



ANIMAL EVAC.NZ
KARAREHE WHAKAWATEA
Evacuate | Shelter | Reunite

After Action Report:

Australia Fires 2020

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Executive Summary

In late 2019, the Australian Bushfire season started and progressed to major fires across South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland. In December 2019, New South Wales (NSW) declared a state of disaster and it was following this declaration that the plight of millions of wildlife being affected by the fires could no longer be ignored. At the encouragement and initial response funding from Save Animals From Exploitation (SAFE), Animal Evac New Zealand (AENZ) commenced arrangements to deploy to the Australian fires. The Ministry for Primary Industries convened a meeting of NZ based NGO's interested in responding to the fires to assist with coordination, though no bi-lateral official request for assistance had been received. This meeting was useful and the coordination by MPI was appreciated. Thanks to Air New Zealand, over 400kg of response equipment accompanied the team with no excess luggage being charged. Rotation (rota) 1 assembled in Wellington for a pre-deployment briefing and preparation 6-7 January 2020, and a six-person team deployed on 8 January 2020. The second rota, consisting of four responders deployed on 13 January. As part of the logistics, our team veterinarian also applied and was granted emergency registration to practice in NSW. Also, within days of arrival, our insurer Rothbury confirmed we had appropriate levels of insurance cover.

Using professional networks within the Australian emergency services, a response partnership was arranged with a local partner agency which allowed the arriving team to head immediately out to the Blue Mountains for wildlife rescue in areas ravaged by bushfire. The partnership with the Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service (WIRES) contractor, enabled immediate local knowledge and access to a certified dart operator. AENZ completed two rotations of animal disaster responders to the fires in NSW who carried out numerous response activities from community evacuation readiness, through to searching for surviving wildlife in private forests which had not been made a priority. The fires were the largest in NSW history, burning over 9,900,000 acres, destroying 2,683 homes, causing over AUD\$100b in damages and killing more than 800 million animals. Across the two rotations, many members already had operational experience deploying to international disasters or austere conditions. All team members had completed rural fire safety, wildlife rescue, and incident management certifications in addition to their AENZ training in animal disaster response (foundation course), sheltering, and dog bite prevention. Specialist skills were deployed including a registered veterinarian, experienced paramedics, emergency managers, humanitarian aid workers, public information manager, animal control officers, former SPCA inspectors, animal rescue technicians, and farmers.

The first mission was to Blue Mountains to carry out rescues of kangaroos burned by the fires. Then the team travelled to the town of Bundanoon as it was identified as under serious threat, to ensure people had sufficient resources to evacuate safely with their pets including ensuring vulnerable community members had support. This was achieved successfully working through the local vet and wildlife rehabilitation centre. Then the team travelled to Pointer Mountain at the request

of land owners to clear their property to ensure no injured animals were left suffering. Following this, the team travelled to Batemans Bay to assist Wild2Free kangaroo sanctuary with searching for injured wildlife on their large property, finishing with another search operation at Nillgen Creek just north west of Batemans Bay. This required the relocation of our base camp three times over 10 days based on fire risk and other operational needs.

The cost of deploying AENZ was approximately NZD \$35,000 in direct costs, and these were mainly covered from by tagged (specific use) donation, with the shortfall covered by generation donations and funds. We thank those individuals and organisations who donated to our cause for their support. A large portion of equipment including pet carriers were left with the communities and organisations we worked with to build local resilience.

AENZ was the first international team to arrive following the disaster declaration and our efforts ensured more than 200 animals benefited from our response, including Kangaroo, Wallaby, and Echidna. This includes ensuring that over 150 companion animals could also be safely evacuated from the township of Bundanoon. The outpouring of support and appreciation from the Australian public and services was truly appreciated.

There were a number of lessons from the AENZ 2020 Australian bushfire response, however the main lessons were:

1. The plethora of “animal rescue” groups deploying both domestically and internationally without the correct training and/or equipment, and then sensationalizing their rescue efforts undermined the credibility and access of legitimate specialist teams (delegitimisation of animal rescue).
2. Official assessment that there was sufficient capacity to deal with the catastrophic numbers of fire affected wildlife did not match on the ground assessments and there were huge operational deficiencies that lead to sub-optimal animal welfare outcomes.
3. AENZ needs to address several deficiencies including strengthening its remote support capability, providing further training to its volunteers (in D4H, social media, rural fire), identifying and developing a cadre of specialists for international deployment, GIS integration with D4H Incident Manager and procuring additional specialist equipment.
4. Arrangements in Australia need to create an inclusive model of operation, but ensure task allocations match the actual skills, training and equipment of the teams offering assistance. A trans-tasman MOU on international mutual aid should be explored.

Lessons Identified – Quick Observations

Ref	Lesson Identified	Post-AAR Note
1	Pre-deployment preparations were good given AENZ had not anticipated deploying internationally. Local/state animal emergency management plans should provide mechanism to screen and coordinate international teams arriving.	This has been raised at the Global Animal Disaster Management Conference (GADMC), encouraging mainstreaming of animal rescue response into existing coordination systems like UNDAC and team accreditation like INSARAG (i.e., light animal rescue teams)
2	Level of readiness for international deployment by AENZ was low as not anticipated, however this was compounded by not all members having completed CIMS and rural fire safety training and personal details not up to date requiring constant requests for information. With the deployment occurring just after New Year's, many were still on holiday or unable to get away from work also, which meant the number of available members was low.	DH4 Personnel Manager has been updated to allow for personal details to be provided such as passport information. It may be advantageous to pre-identify suitable members for international deployment and have related training and information requests completed before being considered for response.
3	Deployment equipment checklist could be updated to add sections that are event specific (i.e., flood, fires, quakes etc) and clarifying what is required versus what is optional to bring. For this event, adding Camelback and high energy bars would have been useful for the tasks undertaken and respective climate.	
4	The use of AirBNB proved highly effective as often the team was relocating to areas of heightened fire risk, so such accommodation was in good supply.	
5	Communication systems (radios) were not always effective and there were times when the Base of Operations found it difficult to know the location or status of field teams. Communications needs to be improved.	X2 Garmin InReach satellite tracking devices have since been procured, along with new DMR radios (commercial grade) to improve future response communications and safety.

Animal Evac New Zealand | After Action Report: Operation Australia Fires 2020

Ref	Lesson Identified	Post-AAR Note
6	The priority to source high levels of protective equipment was a good decision. Cotton overalls were selected and branded quickly to provide limited protection while working on burned out areas which were not longer considered active, but still had hot spots. Suppliers had no bushfire PPE in stock due to the fires across the state.	New bush firefighting helmets procured, and fire-resistant uniform options also finalised which are held as a shared cache for those having completed rural fire safety training.
7	More rescue tools to make access to damaged property would have been useful i.e., hammer, tin snips, wire cutters, ladder etc.	New rescue tool backpacks established in Central and Southern caches for future responses.
8	A fair part of the team had not worked together, however the team environment was really great, supportive, positive and welcoming. However, increasing the amount of <i>peace-time</i> social and training activities would help ensure this.	New team structures should lead to improved engagement and teamwork opportunities.
9	The Remote Support was fantastic with numerous members back in New Zealand providing virtual support and coordination. However, this resource needs more support and engagement. AENZ may wish to consider formalising a virtual support team that have specific skills and capabilities for future responses and having a formal leader/focal point during response to improve coordination and workload allocation. Remote Support team felt part of the team.	
10	The flexibility of the team to fulfill multiple roles was good, with no gaps reported. However, it was sometimes unclear what skills each other had and how best to utilise these.	New AENZ member Personnel Accountability System (PAS) magnets now procured and able to be placed up on magnetic organisational chart to help identify key skills. "Response Bio" also added to D4H Personnel Manager to allow a summary of the skillsets of the team, plus frequent flyer details.
11	Further CIMS training is needed as many were not sufficiently knowledgeable of the system and its processes.	Accredited online training has been offered by a supporter of AENZ which should be taken up.

Animal Evac New Zealand | After Action Report: Operation Australia Fires 2020

Ref	Lesson Identified	Post-AAR Note
12	Social media interest and activity was significant which helped raise AENZ profile. Having remote support develop a social media roster was very useful. This is another function where the remote support team can provide more capacity, but more volunteers in this area are needed. Real time social media posts created authentic and engaging content, though it was unpredictable which caused unanticipated workload for the remote support team. Social media activity should be logged on D4H as it can be easily searched/filtered and provides one source of truth. D4H IM also has task logging capability, however the debriefs highlight that we need to increase the level of D4H training tailored to specific functions. Members also wanted more social media training, though having one official channel post that deploying members can share from proved effective and ensured only approved images are being used.	
13	GIS mapping support by Kate was really good. Having the fire map overlay on D4H IM was very useful.	As Kate is unavailable currently, AENZ needs to increase its GIS capability. Elizabeth Butcher is now looking into this area.
14	AENZ volunteers in canterbury managed to contact local fundraisers who were already planning events to raise funds for fire affected communities in Australia and got their funds to go to Animal Evac. The fundraising efforts by volunteers back in NZ was amazing and helped raise our profile. Suggest BBQs are not used as fundraisers, suggest replacing with an ice cream stand or something else.	
15	Operational tempo was good, but some were new to the quasi-military nature of emergency response such as briefings and chain of command. Though useful for domestic operations too, it may be an idea that those who are pre-selected for international deployments complete a basic AENZ international disaster response training course (i.e., based on RedR) to clarify expectations and operating environment. A module on formal briefings etc should be added to the foundation course.	AENZ Command course is being developed to train team leaders in all AENZ functional areas and other selected members. This should alleviate this area and better train and prepare AENZ members and align to International teachings and leadership models.

Animal Evac New Zealand | After Action Report: Operation Australia Fires 2020

Ref	Lesson Identified	Post-AAR Note
16	Incident Management Team only had two people which meant them filling multiple roles for such a complex response. As time and finances permit, a larger IMT element should be deployed to future events (who continue to have experience and CIMS/EOC training etc). This also highlights the need to develop the “Command” capacity of AENZ as identified in previous reports.	Mark Anderson is working on developing a Command Course to help improve this capacity.
17	Operational support whilst deployed was limited. Though good accommodation ensured everyone could be well rested, and there was much joy and banter preparing meals, having a “camp mother” would have been really helpful, but this may not always be possible in disaster situations.	
18	Local engagement was really good, with the team electing to go out and engage with communities during breaks and mealtimes. This led to numerous requests for assistance, as well as building positive community relationships. Local engagement was also made effective by joining local facebook groups.	
19	The proactive engagement through supporting the community readiness expo was excellent. Through using existing local capacities and icons such as the vet at Bundanoon Veterinary Hospital allowed locals to be empowered and used. Their assistance in providing a pickup point for pet carriers for evacuees was a huge success with over 150 animals being safely evacuated. Using an evidence-based approach to our interventions such as knowing that lack of pet carriers is a causal factor for evacuation failure proved highly successful, and though not as dramatic as waiting for the animals to be directly in harms way, it is more effective and has a high likelihood of creating positive animal welfare outcomes.	
20	AENZ was given multiple assurances that there was sufficient capacity to deal with the numbers of injured and affected wildlife, however this was observed not to be the case. This view was shared by many local veterinarians who were also told they would not be needed, only to find themselves being called upon to assist large numbers of suffering animals.	
22	With inter-state and international interest, this also raises the need for federal coordination of animal disaster response including establishing border controls to prevent well meaning, but unqualified and inexperienced responders arriving. One option would be creating a disaster assistance visa which is available during a declared emergency, and only those with	

Animal Evac New Zealand | After Action Report: Operation Australia Fires 2020

	such are able to enter the country to assist. Those without such a visa would face deportation. The disaster assistance visa would require only organisations that have been pre-approved at the state or federal level to be eligible to access it.	
23	Standard Memorandum's of Understanding are required, including pre-approving teams for future trans-tasman deployment. The integration of animal disaster rescue with mainstream human rescue frameworks needs attention such as the inclusion of animal rescue in systems such as the UN Cluster System, and International SAR Advisory Group (INSARAG) light team accreditation.	
24	The availability of EAP through Xero (as a subscriber) and offer to access counsellors within AENZ was useful, however there could be benefit to increase deployable capacity in psychological first aid (PFA) and strengthen longer term support for responders. Daily briefings were held and more consistent use of the three C's (cares, concerns and celebrations) at the start of each day before the briefing would be useful in future responses.	With a number of qualified counsellors within AENZ, a mental health policy should be explored. D4H indicates five members have completed PFA training however, it would appear records need to be updated to reflect the higher number of people trained.
25	The large animal evacuation centre at Mittagong facilitated by Local Land Services (DPI) demonstrated the value of co-location shelters. This model along with the co-habitation model is more cost effective, less resource intensive, is less stressful to animals, empowers animal owners and is scalable and sustainable. These approaches have been previously advocated by AENZ and such promotion and education should continue.	
26	Dr Heather Remnant, the deploying team's veterinarian was quick to establish professional registration and insurance requirements. This led to her gaining registration to practice as a veterinarian in NSW. Identifying and maintaining a small number of AENZ veterinarians with Australian/State registration would be beneficial.	
27	The availability of four-wheel drive utility vehicles was noticeable, but AENZ was fortunate to secure two of these locally for operations. In the future, it should be remembered that rental four-wheel drives may not have tow bars fitted and these may require local procurement.	

Abbreviations

AENZ	Animal Evac New Zealand
AIMS	Australian Inter-Service Incident Management System
AWEM	Animal welfare emergency management
CDEM	Civil Defence Emergency Management
CIMS	Coordinated Incident Management System
D4H	D4H Technologies (Incident Management System)
DPI	Department of Primary Industries (NSW)
DAC	Duty Agency Commander (Animal Evac NZ)
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
FENZ	Fire & Emergency New Zealand (formerly NZ Fire Service)
HUHA	Helping You Help Animals (animal charity)
IAP	Incident Action Plan
ICP	Incident Control Point
IMT	Incident Management Team
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPI	Ministry for Primary Industries
NSW	New South Wales
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSW)
SITREP	Situation Report
TLA	Territorial Local Authority
USAR	Urban Search & Rescue
WIRES	NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc.

Media Links

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/the-weekend/audio/2018729608/kiwi-volunteers-helping-fire-affected-australian-animals>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/australia/118733022/kiwi-charity-focused-on-saving-animals-from-australias-bush-fires>

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/kiwi-volunteers-jump-the-ditch-to-help-fire-affected-australian-animals/4PHVIINL6IUSFAVMAAMKKC5LJM/>

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/northland-woman-helps-australian-wildlife-hurt-by-bushfires/OPPDTJM5CQPWID5EI7XUTFGRJM/>

<https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/world/2020/01/australia-bushfires-heart-wrenching-video-shows-wallaby-recovering-from-injuries.html>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/audio/2018731130/the-truth-about-rescuing-animals-from-the-australian-bushfires>

Deployment Roll

On-Ground

1. Steve Glassey, AENZ Duty Agency Commander
2. Mark Anderson, AENZ Deputy Duty Agency Commander
3. Dr Heather Remnant, Veterinarian
4. Jennifer Rizzi
5. Darren Gray
6. Steve Heller
7. Antonia Allum
8. Bridget King
9. Holly Hender
10. Sarah Lodge
11. Slade Macklin (Honorary Member)

Remote Support

- Miriam Quarterman
- Julia Wells
- Marsha Ali
- Evan Collins

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- Boehringer/Frontline
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- Travel Prefab
- D4H Technologies
- Greater Good Foundation
- Rothbury Insurance
- Total Fauna Solutions

And all the employers and families of our volunteers who supported their response too.

Photos & Images



Above: Rotation #1 crew with Debra Ashton, Chief Executive of SAFE.



Above: AENZ crew rescue a Wallaby



Above: Darren Gray and Jennifer Rizzi discuss operational planning using D4H.



Above: Rotation #2 crew arriving at Sydney International Airport.



Above: Jennifer Rizzi meeting incident management team at Wollondilly fire control.



Above: AENZ crew searching for fire affected animals near the Blue Mountains.



Above: AENZ supporters in Christchurch put on a fundraiser to help the response



Above: Veterinary Science student Holly Hender assesses a much loved family pet which had suffered burns.



Above: Dr Heather Remnant and Mark Anderson rescue a surviving Echidna found without any food or water sources. Later safely relocated.



Above: Dr Heather Remnant assisted by other AENZ crew treat a badly burnt survivor.



Above: Holly Hender assists a local veterinarian to assess injured wildlife



Above: Sarah Lodge takes time out with a Wallaby that survived the fires.



Above: AENZ supported the Readiness Expo held at Bundanoon, including the distribution of over 150 pet carries in conjunction with the local veterinary hospital to ensure householders could evacuate their animals safely.



Above: AENZ rescuers search for survivors



Above: "Shadow" the Wallaby was rescued by AENZ but later died of complications.



Above: Even a flock of sheep wandered to the AENZ crew, who rounded them up for assessment.



Above: Miriam Quarterman was one of many remote support volunteers that enabled the operations success.



Above: Honorary member Slade Macklin was instrumental in establishing contact with local communities and agencies.



Above: Darren Gray at the end of a long hard day.



Above: AENZ Agency Commander provides a public talk following the deployment to share the lessons from the response.

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Animal Evac New Zealand | 2021

