

Preparing for emergencies with your animals: A community conversation guide





About this guide

Past experience in Australia and around the world shows that in emergencies and disasters such as bushfires and floods, animals – wildlife, farmed, and companion animals – are often the most vulnerable members of our communities. Worrying about or losing loved animals can also put humans in dangerous situations and cause significant distress.

Planning ahead can make sure you and your beloved critters have the best chance of surviving and thriving on the other side of an emergency situation.

As disasters get more frequent, fast-moving and widespread, developing your animal emergency plan with your local community is more important than ever, because not everyone will have the resources or capacities to care for their animals by themselves.

This guide will help you take the time with some trusted neighbours, family, friends or community members to make sure that you and their animals will be as safe as possible, come fire, flood, or other emergency.

This guide has been developed as part of the 'Developing systems and capacities to protect animals in catastrophic fires' research project. This research found that emergency planning often does not include animals, or when it does, this planning is only done at the household level. The project found that during the Black Summer bushfires, this level of preparation was not sufficient, and many people needed additional support from their communities to safely care for their animals – and the communities that responded achieved amazing things, but it was also very challenging to make this happen. Planning ahead as communities will make the processes easier, more effective, and less stressful. The full project report can be found in full at <https://doi.org/10.25910/82xf-5609>.





Part 1: Organising the session

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1. Identify a small, trusted group of people you would like to work through this process with, and make a time to catch up with them, ideally in person, but a video conference chat will work too. You might also like to think about anyone you don't know that well, who would benefit from being included in the process. We know that social connection is one of the most valuable resources in disasters, so this process could be a great opportunity to build those community relationships.
 2. We suggest allowing up to 3 hours, when you will not be tired or distracted (you could break it into 3 x 1 hour sessions, if that is easier, or similar), and that a group of 3 – 4 households would be a good number. Set a date a few weeks in advance, so you can each do your homework.
 3. Let everyone know that, depending on their previous experiences, this planning process might be quite stressful and remind them of challenging situations in the past, even though it will help everyone be better prepared in future. It might be beneficial to check out www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/natural-disasters-and-your-mental-health and www.phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub which have disaster-specific mental health resources. As you work through this process with people, make sure everyone looks out for each other emotionally, and that if people need to take a break or slow down, that is respected.
 4. Before you meet up in person, allocate one person to be the “facilitator” and another to be the “notetaker.” When those people are speaking through their own plans, make sure someone else takes on the role of facilitator and notetaker, so they are free to discuss their plans.
 5. The facilitator's role is to keep conversations on track and on time, and to make sure people are feeling comfortable to discuss their situations.
 6. The notetaker's role is to write down all the things the group needs to be aware of going forward, and to make an action plan for what tasks remain at the end of the workshop.
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Part 2:

Preparing individual plans ahead of the collective session

7. Each household should prepare their own individual animal emergency plan in advance. Here are some existing templates and guidance provided by other agencies which will be useful for this:
- The New Zealand government website has a great selection for different kinds of animals and different kinds of disasters: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-emergency-management/preparing-animals-for-emergencies/>
 - These two sites focus on farm animals: <https://www.four-paws.org.au/our-stories/publications-guides/disasters-and-farm-animals-are-you-ready> and <https://ccmedia.fdacs.gov/content/download/11446/file/Disaster%20Preparedness%20for%20Livestock.pdf>
 - These two sites focus on pets; The Red Cross page has the information in a number of different languages: <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness.html> and the RSPCA has some advice specific to reptiles, rodents and other less common pets: <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-preparations-should-i-make-for-my-pets-in-case-of-an-emergency/>
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8. While developing their individual household plans, each household should identify the following (you can use Table A on the following pages as a guide):
- What resources do we not already have? For example, adequate cages to transport all our chickens.
 - What information do we not already have? For example, where are the local evacuation centres, and do we know if they would accept our animals? Have the disaster warning systems changed, and do we need to look into that?
 - What skills do we not already have? For example, the ability to confidently and quickly load all our horses onto trailers.
 - What networks do we not already have? For example, do we only know people with spare paddocks locally, who are also likely to be affected by the same bushfires/floods as we would be? Will we need to connect with some people in a neighbouring region, where their land might be safe when ours is not, or ours might be safe when theirs is not?
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Part 3:

Running the collective session

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9. Once you've all arrived and settled in, begin with each household talking through the plans they have for all their animals, and the resources, information, skills and networks that they need but do not have. Depending how many and what kind of animals each household has, this might take a little time or a lot. Try to be realistic and plan this in advance, so you don't run out of time.

 10. Let your group members know if you think they have missed any crucial steps in their emergency plan.

 11. Allow each household to share their plans and the gaps they've identified, before you turn to the group problem solving part. The notetaker can take note of all the gaps identified by each household.

 12. After each household has shared their plan, as a group, discuss which of these gaps in resources, information, skills and networks you can help fill within the group. Are everyone's needs going to be able to be met by the group? If so, what kinds of planning or communications need to happen to ensure this really works in an emergency situation? Do you need to practice anything?

 13. Which gaps remain? What can you do, as a group, to fill these gaps? Is there someone you can speak to to get more advice or information?

 14. Turn items 12 and 13 into a list of actions. For each action, allocate a person to complete it, and a timeline by which you hope to achieve it (you can use Table B on the following pages as a guide).

 15. If necessary, set up another time for the group to catch up, to check in on progress against the actions, and if any further help will be required.

 16. Celebrate your successes in multispecies community emergency planning! Thank all your human group members for their time and effort. Go home and give your non-human companions a hug or pat or special treat.

 17. Share the love! Encourage every household that was part of your group to repeat this process with another group of different people. This will help ensure more and more people in your community go through this process, and that each household has multiple points of contact who know their situation and can help them keep on top of their emergency planning and possibly help if an emergency does happen. And/or you might like to share this form and talk about your experience on social media.
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Table A: Homework for individual households to prepare in advance

Resources we need but don't have yet	How could we fill the gaps ?


Information we need but don't have yet	How could we fill the gaps ?



Table A: Homework for individual households to prepare in advance (cont.)

Skills we need but don't have yet	How could we fill the gaps ?

Networks we need but don't have yet	How could we fill the gaps ?

A photograph of two horses in a paddock. On the left is a brown horse with a dark mane, and on the right is a white horse with a light mane. They are standing in front of a metal fence. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, corrugated metal bucket. The ground is dirt with some hay. The background shows trees with sparse leaves under a blue sky.

Planning ahead can make sure you and your beloved critters have the best chance of surviving and *thriving* on the other side of an emergency situation.



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