

Fire emergencies: helping your animals

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Emergency and Strategic Response

Orange

When a bushfire occurs, the Rural Fire Service (RFS) is in control. The Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) is one of the agencies that provide support services to the RFS in bushfire emergencies. In the event of a fire emergency, NSW DPI has the responsibility for the welfare of all animals, including livestock, horses, companion animals and wildlife.

In a fire, don't ignore the welfare of animals that you care for. To minimise the risk to your animals make arrangements for their safety by being prepared for fires. You are responsible for helping your animals. If you cannot help your animals, notify NSW DPI for assistance.

NSW DPI's Bushfire Operating Plan outlines strategies to provide relief for livestock, companion animals and wildlife during a bushfire emergency. This includes the provision of immediate animal relief services and rehabilitation assistance to primary producers. Assistance measures include:

- supply and distribution of emergency fodder and other materials;
- assessment, destruction and disposal of injured stock;
- provision of animal care services for animals evacuated from an area because of bushfire emergency;
- fodder and agistment transport rebates for bushfire-affected stock, and low interest rate loans, if a natural disaster area is declared.

NSW DPI can draw support from other agriculture and animal welfare organisations which have agreed to help them ensure the welfare of animals in emergencies.

The care of animals

Livestock

Landholders need to identify fire refuge areas for their livestock. Farm animals can most easily be protected from bushfires by preparing and maintaining fuel-reduced pastures onto which stock can be moved or held in an emergency. In addition, ensure you have emergency fodder supplies for your animals. Also consider how you might evacuate your large animals if needed, keeping in mind the handling facilities and transport required.

If you cannot help your animals NSW DPI can provide assistance. NSW DPI can help:

- move your animals and fodder;
- coordinate veterinary assistance for injured animals;
- coordinate the supply and distribution of emergency fodder and other materials;
- provide a 50% transport rebate for fodder and agistment for bushfire-affected stock;
- provide a low interest loan to eligible landowners if a natural disaster area is declared.

In the worst case, advice can be given in assessing burnt livestock and assisting with slaughter and disposal.

Following the bushfire, NSW DPI can work with the Local Emergency Management Committee to provide advice on pasture regeneration, feeding livestock and the forms of assistance available to landowners.

Companion animals

During a bushfire, the owners of dogs, cats, birds and other companion animals usually take care of them. If you are asked to evacuate, take your animals with you to the evacuation centre, making sure they are constrained (collar and lead



for dogs or a carrier for smaller pets) and labelled with identification details.

Occasionally, when people cannot help their animals, NSW DPI is requested to assist in their rescue and care and can do so in cooperation with other agricultural and animal welfare organisations. NSW DPI and its support network can assist in:

- coordinating the rescue and housing of companion animals;
- coordinating the supply of food to animals stranded by bushfire;
- providing veterinary assistance to companion animals.

Wildlife

The amount of assistance that can be provided to help wildlife is sometimes very limited, and depends on the scale and location of the bushfire. Rescued wildlife has special requirements and only trained people, with the right equipment, can undertake this task. NSW DPI is responsible for ensuring the care of wildlife in emergencies, with the assistance of other organisations that have wildlife expertise like WIRES and DEC. When necessary, NSW DPI can assist with:

- rescue of animals at risk and their transport to appropriate release sites;
- organisation of appropriate veterinary care.

Bushfire preparedness and response

The responsibility for fighting bushfires lies with the RFS. NSW DPI supports the RFS by coordinating agriculture and animal support services, and undertakes this role with the help of other government and non-government organisations.

Be prepared in the event of bushfire. NSW DPI cannot emphasise enough the need for people to prepare their farms for bushfires and understand how to protect their property and animals.

In the event of a fire emergency, the RFS will provide fire information and advice on evacuations and property protection. NSW DPI will coordinate with the RFS and provide information about helping your animals, including moving animals to refuge or evacuation areas. If you do not have a fire refuge area for your large animals and you have to evacuate them, NSW DPI will advise the location of evacuation areas for large animals. If directed to evacuate, you should take your animals with you to the evacuation centre.

NSW DPI's overall task is to work in partnership with the RFS and other supporting organisations to ensure that agriculture and animal support services are provided in a bushfire emergency and, by this means, achieve good outcomes for people, their farms and animals.

More information on preparing for bushfires can be found on the RFS website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or NSW DPI's website at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au.

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