and people.

What sort of people work for WSPA?

We have a range of professionals working in our multi-disciplinary teams including veterinarians, researchers, campaigners, media and communications staff, fundraising and supporter care staff.

How we create real and lasting change for animals

Ending animal suffering is an ambitious goal. To achieve it we ensure our work is grounded in a strong evidence base and that it builds on collaborative partnerships that allow us to make the biggest impact for animals, including those outside the world of animal welfare.

These two approaches work in concert: by partnering across sectors we can have greater influence for animals and bring about larger scale sustainable change; meanwhile our credible evidence base helps attract and maintain these partners, and contributes to their own work. With these working practices already firmly in place, we are an organisation uniquely positioned to achieve sustainable change for animals worldwide – change that also benefits people and the planet.

Transforming the relationships between animals and people

We champion the cause of animal welfare across four main areas. With detailed knowledge and expertise in each, we are able to campaign effectively to promote and achieve changes for animals that also benefit people.

Animals in Disasters

We deliver aid to meet the acute post-disaster needs of animals and to begin the process of reconstruction, assisting whole communities. We also work closely with governments, to ensure that animal welfare is included in emergency planning and response, and with humanitarian agencies, to ensure animals are considered in aid delivery.

Animals in Farming

We work collaboratively with businesses and other stakeholders in order to achieve changes to livestock production methods which improve animal health and welfare. Our campaigns encourage moves to higher welfare systems, including championing the causes of cage-free laying hens, access to pasture for dairy cows, and welfare-friendly pig production.

Animals in Communities

We research, run and promote programmes that protect companion and working animals from suffering. Through our work, we provide long-term solutions to prevent the unnecessary culling of animals in response to disease outbreaks and make the vital links between public health and sustainable livelihoods.

Animals in the Wild

We expose the dangers facing our world's wildlife and campaign to protect animals that have been, or are in danger of being, removed from their natural habitats for use as 'exotic pets' or in traditional medicines, fashion or entertainment.

Animals in Disasters: Helping animals starts with people

India case study

Earlier this year, WSPA deployed to Maharashtra in India in response to a prolonged drought. The people in this part of India live within subsistence economies, relying on cattle and buffalo for immediate nutrition, use as working animals, income, insurance and social cohesion. WSPA's deployment followed a request by the Indian government for assistance, and we worked closely with local partners on the ground to set up a temporary camp for livestock owners to take their animals for food, water, shelter and veterinary care.

Chatragun, 21 years old, walked seven kilometres to the camp with his eight cattle including a two-year old female calf.

The intervention is also an opportunity for WSPA to work with animal owners and communities to better prepare them for future disasters.

Animals in disasters work in Australia

In Australia, WSPA is working towards the integration of animals into disaster management through policies and plans at all levels of government such that

animal welfare is considered a mainstream aspect of emergency management planning.

Why animals matter in disasters

Animals have intrinsic value

As sentient beings, animals suffer in disasters from injury, pain, hunger, thirst, fear and distress. The World Organisation for Animal Health defines animal welfare in the following way:

"Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress".

On the basis of animal welfare principles alone, efforts should be made to protect animals from disasters.

Animals contribute to human health and wellbeing

The link between human wellbeing and interaction with animals is well documented. A survey of New Zealand residents found that almost two-thirds believe their relationship with their pet is vital to their psychosocial wellbeing (Glasse 2010).

Following Cyclone Tracey, animals were flown out of Darwin while the infrastructure was repaired. Residents reported that the return of their animals was critical to their recovery following the disaster (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources South Australia 2012).

Animals have economic value

Whilst there is no comprehensive database of the livestock losses incurred in disasters, available data suggests that the direct costs of livestock losses are considerable. For example, the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires resulted in an estimated total gross output loss of more than \$65 million (Coll 2013). A decrease in production in the agriculture sector also results in downstream production losses for agriculture-dependent industries. These downstream impacts have been estimated to result in a total economic loss some 2.4 times greater than that experienced by the agricultural industry alone (Statistics New Zealand in Coll 2013).

Failure to account for animals puts human life at risk

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (2010) found that individuals perished in the Black Saturday fires in 2009 as a result of failing to evacuate with their animals and prematurely returning to the fire ground in order to save their animals.

What does this have to do with local government?

WSPA recognises that local government is at the forefront of emergency response and that animal

management officers have expertise that is called upon to manage animals in emergencies.

Animal management is all about municipal health, safety and amenity. Whilst each local community will have different needs, animals live in all communities and regardless of the types of disasters experienced in the local area, animal management needs to be included in disaster planning.

Black Saturday fires

The Black Saturday bushfires killed 173 people, injured 414 people, destroyed 2,133 homes and displaced 7,562 people. 120 people were killed by a single fire in the Kinglake Area alone (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010).

Temperatures reached 46 degrees Celsius with winds in excess of 100km per hour. Leading up to the disastrous conditions was 2 months of extremely low rainfall and hot dry conditions (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010).

In terms of livestock, a minimum of 22,707 sheep, 1,844 dairy cows, 12,968 meat cattle, 111 pigs, and 3,231 chickens were killed (Coll 2013).

Of the witness testimonies provided to the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday Victorian bushfires, over one-third included reference to animals. Testimony included references to residents who died when they attempted evacuation with animals. Following the Royal Commission's recommendation that animals be integrated into emergency management planning in order to promote human safety, the Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan (VEAWP) was developed.

The VEAWP (Department of Primary Industries & Department of Sustainability and Environment) describes:

- The planning requirements for animal welfare support services in emergency preparedness, response, relief and recovery;
- The roles and responsibilities of agencies, organisations, owners and carers that have a role in planning for and providing emergency animal welfare support services; and
- Operating arrangements during an emergency for animal welfare agencies and organisations, emergency service agencies and animal owners and carers.

Crucially, the VEAWP also provides for the assembling of the State Emergency Animal Welfare Unit to bring together those with responsibility for animals in emergencies with mainstream emergency management control and coordination bodies.

Why a National Advisory Committee for Animals in Emergencies?

Australia has a world class emergency management system that covers all parts of the disaster cycle and

outlines clear control and coordination arrangements that allow for effective mobilisation of resources across the three levels of government.

The extent to which animals are integrated into these arrangements varies significantly across states, territories and local government areas.

The community has an expectation that emergency management arrangements will allow for a coordinated approach to the management of animal welfare impacts to companion animals, livestock and wildlife.

The National Advisory Committee for Animals in Emergencies was established as an interim committee following the workshop entitled, *Building Resilience: Animals and Communities Coping in Emergencies* co-hosted by WSPA and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australian Animal Welfare Strategy in October 2012.

The workshop drew together over 50 stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds including emergency managers; humanitarian organisations; Australian local, state and federal government departments; New Zealand government departments; veterinarians; researchers and animal organisations.

It was acknowledged that the Australian public increasingly expects that emergency management arrangements will include animals and that failure to integrate animals into planning results in unacceptable economic and social costs, including loss of human life.

Workshop delegates resolved to improve outcomes for animals in disasters by seeking integration of animals into emergency management at each stage of the disaster cycle (preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation).

Delegates also agreed that one of the primary ways to achieve this objective would be the establishment of a national advisory committee for animals in emergencies to provide leadership, insight and advice to organisations attempting to integrate animals into emergency management systems (WSPA & DAFF-AAWS 2012).

The National Advisory Committee for Animals in Emergencies met for the first time in February 2013 and includes members from industry; humanitarian and animal welfare organisations; federal, state and local governments with responsibility for animal welfare; the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department; and the veterinary community.

Vision and Mission

The interim committee was established in 2013 with the vision that: "animal welfare is accepted as core to emergency management and there are improved outcomes for animals in emergencies".

The mission of the committee is: "to work collaboratively to incorporate animals into emergency

management planning at all levels of government, and to encourage those responsible for animals in emergencies to accept their responsibilities”.

The National Planning Principles for Animals in Disasters

Following a process of assessing the status of animals in emergency management planning across Australian jurisdictions, numerous examples of best practice were identified and used to develop the overarching national planning principles.

The purpose of the national planning principles for animals in disasters is to provide a non-prescriptive tool to help jurisdictions customise plans to meet their particular circumstances.

While there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, there is some merit in state and territory plans for animals in disasters being sufficiently aligned to share common characteristics and approaches, particularly to enable the jurisdictions to work together in emergencies that extend across borders.

The principles are minimum expectations of the community for animal welfare outcomes in disasters.

They cover both the planning principles themselves and considerations to include in emergency plans. The planning process is an opportunity to build support for the integration of animals in emergency response plans; to increase understanding of how plans might work in practice; and to develop the networks that will allow for effective implementation of plans.

It is intended that the National Planning Principles for Animals in Disasters provide an easy to use tool for jurisdictions when writing or reviewing plans. These guidelines are sufficiently high-level to allow for jurisdictional customisation.

The planning principles are separate to animal welfare arrangements for animal disease and biosecurity emergencies, such as AUSVETPLAN or plans relating to cetacean entanglements or strandings, and marine pollution.

National Planning Principles excerpts

The planning process for animals in disasters should:

- explicitly recognise that integrating animals into emergency management plans will improve animal welfare outcomes
 - explicitly recognise that integration of animals into emergency management plans will help secure improved human welfare and safety during disasters
 - aim to clearly identify roles and responsibilities within command and control structures in sufficient detail to allow for effective implementation of animal welfare measures
 - recognise the wide range of parties involved in animal welfare at each stage of the disaster cycle and ensure these organisations are consulted during writing or reviewing disaster plans
 - respect the role of local government as ‘first responders’ in disasters and acknowledge local government expertise in understanding local needs and resource availability, especially with reference to animal welfare and animal management arrangements within the local area
 - consider how best to ensure effective integration and implementation of the plan by, for example, extensive consultation during the planning process or inclusion of an animal welfare element in requirements for disaster training exercises
 - include effective communication about plan implementation with those parties who may be involved as well as those who may be impacted by disasters
 - be communicated in language that is accessible to all stakeholders including the general public.
- The disaster plan should:*
- make reference to, and situate the plan within, the local area and/or jurisdictional regulatory and legal frameworks
 - take an ‘all hazards’ humane approach to all species and encompass a wide range of possible disaster-type situations that may impact upon the welfare of livestock, companion animals, wildlife and other categories of animals such as laboratory animals
 - use a definition of disaster that aligns with the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience
 - include a statement of scope that excludes animal disease and biosecurity emergencies from the plan
 - emphasise that biosecurity requirements are of utmost importance in disasters and that quarantine and biosecurity protocols must be followed wherever practicable
 - appropriately plan for animals taking into consideration the types of disasters most likely to be experienced in the particular jurisdiction
 - provide for a staggered scaling up of response and resources in line with the scale and severity of disasters and their impact on animal and human welfare
 - include a vision statement that makes reference to the importance of securing animal welfare outcomes in disasters
 - include a brief rationale statement that includes reference to the benefits of the plan for animal welfare, human safety and wellbeing, and for the economy

- include consideration of animals at all stages of the disaster cycle including preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation
- outline command and control structures in language that is accessible to the general public
- specify that the individual in charge of an animal is ultimately responsible for its welfare in disasters
- outline the processes for interagency co-operation at all stages of the disaster cycle
- include a system for formalising arrangements with animal welfare support organisations
- take into consideration logistical challenges that may impact upon implementation of the plan during disasters, for example, in the event that key infrastructure or personnel are not able to be deployed, communication is affected or shelters are destroyed or otherwise unavailable
- include arrangements for regular testing of the animal welfare in disasters plan
- include requirements and arrangements for regular testing and review of the animal welfare in disasters plan

Implementing the National Planning Principles at Local Government Level

Collaboration between all tiers of government is required to effectively integrate animals into disaster management planning and operations. At local government level, it is essential that animal management and emergency response functions work together in planning to ensure that animals are not forgotten. Animal management officers have a responsibility to uphold public safety and are ideal advocates for animals in disaster planning.

The National Planning Principles are sufficiently high level to allow for customisation to state/territory and local context. It may be worth advocating for a dedicated working group within the council to address the question of a plan for animals in disasters. With representation from across the functional areas of the council and high-level managerial support, the local council's plan should be able to link with existing chain of command structures and to the jurisdiction's animals in disasters plan, should one have been developed.

It is often the case that local council plans contain more substantive detail on matters such as contact lists for equipment suppliers and specific process instructions than do jurisdictional plans. Essentially, each plan will be different based on the community's needs and available resources. The incorporation of evaluation criteria at the onset will allow for measurement of the benefits of the plan to the community which will help to further 'win hearts and minds'.

National Planning Principles Next Steps

The interim National Advisory Committee for Animals in Emergencies acknowledges the progress being made towards integration of animals into emergency management planning in the jurisdictions. The committee would like the National Planning Principles for Animals in Disasters to be a useful tool to support jurisdictions as they seek to improve disaster management planning by ensuring that animals are considered.

In their June 2013 meeting, the Animal Welfare Committee – which consists of the heads of federal and state government departments responsible for animal welfare – endorsed the National Planning Principles.

Work is proceeding to achieve similar results with the heads of departments responsible for emergency planning. Ultimately, adoption of the principles by the emergency management community will lead to improved outcomes for animals in emergencies.

The recent *Building Capability in Communities: A National Approach to Animals in Disasters* workshop held in September and co-hosted by WSPA and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australian Animal Welfare Strategy presented an opportunity for stakeholders to come together to reflect on progress, to share expertise and to collaborate towards improved outcomes for animals and communities in disasters. Local government representatives played an important role in the workshop and WSPA would like to continue to work to assist local government animal management officers to have input into disaster planning.

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About the author

Jacqui Mills is the Australian Campaign Manager for Disaster Management at the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA). WSPA moves the world to protect animals. With dedicated disaster operations teams based in Asia and Latin America, WSPA is an expert in alleviating disaster-related animal suffering. WSPA has been doing relief work in disaster-struck areas for more than four decades and works in unison with local partners and humanitarian agencies.

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