



Australians for Animals

PROTECT • NURTURE • RESTORE

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VICTORIA'S DEVASTATING FIRES A WILDLIFE HOLOCAUST

Victoria's fires have burned an estimated 400,000 hectares, an area five times larger than Singapore, in the most cleared land in Australia.

The wildlife toll is unknown. AFA together with most Victorian shelters believes the mortality is in the thousands as the fires were fierce and there's few refuges for injured, wounded, burnt animals. The situation made much worse as Victoria's Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA) refused to allow wildlife rescuers to enter areas where the fires had been extinguished.

AFA knows from our many contacts with people on the ground that desperately overworked shelters were in despair as animals that would have survived have been left to die agonizing deaths.

The situation in Victoria is beyond serious. The failures of government and RSPCA Victoria demonstrate obscene negligence.

In 2019 RSPCA Victoria signed a memorandum of understanding with the Victorian government agreeing NOT to deal with wildlife issues.

Survivors face a grim future. AFA has not been able to confirm the Victorian government has any planned food drops, there's a desperate need for water as so many animals are dehydrated. Without water, few creatures can survive for longer than a few days.

What habitats are left is unknown.



Image by Paul Hilton

A brief rundown of the state of despair provides evidence of the Victorian Labor government's complete rejection of any adequate care of the state's wildlife. It makes shocking reading.

Whilst DEECA is the agency

that responds to wildlife during emergencies, including fire, rescue volunteers say DEECA teams are shooting animals who could survive.

No information is available on where teams are located or who is involved in the teams.

EMPTY RSPCA HOSPITAL

An RSPCA Victoria koala hospital was funded by more than \$3 million including \$1.5 million donated during the 2019-2020 bushfires.

The hospital was fully operational by 2022 stating its specific purpose of caring for koalas and other wildlife. The facility is known as the RSPCA Koala Ward.

RSPCA Victoria was contacted, we requested details of the number of koalas and other wildlife brought into their koala hospital jointly under the care of the RSPCA and Zoos Victoria.

Their response: "Melbourne Zoo, Werribee Open Range Zoo's RSPCA Koala Ward, and Kyabram Fauna Park have not yet received inpatients from these fires.

Please note that Werribee Open Range Zoo's RSPCA Koala Ward has been designed with the specific requirements of koalas in mind but is fully capable of treating and rehabilitating all wildlife requiring treatment, not just koalas."

The RSPCA's Mobile Animal Care Unit is "prepared for use and has been offered to relevant authorities for deployment – when it is safe to do so." The mobile unit continued to be parked.

Why? RSPCA's response "DEECA wildlife assessment teams will assess the situation and determine whether further support and resources are required through the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN)".

The WESN is the responsibility of DEECA. "The purpose of the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN) is to improve wildlife welfare outcomes through the development of a network of trained and accredited individuals from across the veterinary and wildlife welfare sectors who can be deployed as part of wildlife emergency response activities for bushfire and extreme heat events."

DEECA's website states: "DEECA responds to wildlife during emergencies. This includes wildlife affected by fire. DEECA is the lead agency to respond to wildlife welfare by fire in Victoria." Except it didn't.

Confusion reigns, it's almost impossible to identify which organisation is carrying out rescues,



Image by Paul Hilton

support and care much less any information on the number of patients, if any.

Several rescuers, in contact with WESN volunteers, advised WESN volunteers haven't been called up and are deeply frustrated with the situation. Shelters contacted have no idea where WESN is operating, how many animals have been transported into care or if the network is even functioning.

Over the many years AFA has been operating, we've witnessed some horrific cruelty. But the Victorian fires and the dreadful plight of the state's wildlife has left the charity in tears. Our committee weeps for the suffering these poor animals have endured.

The sight of dreadfully stressed

animals, in pain, in grief and shock should be an injunction for the most urgent action by a government. Instead, this appalling government focused on red tape, hindrances and ensuring minimal media.

DEECA made sure that the media could not get to the fire grounds after fires were extinguished. Citing a need to get approval, which required filling in endless forms and a wait of up to two weeks to get an approval or not, mainstream media was not allowed to go to any shelters or take photos.

The Victorian state government is a stain on Australia. The death toll of kangaroos was horrific and yet the shooting for commercial industry continues on.

AFA'S LAWSUIT AGAINST THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT UPDATE

In December, our Co-ordinator flew to Melbourne to be present at a Victorian Supreme Court hearing as DEECA attempted again to ensure that any identification of the three "experts" who authorised or approved the helicopter shooting of over 1000 koalas at Budj Bim National Park would be suppressed.

The Judge ordered our legal team and DEECA's lawyers to find a compromise. The result? The names of the three experts may not be published in any Australian media for five years. An extraordinary decision given that one of the "experts" had already identified self on Facebook.

The judgement also created a precedent which will allow governments to withhold the identification of "experts" involved in any obscene slaughter thus ensuring that their expertise cannot be challenged.

The next legal effort will be DEECA challenging AFA's standing – the right to take legal action against the Victorian government. Our legal team is confident that the

charity's nearly 40-year history in koala conservation and campaigns in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and SA will ensure the charity's gains standing. The standing hearing is set down for May 7th and 8th in the Victorian Supreme Court.

AFA cannot emphasise more strongly that the behaviour of DEECA in the Victorian bushfires is an injunction to ensure the charity proceeds with this historic legal challenge. We cannot allow our wildlife to be treated with such callousness and brutality.

The legal challenge against DEECA is long overdue. The Victorian Labor government's appalling wildlife policies and lack of any protection of vulnerable species, particularly the koala must be

COURT COSTS

THE LAWSUIT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

AFA has to raise approximately \$100k to cover the costs for court fees and expert advice.

Your donations are essential as we fight this David & Goliath battle against a taxpayer funded BIG government.

We have also set up a give now page for donations which can be found at:

www.givenow.com.au/koala-crisis

brought to justice.

AFA apologises for the lateness of this newsletter. The charity has focused its full attention on the Victorian fires. AFA has provided a decent donation to one of the shelters and ensured that our very popular Facebook page Koala Crisis regularly identified names and

bank details of wildlife shelters needing donations. We will continue to directly help shelters as funds permit – but we have to keep funds aside for the lawsuit.

Our Facebook Koala Crisis posts on the Victorian fires have reached almost one million people.

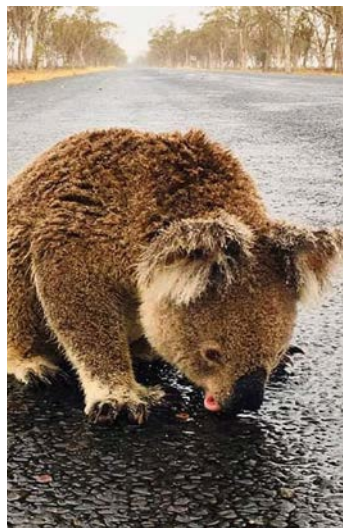
NSW LABOR GOVERNMENT'S KOALA SCAM

Many of you will have read the latest NSW government "koala population estimate" is now around 250,000.

Based on appalling and unacceptable methodology, fantasies, and downright crap, this is the latest Labor effort to persuade Australians and the international community that these dreadful governments (state and federal) are responsibly caring for Koalas.

Nothing could be further from the truth. With 60,000 koalas killed in the Black Summer fires, combined with ongoing non-stop logging of native forests, massive urbanisation projects in koala habitats, mining, infrastructure, diseases, the Koala is facing extinction. There's no legal protection of habitat anywhere in Australia.

The much-touted Great Koala National Park is still not legally designated, and will rely on the latest Labor plot to use any forests they save from logging as vehicles for carbon emission credits.



Forests that need to be protected in the proposed park are still being logged. Native forests on the perimeter of the park are being declared as plantations.

Please support Australians for Animals' work. The charity is on the front lines.

**For the Animals,
Sue Arnold & Friends.**



**PLEASE
HELP
SAVE
THE
KOALAS**

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