

21 March 2024

Report to NSW Environmental Trust

Evaluation of the Bushfire Relief Fund for Wildlife Rehabilitators Project

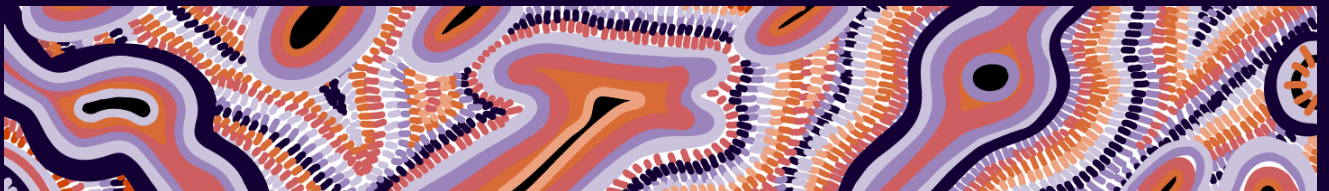
Final report



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ACIL Allen acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and its waters. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and to the youth, for the future. We extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reading this report.



Goomup, by Jarni McGuire

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Executive summary

Introduction

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent statutory body established under the *Environmental Trust Act 1998* (the Act) by the NSW Government, positioned within the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the Department). The Trust is empowered under the Act to make and supervise the expenditure of grants across a range of programs with the objective of enhancing environmental outcomes in NSW.

The Trust grant programs are overseen by Technical Review Committees (TRCs). TRCs are established under the Act and provide advice and recommendations to the Trust on the practicability and worthiness of grant applications. In some cases, TRCs also monitor and review the progress of funded projects.

The Bushfire Relief Fund for Wildlife Rehabilitators (the Fund) was funded through the Trust's Major Projects Program, under the New Government Priorities funding stream in 2019. The Trust awarded the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) a grant of \$998,000 to respond to the wildlife impacts of the 2019-20 bushfire season and to equip NPWS to protect and rehabilitate wildlife for following bushfire events. The Fund was overseen by the Community and Sustainability TRC.

The main objectives of the Fund were to:

- provide grants to wildlife rehabilitation volunteers to support the rescue, rehabilitation and release of animals injured in fire emergencies
- improve coordination and enhance the capability of the wildlife rehabilitation sector to prepare and respond to emergency events
- enhance the provision of veterinary support at emergency events.

The grant was split into 2 parts, with \$500,000 disbursed to the wildlife rehabilitation sector and \$498,000 to emergency response agencies and support organisations. The funds were allocated to programs and resources to strengthen NSW's capacity to protect and rehabilitate wildlife during and following bushfire events.

This included the provision of accredited wildlife awareness training to 200 wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians, \$300,000 in durable asset funding disbursed to 8 organisations and \$200,000 in consumable grants distributed to 25 licensed wildlife rehabilitation organisations. NPWS partnered with the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife (FNPW) to deliver the funding for assets. This was managed under FNPW's Wildlife Heroes program, a separate grant project.

This evaluation

The Trust engaged ACIL Allen to evaluate the Fund’s appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, and net benefits. The evaluation has been guided by the terms of reference below, and key evaluation questions (KEQs, see Appendix A). The terms of reference require ACIL Allen to:

- Determine the degree to which the Project exceeded or met its intended outcomes and deliverables.
- Identify any lessons learned, including but not limited to lessons around governance, financial management, project planning and design, and delivery of intended outcomes.

The evaluation involved refinement of the evaluation plan and KEQs, a desktop review, interviews with 13 stakeholders, a survey with 49 responses, analysis and reporting (see Appendix B).

Key findings

The key findings for the evaluation are provided below according to the KEQs.

Table 1.1 Overview of evaluation findings

KEQs	Key findings	Rating
Appropriateness - To what extent was the project design appropriate?		
KEQ 1: How appropriate was the planning process in the initial scoping phase?	The planning process (including development of the business plan) took place retrospectively, after an urgent release of funds was announced. This was brief and drew on key sector stakeholder perspectives of the sectors’ needs. Key stakeholders were involved in the planning, including the Trust, NPWS and FNPW.	
KEQ 2: To what extent did the project address the identified need and was it the most appropriate thing to do?	The project aligned with the wildlife response sectors’ urgent needs. While there were other objectives that could have been pursued, the objectives of the grant were an appropriate focus.	
KEQ 3: To what extent was the expenditure appropriate for the project?	Sufficient funding was provided relative to the planned activities and intended outcomes.	
Effectiveness - To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?		
KEQ 4: To what extent was the project appropriately planned and scoped to ensure delivery of intended outcomes and effective measurement of these outcomes?	The Fund’s planning and scope broadly aligned with the intended outcomes. However, this information could be better organised in planning documents to present a logical sequence from Fund inputs to outcomes.	
KEQ 5: To what extent were the project’s activities implemented as intended? If not, why, and what was the impact?	Overall, NPWS and FNPW delivered a broad range of activities, and most of the intended activities. Risks were broadly well managed through planning and refinement in discussion with the Trust.	
KEQ 6: Were the intended outputs delivered, do these represent value for money, and was the project delivered on time and on budget?	Overall, the Fund delivered most of the intended outputs. These were largely perceived to be needed, high-quality and fit-for-purpose. The outputs and outcomes were in line with Government priorities and responsibilities and are having ongoing legacy impacts in the sector. Some outputs were not delivered due to factors beyond NPWS’ control. The project was delivered on budget, and on time, in accordance with revised project timeframes.	
Efficiency - To what extent has the project operated efficiently?		
KEQ 7: How well managed was the project? To what extent were the methods for making decisions and	Not all of the Trust’s grant management processes were followed. While this did not create adverse outcomes, there are opportunities to improve the balance between flexibility and accountability in managing future Trust grants.	

KEQs	Key findings	Rating
managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?	NPWS and FNPW generally managed the Fund well. However, NPWS did not collect outcomes data as originally intended, and only sought approval for this retrospectively. This is not good practice.	
KEQ 8: How efficiently was the project delivered (including planned activities and implementation costs)? To what extent could resources have been allocated more efficiently?	Overall, the Fund delivery and resource allocation were efficient. The project activities were delivered on budget, and on time, in accordance with revised project timeframes. Administration costs were minimal. Minor amendments were made to reallocate funding across years and activities. This process worked well.	●
KEQ 9: Did the project deliver value for money?	The Fund has provided value for money by delivering strong impact for a relatively small funding amount.	●
Opportunities		
KEQ 10: What were the lessons learned and/or other opportunities related to the project, including what could be done differently?	There are opportunities for the Trust and NPWS to improve future projects by strengthening grant delivery arrangements, and enhancing wildlife responses by addressing gaps and opportunities specific to the sector.	●
KEQ 11: What were the associated risks with governance, financial management, and project planning?	The Trust, NPWS and FNPW broadly managed risks well. Issues were quickly raised and resolved through discussions and grant variations. However, there is a need for better accountability around changes to project outcomes, more transparent financial management, and planning for critical dependencies.	●
Legend: ● no achievement ● minimal achievement ● moderate achievement ● strong achievement ● very strong achievement Source: ACIL Allen		

Recommendations

The recommendations for the Trust to improve future grant programs and delivery are provided below.

There are opportunities for the Trust to maximise its investment, by working with funding recipients to explore legacy impacts and encouraging funding recipients to continue to leverage the grant outcomes after the grant concludes.

Recommendation 1

The Trust should ensure that funding recipients (such as NPWS) take appropriate steps in implementing grants to maximise ongoing legacy impacts during and following the grant period.

There were trade-offs associated with the urgent funding release and Fund planning. During the retrospective design and expedited planning process, NPWS and the Trust did not create clear pathways to impact for the Fund, nor appropriately prepare for impact measurement or reporting. There are opportunities to enhance these planning and reporting processes for future grant delivery. Some of this work has already taken place, as the Trust regularly updates standard templates in response to user feedback.

Recommendation 2

The Trust should:

- explore amendments to its standard planning templates to incorporate program logics (to present a logical sequence from Fund inputs to outcomes) as a standard foundation for project planning
- include standard terms for how devolved grants should be managed and reported on
- check on project progress by ensuring the grantee is collecting impact data throughout the grant lifecycle to ensure that its impact can be determined.

There are opportunities to improve the balance between flexibility and accountability in managing future Trust grants.

Recommendation 3

The Trust should:

- consider incorporating more regular check-ins with grantees, particularly for higher risk and value projects, and use this as an opportunity to collaboratively reflect on and amend the project delivery as needed
- require that grantees have appropriate (strengthened) mechanisms in place to ensure knowledge transfer, and that staff turnover does not impact institutional knowledge or grant delivery
- ensure that grantees have strong financial management practices in place so that funding expenditure is appropriately tracked, managed and acquitted (noting that NPWS' practices highlighted a need for enhanced assurance).

There is an opportunity for the Trust to better map its funding and work with grantees over the life of the grant to explore potential partnerships with grants delivered in related areas.

Recommendation 4

The Trust should explore opportunities to better connect with other existing and newly funded projects and grants in related areas to better leverage any synergies and reduce unnecessary gaps or overlaps. This could be explored with grantees on an ongoing basis as projects are delivered.



This chapter provides an overview of the context and the evaluation.

1.1 Background and context

1.1.1 2019-20 bushfires

The 2019-2020 bushfire season has been named the 'most devastating' in New South Wales's (NSW) history, with almost 7% (5.5 million hectares) of the state's area burnt, approximately 2,500 homes destroyed, and 26 lives lost.¹ The economic impact of the bushfires has been estimated at a \$4.6 billion reduction in Australia's gross domestic product (GDP).²

Prolonged drought prior to the 2019-20 summer affected 98% of NSW.³ This led to an unusually early and challenging start to the fire season in NSW.⁴ The 'Bush Fire Danger Period' was declared 2 months earlier than usual, beginning on 1 August 2019 in several Local Government Areas.⁵ By February 2020, over 11,000 bush and grass fires had occurred throughout the state.

The bushfires were eventually suppressed by significant human resources and rainfall.⁶

The *NSW Bushfire Inquiry* (published in July 2020) and the Commonwealth's *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* (published in October 2020) highlighted the ecological impact of the bushfires, including the significant, long-term damage to biodiversity.

¹ NSW RFS (2020). *Bush Fire bulletin, Unprecedented, the 2019/20 fire season, V42, No1/2020*. Accessed January 2024: https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/174823/Bush-Fire-Bulletin-Vol-42-No1.pdf.

² SGS Economics and Planning (2020). *Economic recovery after disaster strikes - volume two*. Accessed January 2024: https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/171663_suncorp_group_ltd_supporting_documents_1.pdf.

³ NSW RFS (2019a). *NSW RFS declares start of Bush Fire Danger Period*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/nsw-rfs-declares-start-of-bush-fire-danger-period>.

⁴ NSW RFS (2019b). *Bush Fire bulletin, Early fires hit hard, V41, No2/2019*. Accessed January 2024: https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/131479/Bush-Fire-Bulletin-Vol41-No2.pdf.

⁵ NSW RFS (2019a). Op. cit.

⁶ BBC (2020) *Australia fires: New South Wales blazes all 'contained'*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-51484814>.

Throughout the season, it is estimated that over 1 billion animals died nationwide in the fires.⁷ This prompted significant responses from governments, not-for-profits and the community. Of a total of \$3.2 billion allocated to support the bushfire relief effort, approximately \$100 million (3% of the total) was directed towards wildlife and habitat rehabilitation.⁸

1.1.2 The NSW Environmental Trust

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent statutory body established under the Act by the NSW Government. The Trust is positioned within the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the Department), formerly the Department of Planning and Environment, and the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

The Trust is empowered under the Act to make and supervise the expenditure of grants across a range of programs with the objective of enhancing environmental outcomes in NSW. These programs include Major Projects (including ongoing major projects, strategic major projects, and new government priorities), contestable grants, and various NSW Government initiatives. The Trust is chaired by the NSW Minister for the Environment, and includes representatives from the Department, the Nature Conservation Council, NSW Treasury, and local government.⁹ Trust grant programs are administered by Trust administration, which sits within the Department.

The Trust provided \$48 million in expenditure on environmental initiatives and support in 2021-22.¹⁰ The Trust:

- Supported 30 active major projects¹¹ dedicated to addressing challenges that require long-term, targeted support. Recent examples include an 8-year, \$7.3 million project to eradicate a highly invasive plant species, and a 5-year \$14.7 million project to control feral cat populations.¹²
- Provided 22 contestable and other small grants¹³ that are dispersed through competitive application processes, awarded based upon eligibility and merit. These included grants of up to \$200,000 (to each successful applicant) for environmental research,¹⁴ environmental restoration and rehabilitation.¹⁵

Trust grant programs are overseen by TRCs. TRCs provide advice and recommendations to the Trust on the practicability and worthiness of grant applications. Under the Major Projects program, TRCs also monitor and review the progress of funded projects (including improvements, where

⁷ University of Sydney (2020) *More than one billion animals killed in Australian bushfires*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/01/08/australian-bushfires-more-than-one-billion-animals-impacted.html>

⁸ Bishop, Joshua (2020) *Burnt Assets: The 2019-2020 Australian Bushfires*. WWF Australia: Sydney.

⁹ NSW Government (n.d.). *About the NSW Environmental Trust*. Accessed February 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/funding-and-support/nsw-environmental-trust/about-the-nsw-environmental-trust#:~:text=The%20Trust%20is%20chaired%20by,Conservation%20Council%20and%20NSW%20Treasury.>

¹⁰ NSW Environmental Trust (2022). *Annual Report 2021-22*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NSW Environmental Trust (n.d.) *Prospectus*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/funding-and-support/nsw-environmental-trust/major-projects/prospectus>

¹³ NSW Environmental Trust (2022). *Op Cit*.

¹⁴ NSW Environmental Trust (n.d.) *Environmental Research*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/funding-and-support/nsw-environmental-trust/grants-available/environmental-research>

¹⁵ NSW Environmental Trust (n.d.) *Environmental Restoration and Rehabilitation*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/funding-and-support/nsw-environmental-trust/grants-available/environmental-restoration-and-rehabilitation>

relevant) , and may provide recommendations or conditions as part of their endorsement. TRCs only provide endorsement; they do not directly award grants or approve grant expenditures as this is the responsibility of the Trust or its delegates.

1.1.3 The Bushfire Relief Fund for Wildlife Rehabilitators

The Bushfire Relief Fund for Wildlife Rehabilitators (the Fund) was funded through the Trust's Major Projects Program, under the New Government Priorities funding stream in 2019. The Trust awarded the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) a grant of \$998,000 to respond to the wildlife impacts of the 2019-20 bushfire season and to equip NPWS to protect and rehabilitate wildlife for following bushfire events.

The main objectives of the Fund were to:

- provide grants to wildlife rehabilitation volunteers to support the rescue, rehabilitation and release of animals injured in fire emergencies
- improve coordination and enhance the capability of the wildlife rehabilitation sector to prepare and respond to emergency events
- enhance the provision of veterinary support at emergency events.

The grant was split into 2 parts, with \$500,000 disbursed to the wildlife rehabilitation sector and \$498,000 to emergency response agencies and support organisations. The funds were allocated to programs and resources to strengthen NSW's capacity to protect and rehabilitate wildlife during and following bushfire events. This included \$300,000 in durable asset funding and \$200,000 in consumable grants. NPWS partnered with the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife (FNPW) to deliver the funding for assets. This was managed under FNPW's Wildlife Heroes program, a separate grant project. The project was endorsed by the Community and Sustainability TRC.

1.2 This evaluation

The Trust engaged ACIL Allen to evaluate the Fund's appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, and net benefits. The evaluation has been guided by the terms of reference below, and key evaluation questions (KEQs, see Appendix A). The terms of reference require ACIL Allen to:

- Determine the degree to which the Project exceeded or met its intended outcomes and deliverables.
- Identify any lessons learned, including but not limited to lessons around governance, financial management, project planning and design, and delivery of intended outcomes.

1.2.1 Methodology

The evaluation involved refinement of the evaluation plan and KEQs, a desktop review, stakeholder engagement, analysis, and reporting. Stakeholder engagement included interviews with Trust administration, NPWS, FNPW, Wildlife Emergency Response Training (WERT) Group members, and TRC members, as well as a survey with 49 responses. Respondents were predominantly from wildlife rehabilitation organisations (53%), NSW Government (24%) and non-government organisations (20%). Further detail on the methodology is provided in Appendix B.

1.2.2 This report

This report presents the evaluation findings (chapter 2) and a conclusion containing opportunities and recommendations (chapter 3). Additional information is provided in appendices, including the KEQs (appendix A), stakeholder engagement and survey analysis (appendix B).

Evaluation findings

2

This chapter provides the evaluation findings related to the appropriateness of the project design, project delivery effectiveness, efficiency, and opportunities.










2.1 Overview of evaluation findings








Overall, the Fund has been successful. The urgent release of funding and design of the Fund was in line with the wildlife response sectors' needs, and appropriate in supporting the capability and capacity of the sector. The Fund delivered value for money and was generally delivered on time and on budget.

While program management arrangements provided flexibility to evolve over time, the evaluation identified some gaps in the planning, reporting and accountability arrangements.

An overview of the evaluation findings is provided in Table 2.1. We have used Harvey balls to summarise the evaluation findings and demonstrate the degree to which the Fund has been assessed as meeting the KEQs. The evaluation findings are discussed below.

Table 2.1 Overview of evaluation findings

KEQs	Rating
Appropriateness - To what extent was the project design appropriate?	
KEQ 1: How appropriate was the planning process in the initial scoping phase?	
KEQ 2: To what extent did the project address the identified need and was it the most appropriate thing to do?	
KEQ 3: To what extent was the expenditure appropriate for the project?	
Effectiveness - To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?	
KEQ 4: To what extent was the project appropriately planned and scoped to ensure delivery of intended outcomes and effective measurement of these outcomes?	
KEQ 5: To what extent were the project's activities implemented as intended? If not, why, and what was the impact?	
KEQ 6: Were the intended outputs delivered, do these represent value for money, and was the project delivered on time and on budget?	
Efficiency - To what extent has the project operated efficiently?	
KEQ 7: How well managed was the project? To what extent were the methods for making decisions and managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?	
KEQ 8: How efficiently was the project delivered (including planned activities and implementation costs)? To what extent could resources have been allocated more efficiently?	
KEQ 9: Did the project deliver value for money?	
Opportunities	

KEQs	Rating
KEQ 10: What were the lessons learned and/or other opportunities related to the project, including what could be done differently?	
KEQ 11: What were the associated risks with governance, financial management, and project planning?	
Legend:  no achievement  minimal achievement  moderate achievement  strong achievement  very strong achievement	
Source: ACIL Allen	

2.2 Appropriateness

KEQs under the appropriateness evaluation theme focus on the question: *To what extent was the project design appropriate?* The KEQs are addressed below.

2.2.1 KEQ 1: Appropriateness of the planning process in the initial scoping phase

The planning process (including development of the business plan) took place retrospectively, after an urgent release of funds was announced. This was brief and drew on key sector stakeholder perspectives of the sectors' needs.



Key stakeholders were involved in the planning, including Trust administration, NPWS and FNPW.

On 1 November 2019, the then NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean announced \$1 million for the Fund, with funding available from 1 December 2019.¹⁶ The media release defined the broad aim of the Fund, to 'help wildlife rehabilitators respond and prepare for national emergencies'. This was an urgent response and enabled rapid delivery of funding to the sector through the Major Projects program, which provides non-competitive funding that can be urgently released to deliver funding in emergency situations.

The Fund was planned after this announcement, with a business plan co-designed by Trust administration and NPWS in line with the announcement. The budget was fixed based on the announcement, with the timeframes and scope designed through a business plan process.

Business plan development took place over approximately one month, a relatively brief co-design process that aligned with the need to urgently release funding and respond quickly to sector challenges. While there was limited time available for consultation and evidence gathering, stakeholders reported that key organisations were included in early discussions and helped shape the Fund objectives during the initial planning/design phase.

"There would normally be a design phase to do some research to explore what is needed the most to improve the sector, but the urgent response meant that you didn't have the design phase."

"This was a responsive program. It did not follow a fulsome Trust design process."

The Fund aligned with the government strategies, including the NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy,¹⁷ NSW Koala Strategy,¹⁸ and Saving our Species initiative.¹⁹

¹⁶ NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (2021). *Wildlife and Conservation Bushfire Recovery, Medium-term response plan*, p42.

¹⁷ NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (2020). *NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy*

¹⁸ NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (2018). *NSW Koala Strategy 2018-21*

¹⁹ NSW Department of Planning and Environment (n.d.). *Saving our Species Framework*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/saving-our-species-program/threatened-species-conservation>

Common objectives included: securing threatened species in the wild; providing support for the safety and health of the koala population; providing on-the-ground support in response to bushfire emergencies in close collaboration with the wildlife rehabilitation sector; and supporting volunteers and strengthening the capacity of the wildlife rehabilitation sector to deliver on-ground services. As such, it aligned with other strategies current at the time.

The TRC does not have a role in the design process but is generally responsible for endorsing business plans and annual reporting. While the TRC endorsed the Fund business plan, it reported limited visibility of the early design phase and suggested that there would be benefit from more involvement to help build the relationship between the grantee and TRC.

2.2.2 KEQ 2: Extent to which the project addressed the identified need and was the most appropriate thing to do

The project aligned with the wildlife response sector's urgent needs. While there were other objectives that could have been pursued, the objectives of the grant were an appropriate focus.



Stakeholders reported that the Fund's objectives were fit-for-purpose and aligned with the urgent needs identified by the wildlife response sector during the 2019-20 bushfires. The objectives focused on immediate response requirements, including training and guidance for wildlife carers, support to re-build assets, and funding for consumables.

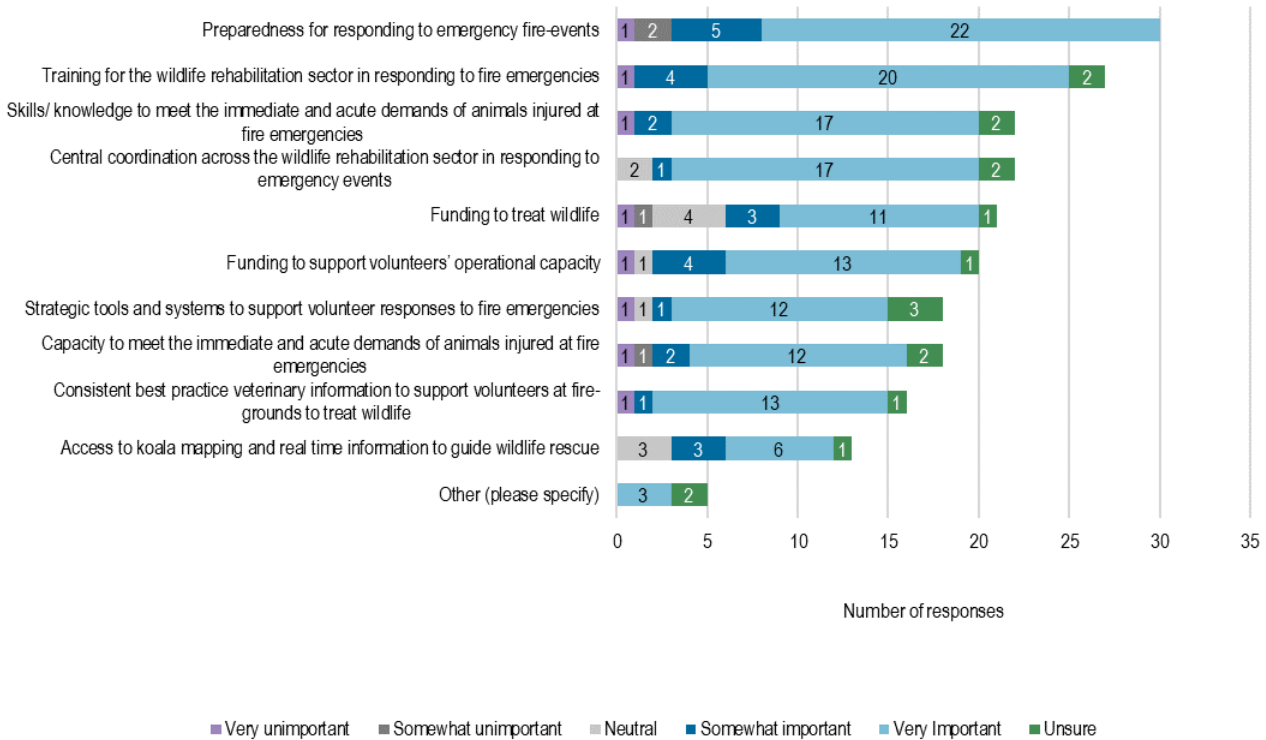
Some stakeholders reported that the focus on better integrating wildlife into the broader emergency response sector was strongly needed. Further, as noted in the Fund business plan, the funding required was not covered by allocations made by government agencies responding to fire emergencies, and there were no targeted programs to deal with the large influx of injured animals and the future needs of wildlife rehabilitation volunteers and veterinary staff.

The Fund was subsequently shown to align with the sectors' needs and outcomes identified in the NSW and Australian Government bushfire inquiries. This suggests that the Fund was effective in aligning with the sector needs identified at the time.

This is supported by the evaluation survey, which shows that most relevant respondents (i.e., those that did not select 'not applicable') considered that it was *very* or *somewhat important* for their organisation that the Fund focused on needs or challenges (see Figure 2.1), including:

- *Preparedness for responding to emergency fire-events, 90%*
- *Training for the wildlife rehabilitation sector in responding to fire emergencies, 89%*
- *Skills/knowledge to meet the immediate and acute demands of animals injured at fire emergencies, 86%*
- *Central coordination across the wildlife rehabilitation sector in responding to emergency events, 82%.*

Figure 2.1 How important was the Bushfire Relief Fund in helping to address the following needs or challenges for you/your organisation?



Note: Responses that selected 'Not applicable' have been omitted in this visual. N=41.

Source: ACIL Allen

Interviewed stakeholders reported that there could have been a stronger focus on coordination across the sector and across comparable agencies across Australia (particularly with the Australian, ACT and Victorian Governments) and development of a NSW centralised wildlife response plan (managed by a single government agency, with input from expert agencies). This need for support directed at longer-term coordination became more evident as grant delivery began and outcomes emerged (discussed further in sections 2.3.3 and 2.5.1).

Stakeholders also identified the need for support for everyday costs (e.g. formula, food, fuel), support for the wildlife response workforce around mental health and burnout, and development of a centralised database to connect better organisations and leverage capacity. This was also supported by respondents to the evaluation survey (see Figure 2.1).

However, interviewed stakeholders highlighted the Fund's challenging delivery circumstances. They reported that the 2019-20 bushfire season presented a fast-paced, highly changeable, and evolving landscape encompassing funding, policy, and service delivery. The funding was urgently needed when it was announced in late 2019. However, the sector was subsequently provided with unprecedented funding from governments and donations from the community and non-profit sector. The NSW Government committed \$3 billion²⁰ in funding toward the bushfire response, recovery, and awareness, and significant funding was received by not-for-profit organisations to support the

²⁰ NSW Government (n.d.). *Recovery from the 2019/20 bushfires*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding/recovery-from-2019/20-bushfires#:~:text=Targeted%20support%20to%20meet%20the,billion%20from%20the%20NSW%20Government>

bushfire response, such as the Australian Red Cross (\$242 million),²¹ and World Wide Fund for Nature (\$51 million).²²

While the Fund was already underway by the time these funding sources emerged, in hindsight, this influx of support lessened the need for government funding and highlighted the need to better integrate diverse funding sources across the sector (see section 2.5.1).

2.2.3 KEQ 3: Extent to which the expenditure was appropriate for the project

Sufficient funding was provided relative to the planned activities and intended outcomes.



As stated in section 1.1.3, the Fund allocated \$300,000 to durable assets, \$200,000 to consumable grants, and \$498,000 to emergency response agencies and support organisations. Stakeholders reported that activities and intended outcomes planned for under the Fund were proportional to the budgeted expenditure.

The original funding was largely seen as appropriate for the project, and some stakeholders reported that more funding would not have been helpful in delivering the outcomes at the time. While more NPWS personnel may have helped, the Fund's delivery speed was limited to some extent by the timing of the NSW and Australian bushfire inquiries. Further, the significant government, not-for-profit and other community support subsequently received by the sector led most wildlife response organisations to be overwhelmed with funding in the short term. Given the relatively small scale of the sector, these funds were not quickly dispersed nor expended.²³

The evaluation survey presents mixed views on the funding, where respondents most commonly reported that the funding was *about right to complete the agreed activity* (38%, see Figure B.3). However, 25% stated it was *not enough*, as the ongoing costs of PPE were too high (noting that funding ongoing costs is beyond the scope of the Fund). Some stakeholders also suggested that additional engagement with wildlife rehabilitation organisations would have been positive.

Value for money is discussed in section 2.3.3.

2.3 Effectiveness

KEQs under the effectiveness evaluation theme focus on the question: *To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?* The KEQs are addressed below.

2.3.1 KEQ 4: Extent to which the project was appropriately planned and scoped to ensure delivery of intended outcomes and effective measurement of these outcomes

The Fund's planning and scope broadly aligned with the intended outcomes. However, this information could be better organised in planning documents to present a logical sequence from Fund inputs to outcomes.



The Fund business plan was first drafted in November 2019. The business plan included a range of sections with information on inputs, activities, outputs and intended outcomes, as well as risk and

²¹ Australian Red Cross (2023). *Australian Bushfires*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.redcross.org.au/bushfirereport/>.

²² WWF Australia (n.d.). *How your bushfire recovery donation is making an impact*. Accessed January 2024: <https://wwf.org.au/what-we-do/australian-bushfires/how-your-bushfire-recovery-donation-is-making-a-difference/>.

²³ O'Malley, N. (2022). *Two years after devastating bushfires donated funds remain unspent*. accessed January 2024: <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/two-years-after-devastating-bushfires-donated-funds-remain-unspent-20220214-p59w5t.html>.

stakeholder management. The ‘outcomes logic and evaluation framework’ section outlined the intended outcomes, the underlying evidence and assumptions, evaluation questions, performance indicators and targets (including tolerance and baseline) and the role responsible for collecting the required information.

However, this information is complex, lengthy, and poorly connected. There was no overarching program logic, as would be good practice,²⁴ to connect inputs with activities, outputs, and outcomes, nor to identify how this will be monitored and evaluated. As such, it is difficult to see a clear pathway between the funding streams and intended outcomes.

A program logic was later developed after the NSW Bushfire Inquiry report was delivered. The program logic summarised the business plan objectives for use in planning and stakeholder communication. However, many of the stated immediate and intermediate outcomes are activities or outputs. For example, “\$300,000 durable asset grants to rehabilitators and not-for-profit vets in partnership with FNPW”, “20 additional vets and/or vet nurses trained in wildlife care”, and “engagement with rehab and vet sectors”. This has flowed through to reporting, which also focuses predominantly on the delivery of activities or outputs.

The business plan requires NPWS to provide information on how the devolved grants will be used to meet the Trust’s objectives but does not provide clear guidelines on how devolved grants must be managed and acquitted. This creates the potential for gaps in the information provided by NPWS to the Trust. Given that the Trust has templates for developing business cases, business plans, annual and final reports, there is an opportunity for the Trust to specify the details required for reporting on devolved grants. As one stakeholder reflected:

“There is no checklist for grant administrators on what should be sent in the grant reports – this should be set up in the business plan so you can check this off at the end.”

In contrast with these gaps, stakeholders reported that the Fund’s planning and scope broadly aligned with the intended outcomes. However, most stakeholders did not have visibility of processes put in place to measure outcomes and impacts.

The business plan outlined the requirement for regular 6-monthly reporting, which would track progress against the workplan, budgeting, lessons learnt, and risks. NPWS was required to survey various stakeholders to understand the extent to which the Fund’s outcomes had been achieved. However, it did not detail how impact would be assessed or reported. Future planning should consider the full pathway to impact, and how this will be measured.

FNPW’s planned grant management included tracking outcomes related to the delivery of asset and consumable grants. FNPW used *SmartyGrants* (a grant management software commonly used by the government and non-profit sector) to verify grantee claims and reported on the outcomes planned in the business plan.

The TRC was responsible for endorsing the business plan, progress, and final reports. This aimed to provide governance and a broader systems-level perspective of the Fund within the bushfire funding landscape. The TRC endorsed the business plan with only minor wording changes.

²⁴ NSW Government (2024). *Step 1: Develop program logic and review needs*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/premiers-department/evaluation-toolkit/steps-managing-an-evaluation-project/step-1-develop-program-logic-and-review-needs>.

2.3.2 KEQ 5: Extent to which the activities were implemented as intended

Overall, NPWS and FNPW delivered a broad range of activities, and most of the intended activities. Risks were broadly well managed through planning and refinement in discussion with the Trust.



NPWS and FNPW delivered a range of activities under the Fund. This included employing 2 wildlife project officers to deliver the Fund activities; managing the devolved grants (including developing funding criteria and a portal for the devolved grants, dispersing funding); engaging the sector to identify future funding gaps; supporting veterinarian, firefighter and volunteer training (including subsidised positions); conducting koala mapping; trialling the TeleVet services and wildlife coordinator role; reviewing interstate wildlife emergency response procedures; developing training resources (bushfire awareness, Incident Control System (ICS), and wildlife first aid); and conducting an after-action review (AAR) with wildlife rehabilitation and veterinary sectors involved in bushfires.

The Fund also brought stakeholders together to form working groups, including the Wildlife Emergency Response Taskforce (WERT) working group, the Wildlife First Response training for NSW firefighters (Wildlife First Response training) and the TeleVet Service Trial for Wildlife (the TeleVet trial).

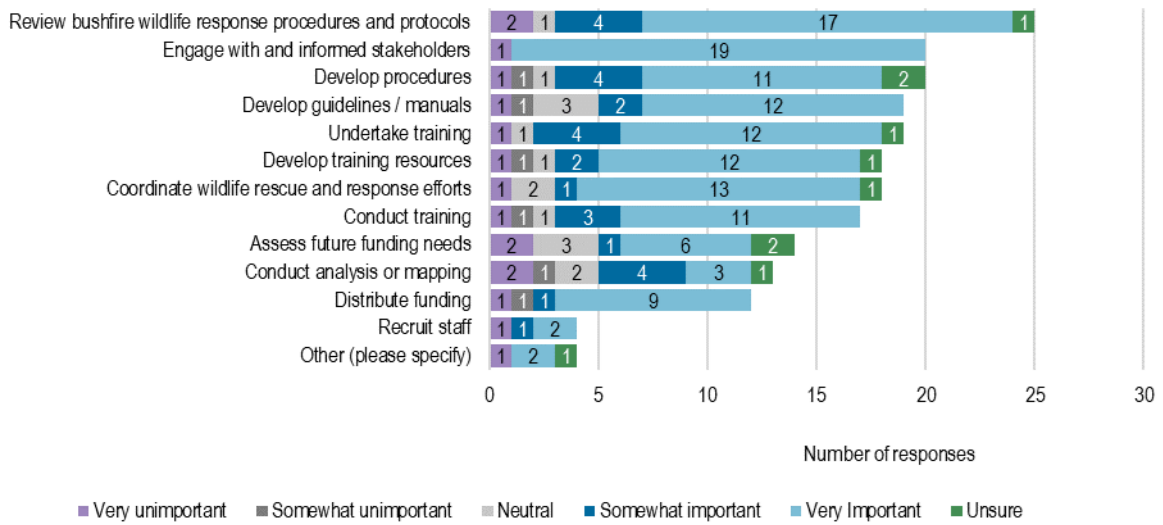
These activities were underpinned by broad stakeholder engagement with relevant agencies (i.e. NSW Wildlife Council, RFS, Forestry Corporation of NSW, State Emergency Service (SES) and Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW)).

Most of the activities were completed, noting that some activities were tied to outputs that could not be finalised due to circumstances beyond the control of NPWS and FNPW. This is discussed further in section 2.3.3.

The evaluation survey shows that respondents most commonly identified that the Fund enabled activities such as *Review bushfire wildlife response procedures and protocols* (25 respondents), and to *Engage with and inform stakeholders* and *Develop procedures* (both 20 respondents). Respondents most commonly considered that the Fund was important or very important in *Engaging with and informing stakeholders* (95% of respondents, see Figure 2.2).

The Fund also supported respondents to *develop guidelines/manuals*, *develop training resources*, *undertake or conduct training*, and *coordinate wildlife rescue and response efforts* (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 What activities did the Bushfire Relief Fund enable you to undertake, and how important were these to you/your organisation?



Note: Responses that selected 'Not applicable' have been omitted in this visual. n=41.

Source: ACIL Allen

NPWS evolved the original business plan over the life of the Fund to reflect the changing circumstances and needs of the sector, findings from the wildlife response training and TeleVet trial working groups, and emerging evidence from the NSW (Recommendation 53) and Australian (Chapter 16) bushfire inquiries. This flexibility was incorporated into the design of the business plan (see section 2.2.2), yet Trust approval was not sought for amendments to the intended outcomes over time (discussed further in section 2.4.1).

“The Fund focused on getting things in on the ground early and then morphed to focus on embedding training. This reflects a logical maturing of the grant purpose and the necessary follow through to translation.”

The Fund evolved to use Recommendation 53 from the NSW Bushfire Inquiry to guide to certain project activities. For example, the Fund’s final report states that the Wildlife First Response handbook and training support delivery of Recommendation 53(d). Recommendation 53 states:²⁵

- That Government develop and implement a policy on injured wildlife response, rescue and rehabilitation including:*
- a) a framework for the co-ordination and interaction with emergency management structures*
 - b) guidelines for Incident Management Plans to include wildlife rescue and rehabilitation as a consideration*
 - c) a requirement for all vets and wildlife rescue volunteers to obtain the Bush Fire Awareness accreditation*
 - d) guidance for firefighters on handling injured wildlife.*

The business plan set good foundations for managing project risk. Risks was monitored during annual reporting and progress meetings with the Trust. For example, by including a provision for the grant period to extend through the fire season and into following years, depending on demand and the likely need for continued support for the sector.

The grant timeframes and milestone delivery dates were later extended to accommodate delays in recruitment, Fund activities and activities beyond the control of NPWS and FNPW (e.g. Resilience

²⁵ NSW Government (2020). *Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry*.

NSW's review of functional areas for wildlife response, recommendation 76 of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry). However, some activities and outputs remained undelivered at the conclusion of the Fund (see section 2.3.3). Risks associated with recommendation 76 could not have been identified at the outset of the Fund. However, NPWS identified a dependency on DPI's delivery of the wildlife response plan in the second progress report (to 31 December 2020), noting that NPWS had limited potential to mitigate this risk.

2.3.3 KEQ 6: Delivery of intended outputs on time and on budget and value for money

Overall, the Fund delivered most of the intended outputs. These were largely perceived to be needed, high-quality and fit-for-purpose. The outputs and outcomes were in line with Government priorities and responsibilities and are having ongoing legacy impacts in the sector. Some outputs were not delivered due to factors beyond NPWS' control.



The project was delivered on budget, and on time, in accordance with revised project timeframes.

Delivery of intended outputs

As discussed in section 2.3.2, the Fund evolved over time, and as such the outputs and outcomes reported in the Fund's final report varied from those outlined in the business plan. These outcomes were shaped through collaboration with key stakeholders.

The Fund ultimately aimed to increase the capacity of wildlife rehabilitation groups and vets to respond to fire emergencies and improve the effectiveness of volunteers to respond to fire emergencies. The Fund delivered outputs in line with this overarching objective.

The Fund delivered \$304,482 in durable asset grants to 8 wildlife rehabilitation organisations (for construction of enclosures, storage rooms and fire trailers), and \$195,622 in consumable funding to 25 recipients impacted by bushfires for emergency use. These figures vary slightly from the original funding amounts, with \$4,482 in additional expenditure for durable asset grants and \$4,378 underspent for consumable grants. The underspend for consumable grants was to accommodate for the majority of the overspending on durable asset grants. The remaining overspend was covered by NPWS.

Other outputs from the Fund include a wildlife first response training course and handbook,²⁶ wildlife care training to vets/vet nurses, and trials of a TeleVet service and an Incident Management Team (IMT) Technical Advisor (for wildlife) (TAW) role.

NPWS also coordinated 14 working group meetings over the duration of the Fund across the 3 working groups identified in section 2.3.2.

Of the total project outputs listed in the project's final report, 15 of 17 (88%) were completed and 2 were not completed. These outputs are distinct from the 22 project milestones (see section 2.4.2), which were initially defined in the business plan as measures for success. The 17 project outputs were not all identified in the business plan, with some only identified in the final report. The delivery of the remaining 2 outputs was dependent on other agencies and stakeholders.

The Fund's delivery required the development of a wildlife response plan by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in their role as lead for the Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area (AASFA) under the NSW State Emergency Management Plan. However, Resilience NSW

²⁶ NSW Department of Planning and Environment (n.d.). *Wildlife first response training for NSW firefighters*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/native-animals/helping-wildlife-in-emergencies/wildlife-first-response-training-for-nsw-firefighters>.

recommended the transition of responsibility for NSW wildlife response emergency management arrangements from DPI AASFA to the Environmental Service Functional Area (EnvSFA within EPA) under Recommendation 76 of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry. DPI AASFA ceased all related work during the review, which caused delays in the development of a wildlife response plan.

As such, NPWS' suite of draft resources and tools (role summaries, guidelines, TAW tools) for DPI AASFA and RFS review and approval, were not finalised. This directly impacted the development of the wildlife response framework. This could only be further developed after changes to responsibilities are implemented.

The second outstanding output was a trial of a staging area for use by WERT members.. This output required the wildlife response framework to be in place. Instead, NPWS delivered an in-person wildlife response workshop to explore wildlife triage sites in scenarios of fires of differing severities, and further develop the tools and resources.

The TRC endorsed the Fund's final report with 2 recommendations to explore the funding amount's impact on caring for wildlife in bushfires and to address Fund milestones that were not delivered, noting that these require inputs from other sector stakeholders.

The outputs supported the Fund to achieve the following outcomes and objectives.

Capacity of wildlife rehabilitation groups and vets to respond to fire emergencies

Stakeholders reported that the Fund was effective in building the capacity of wildlife rehabilitation groups and vets to respond to fire emergencies.

The development and implementation of training for vets and firefighters by Taronga Zoo was well received by the sector. This component also provided wildlife rehabilitators with resources on where to seek support and information and influenced the creation of a technical advisory wildlife role in an Incident Management Team (IMT) for an incident. One stakeholder reported that this was successful in the Bega and Byron Bay bushfires.

The provision of consumables supported everyday needs for wildlife responders, while funding for assets enabled organisations to rebuild following the 2019-20 bushfires. Stakeholders reported that these elements were well-received by the sector. The Fund also encouraged volunteers to develop their own systems for evacuation, training, coordination.

"The Wildlife Heroes [asset] funding was a really successful component. This was necessary to necessary to get vets into the field."

Stakeholders reported that the TeleVet trial was a good idea. It was an app developed specifically to connect emergency responders with wildlife rehabilitators and general practice vets, to request advice on the treatment and care of injured wildlife.

However, stakeholders considered that the full potential of TeleVet was not realised. This was because the trial took place from April to June, contained a limited number of participants (12) and encountered technical issues with the app. The trial's relatively small number of participants made it difficult to gain insights on the functionality of the service.

Issues in communication regarding the service's offering may have impacted its use, as some stakeholders reported poor clarity on whether the on-call vets were trained in wildlife first response. The grant period finished before the trial. The trial evaluation report recommended a second trial to scale the app during a busier period (in terms of demand for wildlife support).

Effectiveness of volunteers in responding to fire emergencies

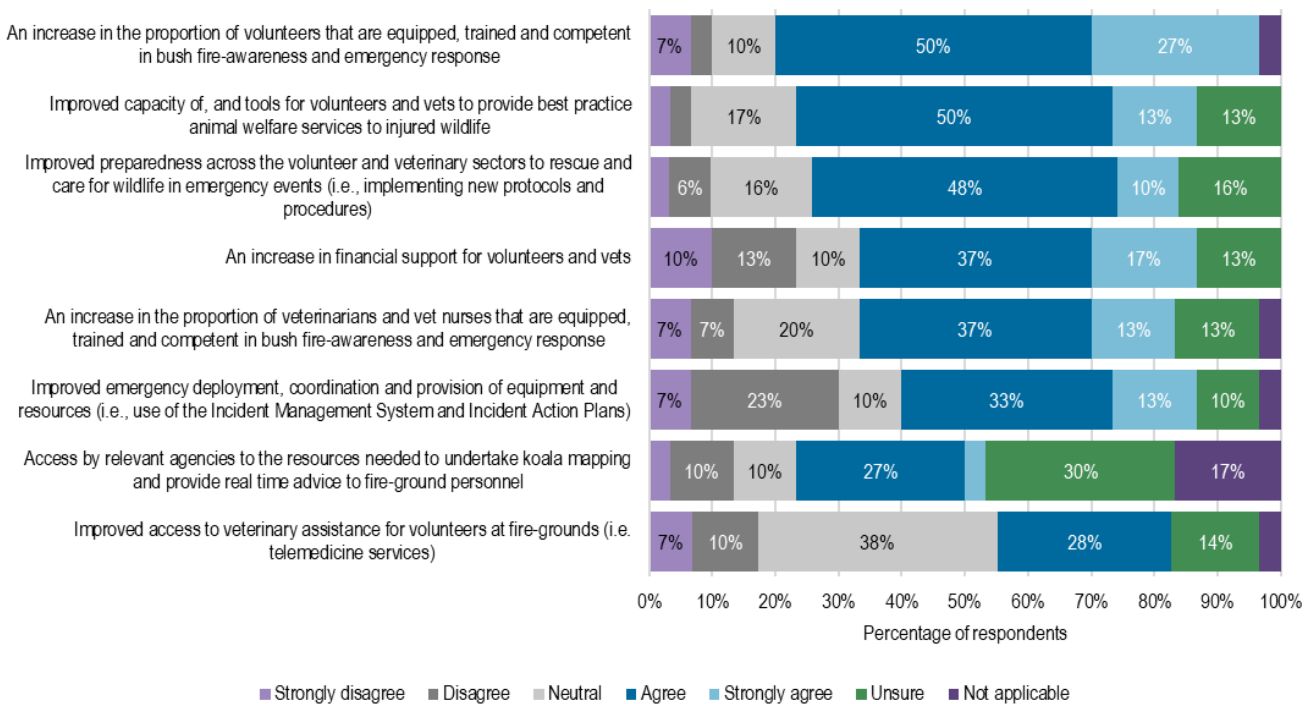
Stakeholders reported that the WERT Group and TAW role had a large impact on building collaboration and clarifying lines of communication interstate and within NSW (particularly among

NSW organisations that were not previously interacting). The Fund supported the development of collaborative relationships across key organisations that will benefit a range of other programs and issues.

The NPWS resources (2-hour online Wildlife First Response training and handbook²⁷), training courses provided by NPWS in collaboration with Taronga (wildlife care training) and TAFE/RFS (bushfire awareness training) have been key in supporting on-ground operations. Stakeholders reported that this is giving firefighters and the wildlife rehabilitation sector the confidence to operate effectively on firegrounds.

These resources and courses were recognised to be highly effective, with 77% of survey respondents either *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing* that the Fund supported *an increase in the proportion of volunteers that are equipped, trained and competing in bushfire awareness and emergency response* (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Bushfire Relief Fund has supported:



n=31

Source: ACIL Allen

However, one stakeholder reported that embedding this capability into other organisations is an ongoing task, and the hardest part of the work.

“There were extremely good working relationships in delivering the Fund. They have covered so much more because of that.”

The Bega and Byron Bay bushfires provided an early opportunity to test the initial effectiveness of the coordination approach. Stakeholders reported positive early experiences with the TAW role and incident action plan framework that supported daily updates on the WERT search outcomes and operations.

²⁷ Taronga and the NSW Government (n.d.). *Wildlife first response for NSW firefighters: Handbook*. Accessed February 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Animals-and-plants/Native-animals/wildlife-first-response-training-for-nsw-firefighters.pdf>.

“We have developed a foundation from which to build relationships with wildlife groups, training and skills. There are hundreds of volunteers that now understand that there is a system in place for wildlife. This has encouraged them to develop their own systems for evacuation plans, PPE, training, and coordination.”

However, it has not been possible to fully test new arrangements and processes due to the wetter and cooler weather conditions experienced in the years following the 2019-20 bushfire season. Much of the work will only truly be tested and validated through more, and more intense, bushfires that involve more people and organisations over a longer period. This will help refine the arrangements and processes, and better inform how successful the Fund has been in supporting capacity. The sector will also need to maintain capacity and capability despite the high sector turnover that will likely continue in the longer-term.

Ongoing legacy impacts

NPWS identified ongoing work to continue developing, improving, and promoting (throughout NPWS and other emergency response agencies) the TAW role and WERT teams, support the wildlife rehabilitation sector, run TeleVet trials, share the wildlife first aid training interstate, and participate in identifying fire management regimes of koalas as part of the NSW Koala Strategy.

Stakeholders identified legacy impacts that are continuing to emerge following the Fund’s conclusion. NPWS is continuing to test, refine, and embed wildlife response training and coordination, including in bushfires in Bega and Byron Bay (both October 2023). This will continue to build capacity across the sector and resolve emerging issues (discussed further in section 2.5).

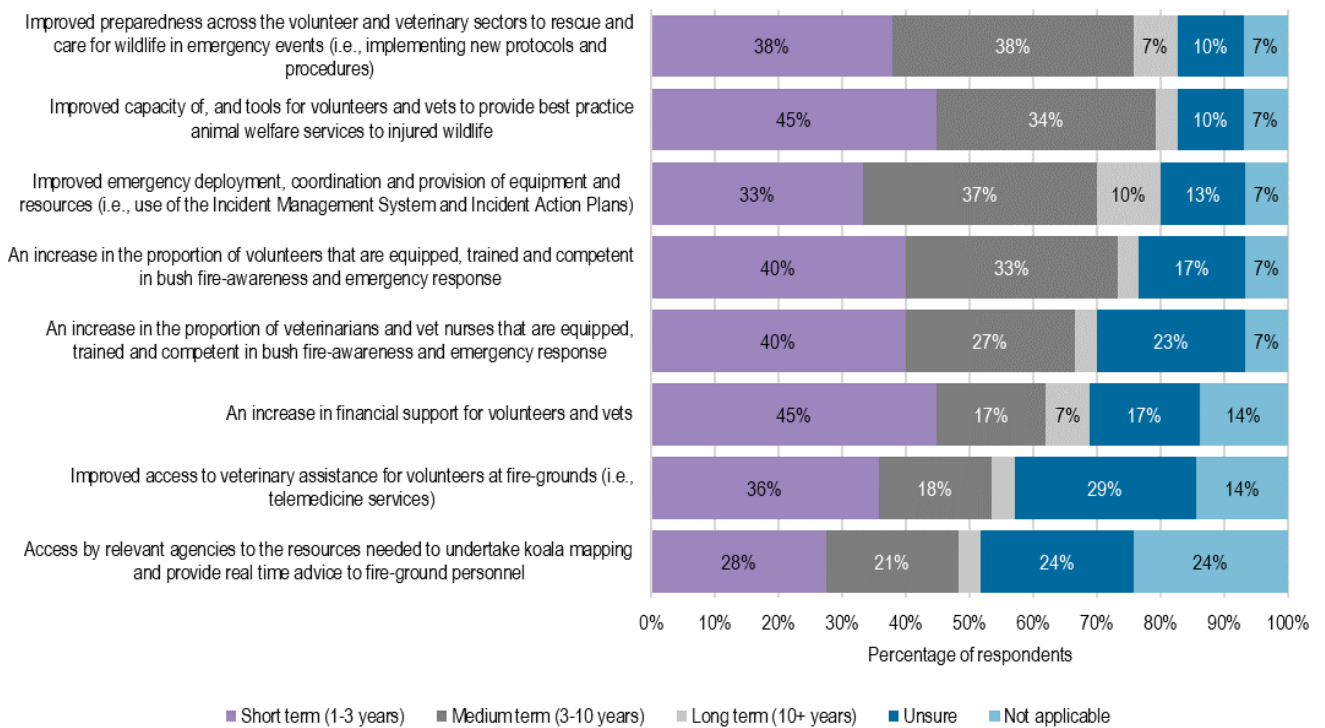
The Handbook and training materials, assets, and consumables can also continue to be used to upskill the sector beyond the Fund. Stakeholders identified the opportunity for other states and territories to learn from NSW’s experiences with the Fund and the Handbook. Stakeholders also reported anecdotal evidence of use of the training and Handbook beyond national parks, for example by the SES.

Survey respondents expected ongoing (long- or medium-term) impacts most often in the following benefits (see Figure 2.4):

- improved emergency deployment, coordination and provision of equipment and resources (i.e., use of the Incident Management System and Incident Action Plans)
- improved preparedness across the volunteer and veterinary sectors to rescue and care for wildlife in emergency events (i.e., implementing new protocols and procedures)
- improved capacity of, and tools for volunteers and vets to provide best practice animal welfare services to injured wildlife
- in increase in the proportion of volunteers that are equipped, trained and competent in bush fire-awareness and emergency response.

When prompted to provide rationale for their answers, 14 respondents provided a qualitative answer. The most common sentiment (7 respondents) was a need for ongoing commitment and funding, especially for training. Responses noted that impacts are difficult to measure and may take years to be fully realised.

Figure 2.4 Over what timeframe are the following benefits likely to last:



n=31
Source: ACIL Allen

NPWS was recently provided an additional \$1 million in NSW Government funding via the Bushfire Inquiry (separate to the Fund) to deliver Recommendation 53 of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry,²⁸ and \$3.7 million under the NSW Koala Strategy (under 3.8 – Improving emergency response actions for koalas and other wildlife) to continue work that commenced under the Fund.²⁹ This includes funding for 2 FTE until the end June 2024 and operating budget until June 2026.

FNPW's current work is building on the Fund outcomes by taking a more thoughtful and strategic approach to providing support for wildlife carers.

“The grant has had huge ripple effects in delivering outcomes beyond the Fund.”

However, stakeholders noted that there is no ongoing data collection or reporting after the final report is submitted, which takes place shortly following the end of the grant. As such, there is limited visibility beyond NPWS of the ongoing impacts and legacy delivered by the Fund, and evidence base to support the Trust to improve its management of grant funding. There is an opportunity to gather longer term insights into the legacy impacts of Trust projects.

²⁸ NSW Department of Planning and Environment (2023). *Bushfire emergency response for wildlife*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/native-animals/helping-wildlife-in-emergencies/bushfire-relief-for-wildlife-rehabilitators#:~:text=Recommendation%2053%20of%20the%20NSW,wildlife%20response%20in%20operational%20plans>.

²⁹ NSW Government (2023). *National Parks and Wildlife Service koala habitat restoration*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.koala.nsw.gov.au/national-parks-and-wildlife-service-koala-habitat-restoration>.

Delivery on time and budget

The Fund grant agreement was formally varied 5 times to create flexibility in how the funds could be used and to extend the timeframes, as follows:

- budget allocation was varied to allow NPWS to employ 2 (rather than 1) project officers (approved 28 July 2020)
- a salary underspend to be reallocated to consultancies, materials, vet training and access, and koala mapping (approved 2 October 2020)
- 1-month extension to the grant timeline to end on 31 July 2021, with the final report by 31 August 2021 (approved 29 April 2021), to allow for development of wildlife response training for firefighters by Taronga Conservation Society (delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and payment of final asset grant that was delayed due to flooding
- 6-month extension to end on the 31 December 2021, with the final report due by 31 January 2022 (approved on 19 August 2021), to allow further time to develop the wildlife response training for firefighters and to investigate the potential loss of funding expended under an asset grant
- 12-month extension to end on 31 December 2021, and final report due by 31 January 2023 (approved on 31 December 2022), to address a budget underspend.

NPWS delivered on the revised project timeframes and requirements.

Stakeholders with visibility of the grant timing and funding reported that the Fund was largely delivered on time and budget. There was sufficient flexibility to modify the delivery as needed, for example to extend the project to better manage the demands on wildlife responders and the surplus of funding provided to the sector.

Value for money

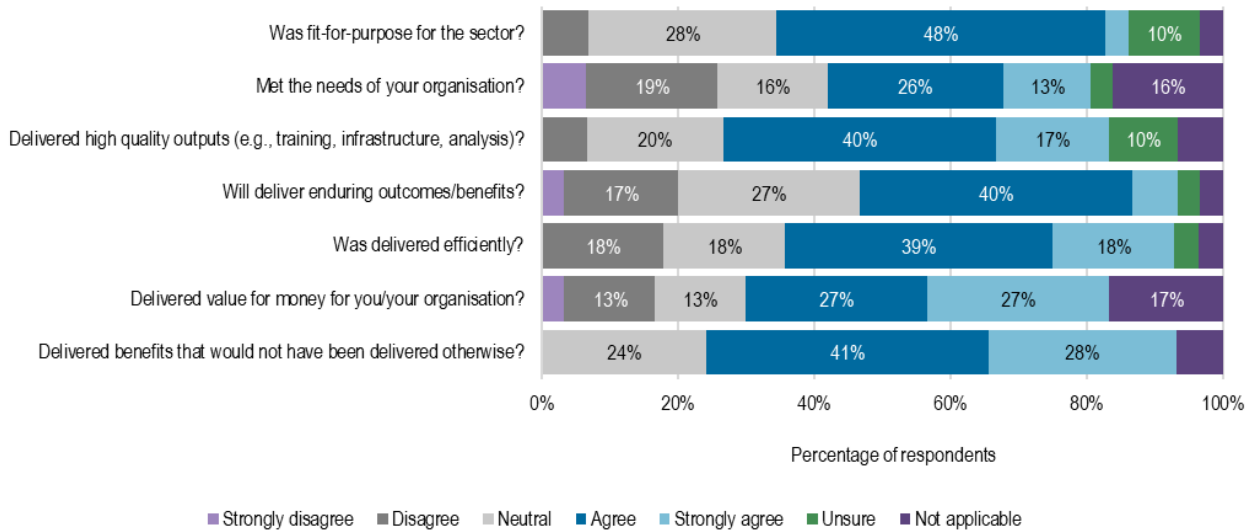
All stakeholders considered that the Fund had delivered substantial value to the sector, and value for money. They reported that NPWS leveraged collaborations and contributions from partner organisations, mostly in-kind contributions of expertise, time, and human resources. This enhanced and scaled the impact of the funding and meant that the Fund delivered more benefit than its relatively small cost.

“It’s amazing it achieved what it had given the circumstances under which it was released.”

The business plan identifies a cash contribution of \$101,500 (10% of the total Fund value); significant in-kind support from the Department and other agencies (primarily staff time and effort), and the provision of equipment. As such, this enhanced the scale of activity and impact that could be delivered through the Fund.

This is supported by the evaluation survey, which shows that 51% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Fund was fit-for-purpose. Further, 54% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it delivered value for money for them/their organisation, and benefits that would not have been delivered otherwise (69%, see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Bushfire Relief Fund:



n=31
Source: ACIL Allen

2.4 Efficiency

KEQs under the efficiency evaluation theme focus on the question: *To what extent has the project operated efficiently?* The KEQs are addressed below.

2.4.1 KEQ 7: Management of the project and appropriate decision making for success

The Trust’s grant management processes were not all followed. While this did not create adverse outcomes, there are opportunities to improve the balance between flexibility and accountability in managing future Trust grants.

NPWS and FNPW generally managed the Fund well. However, NPWS did not collect outcomes data as originally intended, and only sought approval for this retrospectively. This is not good practice.

Three levels of management are considered in this section: the Trust, Trust administration and TRC’s management of NPWS, NPWS’ management of the Fund’s delivery, and FNPW’s management of the devolved asset grants.

The Trust and TRC’s management

The Trust was responsible for approving the business plan and grant variations, and noting the final report, the TRC was responsible for endorsing the business plan, and progress and final reports, Trust administration were responsible for overseeing NPWS’ delivery of the grant and NPWS was responsible for managing the grant delivery. These arrangements created clear lines of accountability for the project, and some stakeholders reported that this typically provides appropriate guidance for projects delivered under competitive grant processes.

Most stakeholders reported that oversight of the Fund by Trust administration and the TRC provided sufficient flexibility to adapt over time. This was particularly important given that the Fund needed to evolve to meet the changing needs and rapidly evolving policy and service landscape as

the 2019-20 bushfire season progressed, the NSW and Australian Government bushfire inquiries were released, and significant funding streams emerged within the sector.

However, stakeholders also reported some mixed views on how well the project was managed.

Stakeholders reported high turnover in government operational staff across the Department, the Trust, NSW Environment Protection Authority and NPWS, as well as within FNPW. This led to gaps in responsibilities and institutional knowledge (including a general understanding of on-ground service delivery requirements and associated experiences within the Trust, and record keeping for NPWS, see below), and reduced the efficiency of the Fund's management. As such, stakeholders recognised that the Fund's effective management and the delivery of outcomes in part came down to the commitment of the individuals within NPWS, the Trust and FNPW responsible for the day to day management of the project.

In contrast, the TRC demonstrated more continuity of personnel across the life of the Fund (relative to the NPWS and Trust). While the TRC endorsed the business plan and reports, it had little involvement in the ongoing monitoring of the Fund (as is standard for TRC processes). Some stakeholders considered that the TRC could have been better leveraged to provide longer-term perspectives. There would also have been benefit in better knowledge retention processes to help transfer knowledge between staff and mitigate the risk of staff turnover.

"Management comes down to the individual contact and how good they are at their job."

"The grant administrators should spend more time with grantees to make sure its collaborative and co-delivered, with some touch points with the TRC."

Stakeholders reported that the Trust's grant reporting processes are challenging to navigate and administratively onerous. As noted in section 2.3.2, NPWS did not seek review or approval for changes to the intended grant outcomes in advance from the Trust or TRC, to maintain the pace of program delivery and to avoid the perceived associated administrative burden. Instead NPWS used project reporting as a vehicle to retrospectively communicate the changes made.

As such, some stakeholders considered that standard governance practices (such as review and approval of amendments to grant objectives) were not followed fully. However, multiple stakeholders acknowledged that seeking advanced approval through normal governance practices would have caused delays and administrative burden.

"NPWS ended up doing what they thought was in line with the needs of the sector, and with what came out of the Australian and NSW bushfire inquiries – and relayed this in the reports."

While this did not result in adverse outcomes for this project, noting that the project is of a relatively small value, it is not good practice and did not allow for sufficient monitoring and accountability. This is also evidenced by inaccurate financial reporting submitted by NPWS (see NPWS' grant management below). This suggests the need for tighter, more focused reporting that is effectively acquitted by the Trust. This should include flexibility and accountability, while streamlining reporting and meetings to reduce the administrative burden.

"There needs to be a balance between getting governance right, and getting action on the ground."

As noted above, the sector more broadly received significant funding following the announcement of the Fund, noting that this could not have been foreseen or planned for at the time. This has created confusion on the use of specific funding streams for particular purposes. For example, some stakeholders could not correctly identify which streams of funding had paid for specific activities delivered in the wildlife response sector, such as the training delivered by the Taronga Conservation Society, or support provided under the Wildlife Heroes program.

As such, there is a need for more clarity as to the funding streams that are operating in the sector and how these complement each other to progress wildlife response outcomes.

Some stakeholders also considered that there would be value in more frequent check-ins with the TRC and the Trust administration for emergency grants like the Fund, as these projects are likely to be delivered in rapidly evolving situations that may require more adjustments to deliver value.

NPWS' grant management

At the NPWS grant funding level, stakeholders reported that NPWS managed the Fund with a small team that had limited resources relative to the scope of the challenges it was seeking to address.

Respondents to the evaluation survey generally had a positive response in relation to NPWS's management of the Fund. Respondents agreed or strongly agreed that processes were clear/easy to follow (77%), NPWS' requests for information and reporting were reasonable (71%), and NPWS provided clear reasons for its decisions/requests (59%, see Figure B.5). Most respondents reported that the effort of the administration process was proportional to the size of the funding received (43%), noting that 31% selected unsure or not applicable (see Figure B.5).

However, NPWS' financial management and record keeping was not effective. The Fund's initial final financial reporting did not identify \$10,923 that was underspent. This was discussed with Trust administration and approval was given to use the remaining funds to print the Wildlife First Response training for NSW Firefighters information booklet. While underspends are understandable and can typically be reprofiled over time, this misreporting of the underspend could have been better managed through appropriate staff hand overs, and more effective project management and financial record keeping within NPWS.

Further, in developing the final report, it became clear that NPWS had not collected outcome data as intended over the life of the grant. This was complicated by changing staff within NPWS. This was not clarified with Trust administration or apparent in the progress reporting leading up to the submission of the final report. As there was no time to meaningfully assess the intended metrics over the remainder of the project, NPWS and Trust administration retrospectively agreed in early January 2022 to limit reporting to other activities and outputs, with limited assessment of outcomes. This was noted in the final report.

Despite these changes, stakeholders broadly considered that final reporting addressed the planned outcomes, and the final report was endorsed by the TRC and approved by Trust administration.

FNPW's grant management

FNPW was effective in managing the dispersal and acquittal of asset grants under the Fund, and reporting on funding outcomes. *SmartyGrants* enabled streamlined and effective management of the grant process, including tracking of correspondence, funding, applications, and reporting.

FNPW sought advice from NPWS and Trust administration to investigate and resolve the loss of \$8,240 expended to a supplier under an asset grant to build a custom aviary for a new flying fox enclosure. The supplier advised that they would be unable to deliver the aviary, and would be filing for bankruptcy, although this never occurred. The grantee ultimately revised the scope of works with FNPW and engaged an alternative supplier to deliver the aviary. This process was clearly documented and well managed.

However, stakeholders considered that the Trust's grant administration guidelines do not specifically address how devolved grants should be managed in a clear and consistent manner nor how this information should be shared with the Trust to ensure transparency and appropriate oversight.

2.4.2 KEQ 8: Efficient project delivery and efficient resource allocation

Overall, the Fund delivery and resource allocation were efficient. The project activities were delivered on budget, and on time, in accordance with revised project timeframes. Administration costs were minimal. Minor amendments were made to reallocate funding across years and activities. This process worked well.



NPWS identified a total of 22 Fund project milestones in the final report, 21 of which were the responsibility of NPWS or the FNPW. The remaining milestone was for an independent evaluation of the Fund (this report). Of the 21, 8 were completed on time, 9 were completed after the intended date of completion, and 4 were not completed. Milestones were not completed due to external delays and complications that caused stalled progress in adjacent organisations, such as DPI AASFA (see section 2.3.3).

This is broadly in line with the overall findings for the Fund's timely delivery (see section 2.3.3), where NPWS requested extensions to the Fund's timeframes because of unexpected events that impacted the delivery of activities, and consequently, outcomes. The first and second variations to the Fund's duration were to allow for delays to the delivery of training programs that were hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic and delayed durable asset construction impacted by flooding. The third variation to extend the project was to allow for underspent funds to be used to print and distribute the Wildlife First Response Handbook for firefighters (see section 2.4.1). Minor adjustments were also made to the original funding commitments for consumable and asset grants, as noted in section 2.3.3. Stakeholders reported that these processes were straightforward and worked well.

The Fund was largely delivered on budget, with minor financial discrepancies noted in section 2.3.3. Final expenditure reporting highlights no variation in budgeted and actual spending, with 100% of funding expended and no more than +/-5% variation in the actual expenditure relative to project budget for each item. The only cost identified as an administrative cost is the funding allocated toward an independent evaluation of the Fund (this report). While there were salary costs and on-costs, these were directly related to project delivery costs.

The project was varied to revise allowances under the grant agreement (i.e. to employ 2 rather than 1 NPWS staff) and to relocate funding across financial years and activities. This involved communication between FNPW, NPWS and Trust administration, and grant variations.

Stakeholders reported that the process for resolving the lost asset funds worked well (see section 2.4.1), and the processes for varying the budget allocations were straightforward. This was also confirmed by respondents to the evaluation survey, who all reported that the Fund's resources were well delivered and allocated (see Figure B.4).

2.4.3 KEQ 9: Value for money of the project

The Fund has provided value for money by delivering strong impact for a relatively small funding amount.



Overall, stakeholders considered that the Fund delivered value for money. They considered that the Fund was a relatively small amount to address a large challenge in the wildlife response sector. The Fund was needed, fit-for-purpose for the sector at the time, and in line with Government priorities (including realignment upon the release of the NSW and Commonwealth bushfire inquiries).

Stakeholders reported that NPWS leveraged substantial in-kind contributions from within NPWS and its partners and leveraged other funding to extend the reach of training materials developed and the beneficiaries of new coordination approaches.

“Compared with other programs that are in the millions of dollars, it has delivered quite a lot.”

The Fund is also continuing to deliver benefit through the actions of vets, veterinary nurses, and other trained personnel, and through the use of guidelines, assets and consumables delivered under the Fund. These benefits are expected to continue into the short (1-3 years) and medium term (3-10 years, see Figure 2.4).

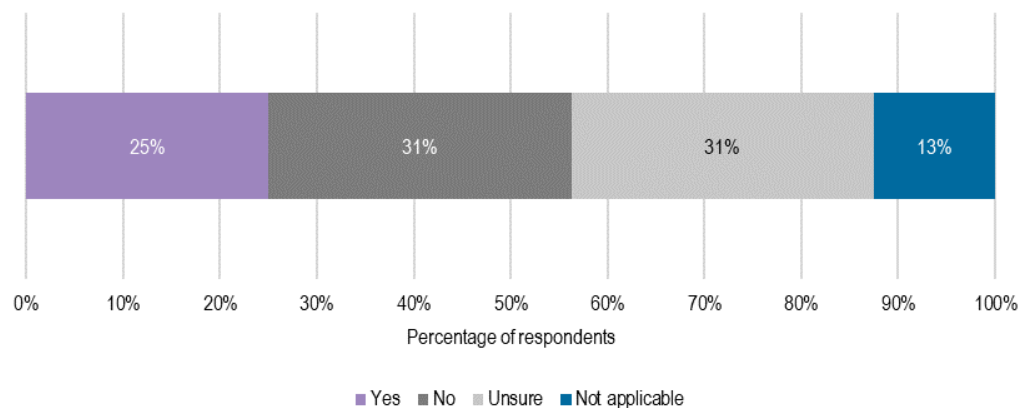
“Wildlife organisations still use the training, and outside of national parks as well.”

FNPW selected grant recipients based on the potential value for money that could be delivered, including leveraging co-contributions. Such applications received a higher assessment score and were more likely to be funded.³⁰ This helped ensure that the asset grants delivered stronger value for money.

This is supported by the evaluation survey, which shows that most (54%) survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Fund delivered value for money for them or their organisation, with 13% neutral and 16% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (see Figure 2.5). Most stakeholders disagreeing commented on the small scale of the Fund relative to the size of the sectors’ challenges and advocated for more work to be done to better support the sector.

The evaluation survey received limited but positive data on the impact of co-contributions on grant recipient outcomes. Across 16 respondents that addressed the question, 4 (25%) reported providing cash or in-kind contributions (see Figure 2.6). 2 of 3 respondents *Agreed or Strongly agreed* that the co-contributions supported them to deliver better outcomes for the project (see Figure B.8).

Figure 2.6 Did your organisation provide cash or in-kind contributions to support the project?



n=16

Source: ACIL Allen

Many stakeholders reported that more funding and activity is now needed to embed the benefit delivered by the Fund, capitalise on the good relationships built over the course of the Fund, and to further enhance coordination across the wildlife response sector.

As discussed in section 2.3.3, the Fund’s outputs will continue to deliver impact through funding provided by the NSW Government to address Recommendation 53 of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

2.5 Opportunities

KEQs under the opportunities evaluation theme focus on lessons learned (including on risks) and opportunities for the future. The KEQs are addressed below.

³⁰ NSW Environmental Trust (2020). *Wildlife Heroes Large Durable Asset Fund Grant Assessment Form*.

2.5.1 KEQ 10: Opportunities

There are opportunities for the Trust and NPWS to improve future projects by strengthening grant delivery arrangements and enhancing wildlife responses by addressing gaps and opportunities specific to the sector.



Grant delivery opportunities

The NPWS' final report identified lessons learned from the Fund's delivery and opportunities for improving future related project delivery, including:

- the need to allow additional time for recruitment to avoid project delivery delays
- ensuring clear procurement discussions with suppliers to avoid contracting expectations
- communication and engagement are time consuming but support stronger project outcomes and quality, particularly with communicating about the Funded programs and encouraging engagement
- the need to identify critical dependencies (particularly those beyond the scope of NPWS) early and establish risk management planning (including early escalation).

These align with the evaluation findings, which identified challenges with critical dependencies (in particular on the NSW centralised wildlife response plan) and the need to work closely with stakeholders across the sector (including the not-for-profit sector, and interstate and intergovernmental organisations). There are opportunities to better plan for critical dependencies (see section 2.5.2) and to leverage sector relationships to enhance the legacy of the Fund (see section 2.3.3 and below).

Sector opportunities

The delivery of the Fund's activities clarified gaps and opportunities specific to the wildlife response sector, that now need to be addressed if the sector is to deliver better care, at scale, and in a more coordinated manner.

Interviewed stakeholders reported that more resourcing is now needed to embed the training developed under the Fund and support ongoing coordination and implementation. This is supported by the evaluation survey, where respondents highlighted the need for continued efforts in this space, especially considering the positive impacts they observed from the Fund (see section 2.3.3).

“You need funding for central coordination, ongoing implementation and to scale up the time committed to implementation. It needs to be a top-down response, not bottom-up.”

Interviewed stakeholders identified primary needs for:

- An overarching wildlife response plan across the sector that is centralised and managed by a single government agency, with input from expert agencies (as referenced in Recommendation 53 of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry). This should also better reflect the need for wildlife response management across national parks, Crown land, state forests and private land (given that Crown land was not referenced in the Fund business plan), and across firegrounds and adjacent areas, and how approaches can be best integrated regardless of the land classification.
- A coordinated, state-wide database of the location and availability of trained staff and keeping deployment records. This would enable better connections between organisations and leverage of the capacity that was enhanced under the Fund.
- Leveraging the relationships that were developed and strengthened through the Fund, to garner broader support for wildlife responses and embed system-wide change.

- Leveraging existing training materials to train a broader range of stakeholders, including firefighters and other members of the wildlife response sector. NPWS was recently funded to deliver further training.

Given that EPA gained responsibility for wildlife response after the Fund concluded, some stakeholders reported that EPA could deliver the overarching wildlife response plan and database.

Stakeholders reported that early testing of the new coordination approach during the Bega and Byron Bay bushfires identified early issues that need to be addressed and improved in the future. This includes challenges with:

- Darting/tranquilising and how to ensure that wildlife responders and the WERT team have access to darting equipment and are trained to use this safely, including access to permits from NPWS for darting in national parks.
- Personal accident and injury insurance challenges for wildlife responders entering firegrounds or fringe areas on and off national parks. While WIRES, the Wildlife Council and Vets Beyond Borders provide personal injury insurance cover for registered personnel when they enter incident grounds if deployed as official rescuers, people not registered with these organisations (i.e. other volunteers) are not covered by such insurance.
- Safety analysis and operations plans, which work well on firegrounds but are more challenging to organise adjacent to firegrounds.
- The need to integrate wildlife search and rescue (the responsibility of NPWS on national parks lands) with triage (the responsibility of EPA), as occurs in Victoria.³¹

While beyond the scope of this project, stakeholders also identified opportunities to address staff shortages, high turnover, mental health, and burnout across the sector; the ongoing sustainability of organisations, including for daily consumables (e.g. formula, food, and fuel) and reimbursements for receiving injured wildlife (including funding for medication); the causes of animal injuries (including habitat destruction); and complacency due to the wet and cooler weather in recent years.

Realising the legacy benefits

The Trust's Major Projects new government priorities stream (which provided funding for the Fund, see section 1.1.2) is not intended to fund ongoing programs of work. Instead, it funds time-limited, focused projects that trial and test new ideas. By nature, each of these grants will be unique. However, there are opportunities to extract lessons from these grants (including common lessons across grants) and identify how they can be leveraged and enhanced to realise and embed stronger impact over time.

There is an opportunity for the Trust and NPWS to discuss project legacies to understand how these can be continued and amplified beyond the grant. While these cannot necessarily be foreseen at the project planning stage, they could be discussed at the end of a grant to understand what and how benefits will continue, and what supports are needed to do so.

For the Fund, this includes leveraging existing stakeholder engagement across the sector to progress and embed an NSW centralised wildlife response plan, scale and enhance training across the sector, and continue to use assets and consumables for wildlife care.

³¹ Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2023). *Wildlife and fire response Wildlife Emergency Support Network (WESN) Fact sheet for volunteers 2023*. Melbourne: Victorian State Government.

2.5.2 KEQ 11: Governance, financial management, and project planning risks

The Trust, NPWS and FNPW broadly managed risks well. Issues were quickly raised and resolved through discussions and grant variations.

However, there is a need for better accountability around changes to project outcomes, more transparent financial management, and planning for critical dependencies.



A number of risks/shortcomings have been identified in the report related to governance, financial management and project planning. These are overviewed below.

Governance risks

As noted above, governance arrangements (see section 2.4.1) and reporting requirements (see section 2.3.1) were clearly identified in the project planning and scoping phase. However, these were not followed. This resulted in NPWS amending project outcomes and reporting scope without approval (or with retrospective approval) from Trust administration.

While this did not result in adverse outcomes for the Fund, and the outcomes delivered were broadly in line with the business plan, NSW and Commonwealth bushfire inquiries and sector needs, this was not due to good governance practice. These shortcomings were somewhat addressed in the final reporting.

However, this is not good practice, and could lead to negative outcomes, particularly for longer term, larger or higher risk grants. Future governance of emergency (and other) grants should seek stronger accountability and more frequent check-ins with grantees to ensure that project reporting and administration is occurring as agreed.

Financial management risks

Minor challenges were encountered with financial management of the Fund, as discussed in sections 2.3.3, 2.4.1 and 2.4.2. However, these were quickly resolved through discussions between Trust administration, NPWS, and FNPW, and variations to the grant agreement. These processes worked well and were straightforward.

The notable exception is NPWS' management of underspend, which was not identified in the Fund's initial final financial reporting (see section 2.4.1). As noted above, this misreporting could have been better managed through better staff hand overs, and more effective project management and financial record keeping within NPWS. Once identified, this was quickly communicated and resolved.

Project planning risks

NPWS identified risks with engaging with other NSW agencies and the impact on Fund delivery and ongoing activities in the sector.

As noted in section 2.3.3, the full delivery of the Fund depended on the development of a wildlife response plan. The NSW Bushfire Inquiry, Resilience NSW review and transition of responsibility for NSW wildlife response emergency management to EPA, caused in delays in the plan's development. This impacted NPWS' ability to finalise draft resources, tools, and the wildlife response framework. As such, there is a need for better planning and risk management around critical dependencies, particularly when these are beyond the control of the grantee (see section 2.5.1).

The Fund's delivery also required strong engagement from external agencies, in particular, NSW RFS as a key emergency response organisation. NPWS engaged with RFS throughout the Fund,

and RFS was a member of the WERT working group. However, RFS' level of engagement varied over time, based on changing priorities. As such, RFS had not promoted or rolled out the Wildlife First Response Training package to its volunteers before the end of the Fund. Since the Fund's conclusion, the RFS incorporated the online training course onto their internal firefighter training system in 2023, but at the time of finalising the report, had not yet approved the distribution of the handbook. Stronger engagement from RFS and NSW Forestry Corporation is anticipated in 2024 via the Environmental Services Functional Area Wildlife Sub Plan Working Group. NPWS identified that limitations on ongoing engagement with relevant organisations will impact wildlife response outcomes.

NPWS also identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a risk for face-to-face engagement with stakeholders. However, changes to project delivery to transition to online meetings and activities created positive outcomes in terms of time and cost savings.

Conclusion

3

This chapter provides concluding remarks and recommendations.

Overall, the Fund (at its delivery) was implemented successfully. The urgent release of funding delivered much needed support to the sector. The co-design process between the Trust and NPWS allowed for the Fund's objectives to be identified, and NPWS was flexible in delivering the Fund to ensure that the Fund evolved to align with the sectors' emerging needs. This was essential given the changing nature of the sector at the time, the influx of funding, and subsequent release of the NSW and Commonwealth bushfire inquiries.

The funding provided was proportional to the Fund's scope and intended outcomes, while small relative to the size of the sector's challenges.

The Fund delivered most planned activities and outputs, which were largely perceived to be needed, high-quality and fit-for-purpose. The Fund made strong progress in enhancing training for vets and firefighters, providing consumables to support the everyday needs for wildlife responders, and building coordination, and building relationships, collaboration, and clear lines of communication within NSW and interstate. This has broadly supported the capacity and effectiveness of volunteers, wildlife rehabilitation groups and vets to respond to fire emergencies.

The Fund has provided value for money by delivering strong impact for a relatively small financial contribution. The outputs and outcomes were in line with Government priorities and responsibilities and are delivering ongoing legacy impacts in the sector through continued use of training and resources, and ongoing funding to extend and embed training.

However, it takes time and commitment to develop trusted, working relationships and to embed systems into emergency management procedures. This is particularly the case with responsibilities for wildlife, which span multiple government and non-profit organisations within and across states and the national government. Further, the new coordination arrangements established under the Fund need time (and larger and more complex fires) to be tested, refined, and embedded across the sector.

There is benefit in NPWS investing time, human resources, and funding over the longer term to leverage the benefits delivered by the Fund, noting that this is not the type of funding that is provided by the Trust.

As such there are opportunities for the Trust to maximise its investment, by working with funding recipients to explore legacy impacts and encouraging funding recipients to continue to leverage the grant outcomes after the grant concludes.

Recommendation 1

The Trust should ensure that funding recipients (such as NPWS) take appropriate steps in implementing grants to maximise ongoing legacy impacts during and following the grant period.

Risks were broadly well managed through planning and refinement in discussion between Trust administration, NPWS and FNPW. Several changes were made to the project delivery timeframes and financial arrangements to accommodate the evolving nature of the sector and release of the NSW and Commonwealth bushfire inquiries. These changes were well managed, and overall, the project was delivered efficiently, on budget, and on time, in accordance with the revised project timeframes.

However, there were trade-offs associated with the urgent funding release and Fund planning. During the retrospective design and expedited planning process, NPWS and Trust administration did not create clear pathways to impact for the Fund, nor appropriately prepare for impact measurement or reporting. There are opportunities to enhance these planning and reporting processes for future grant delivery. Some of this work has already taken place, as the Trust regularly updates standard templates in response to user feedback.

Recommendation 2

The Trust should:

- explore amendments to its standard planning templates to incorporate program logics (to present a logical sequence from Fund inputs to outcomes) as a standard foundation for project planning
- include standard terms for how devolved grants should be managed and reported on
- check on project progress by ensuring the grantee is collecting impact data throughout the grant lifecycle to ensure that its impact can be determined.

Further, the Trust's grant management processes were not all followed. NPWS sought retrospective approval for changes to project outcomes and a lack of outcome data collection and did not adequately manage the Fund finances (leading to unexpected underspend), nor plan for critical dependencies. Staff turnover in NPWS and Trust administration added to these challenges.

While this did not create adverse outcomes, it is not good practice. There are opportunities to improve the balance between flexibility and accountability in managing future Trust grants.

Recommendation 3

The Trust should:

- consider incorporating more regular check-ins with grantees, particularly for higher risk and value projects, and use this as an opportunity to collaboratively reflect on and amend the project delivery as needed
- require that grantees have appropriate (strengthened) mechanisms in place to ensure knowledge transfer, and that staff turnover does not impact institutional knowledge or grant delivery
- ensure that grantees have strong financial management practices in place so that funding expenditure is appropriately tracked, managed and acquitted (noting that NPWS' practices highlighted a need for enhanced assurance).

The subsequent delivery of substantial funding from governments, the non-profit sector and the community created an unexpected surplus of funding and programs, which overwhelmed the wildlife response sector. Funding from other sources was used to amplify and extend the activities and outputs delivered by the Fund.

While this is positive and creates greater value for money for the Fund, there is poor clarity on where funding has been sourced and how some projects fit together. Better mapping could enable the sector (and government) to leverage more impact from the funding provided, and potentially to reduce gaps and/or overlaps. This mapping may naturally occur as part of the development of the centralised wildlife response plan. However, there is also an opportunity for the Trust to better map its funding and work with grantees over the life of the grant to explore potential partnerships with grants delivered in related areas.

Recommendation 4

The Trust should explore opportunities to better connect with other existing and newly funded projects and grants in related areas to better leverage any synergies and reduce unnecessary gaps or overlaps. This could be explored with grantees on an ongoing basis as projects are delivered.

Appendices



A.1 Evaluation framework

The full evaluation framework and KEQs are provided in Table A.1.

Table A.1 Evaluation framework

KEQ	Focus area	Source
Appropriateness - To what extent was the project design appropriate?		
KEQ 1: How appropriate was the planning process in the initial scoping phase?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement of key stakeholders in planning - Use of evidence to inform project need, timeframes and budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scoping and Background material - Business plan - Funding agreement and variations - Consultations
KEQ 2: To what extent did the project address the identified need and was it the most appropriate thing to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design of the project aligned with the need - Other opportunities that could have been pursued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business plan - Scoping and Background material - Funding agreement - Consultations - Survey
KEQ 3: To what extent was the expenditure appropriate for the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budgeted expenditure was proportional to the planned activities and intended outcomes - Expenditure represented value for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding acquittals - Consultations - Survey
Effectiveness - To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?		
KEQ 4: To what extent was the project appropriately planned and scoped to ensure delivery of intended outcomes and effective measurement of these outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project planning and scope demonstrate clear links between the inputs, activities, outputs and intended outcomes - Project planning and scope aligned with intended outcomes - Monitoring processes were established and enabled data collection in line with the intended outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress and final reports - Consultations
KEQ 5: To what extent were the project's activities implemented as intended? If not, why, and what was the impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planned activities were implemented - Processes in place to manage changes to planned activities and potential risk to achieving the intended outcomes - Rationale behind any changes to planned activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business plan - Progress and final reports - Variations and Trust decisions - Consultations - Survey
KEQ 6: Were the intended outputs delivered, do these represent value for money,* and was the project delivered on time and on budget?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intended outputs delivered as planned - Outputs were perceived to be needed, fit-for-purpose, in line with Government priorities and responsibilities, of high-quality, provide sustainable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding agreement - Final report, certified finances, acquittal - Payments

KEQ	Focus area	Source
	benefits over the longer term, and be efficient (i.e. delivered on time and budget)	- Consultations
	- Delivery of the project on time	
	- Delivery of the project on budget	
Efficiency - To what extent has the project operated efficiently?		
KEQ 7: How well managed was the project? To what extent were the methods for making decisions and managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?	- Management processes were in place to deliver and oversight the project - Decision making and management processes were proportional to the project risk level and budget	- Progress and final reports - Trust decisions - Variations - Consultations - Survey
KEQ 8: How efficiently was the project delivered (including planned activities and implementation costs)? To what extent could resources have been allocated more efficiently?	- Delivery of project activities on time - Delivery of project activities on budget (including over/underspending) - Processes in place for reallocating funding across the project - Administration costs represented value for money	- Business plan - Funding agreement - Final report - Consultations - Survey
KEQ 9: Did the project deliver value for money?*	- The project was perceived to be needed, fit-for-purpose, in line with Government priorities and responsibilities, of high-quality, provide sustainable benefits over the longer term, and be efficient (i.e. delivered on time and budget)	- Consultations - Financial reports - Payments - Survey
Opportunities		
KEQ 10: What were the lessons learned and/or other opportunities related to the project, including what could be done differently?	- Lessons learned from the project - Opportunities for future projects in this sector	- Final report - Consultations - Survey
KEQ 11: What were the associated risks with governance, financial management, and project planning?	- Risks and challenges associated with governance, financial management, and project planning	- Project risks identified in business plan - Trust decisions - Consultations - Survey
<p>Note: Value for money will be assessed qualitatively, using key principles of efficiency (on time and on budget, value generated), effectiveness (aligned with need, fit-for-purpose) and economic (high-quality and sustainable).</p> <p>Source: ACIL Allen</p>		

Stakeholder engagement

B

B.1 Stakeholder consultations

Table B.1 lists the stakeholders consulted for the evaluation. A total of 13 stakeholders were consulted in 5 interviews.

Notes were recorded during interviews to enable qualitative thematic analysis. Stakeholders were provided with a discussion guide in advance of the discussion.

Table B.1 Stakeholders consulted

Stakeholder group	Number of stakeholders
The Trust	1
WERT Group members, including representatives from International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Taronga Zoo and NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service (WIRES)	3
NPWS	4
FNPW	1
Technical Review Committee members	4

Source: ACIL Allen

B.2 Stakeholder survey

B.2.1 Overview of survey responses

The survey was dispersed to 145 key stakeholders, including:

- 10 NPWS staff
- 20 from Taronga, IFAW, WIRES and Wildlife Heroes
- 115 stakeholders from wildlife groups, which were requested to circulate the email more broadly to relevant stakeholders within their organisations.

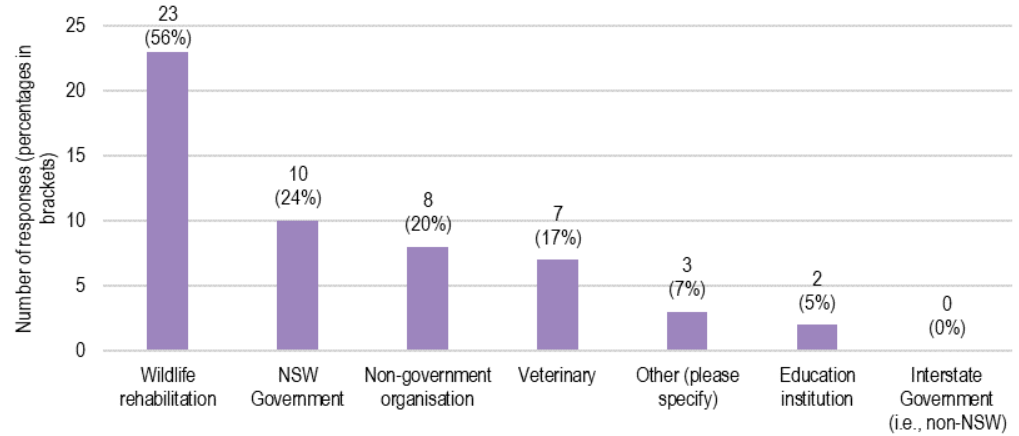
The survey was distributed via email on 8, 13 and 26 November 2023. A follow-up email was distributed on 13 December 2023 to veterinary stakeholders and those participating in Wildlife First Response training and wildlife care training. This was to address low response numbers from this group.

A total of 44 total responses were received.

B.2.2 Demographics

Figure B.1 displays the type of organisation that the respondent is affiliated with. Out of 43 total respondents, 23 respondents (53%) identified *Wildlife rehabilitation* as the organisation type that best describes them, followed by *NSW Government* (10 responses) and *Non-government organisation* (8 responses). Respondents that chose *Other* (3 responses) did not specify their organisation type.

Figure B.1 Which of the following best describes your organisation type?



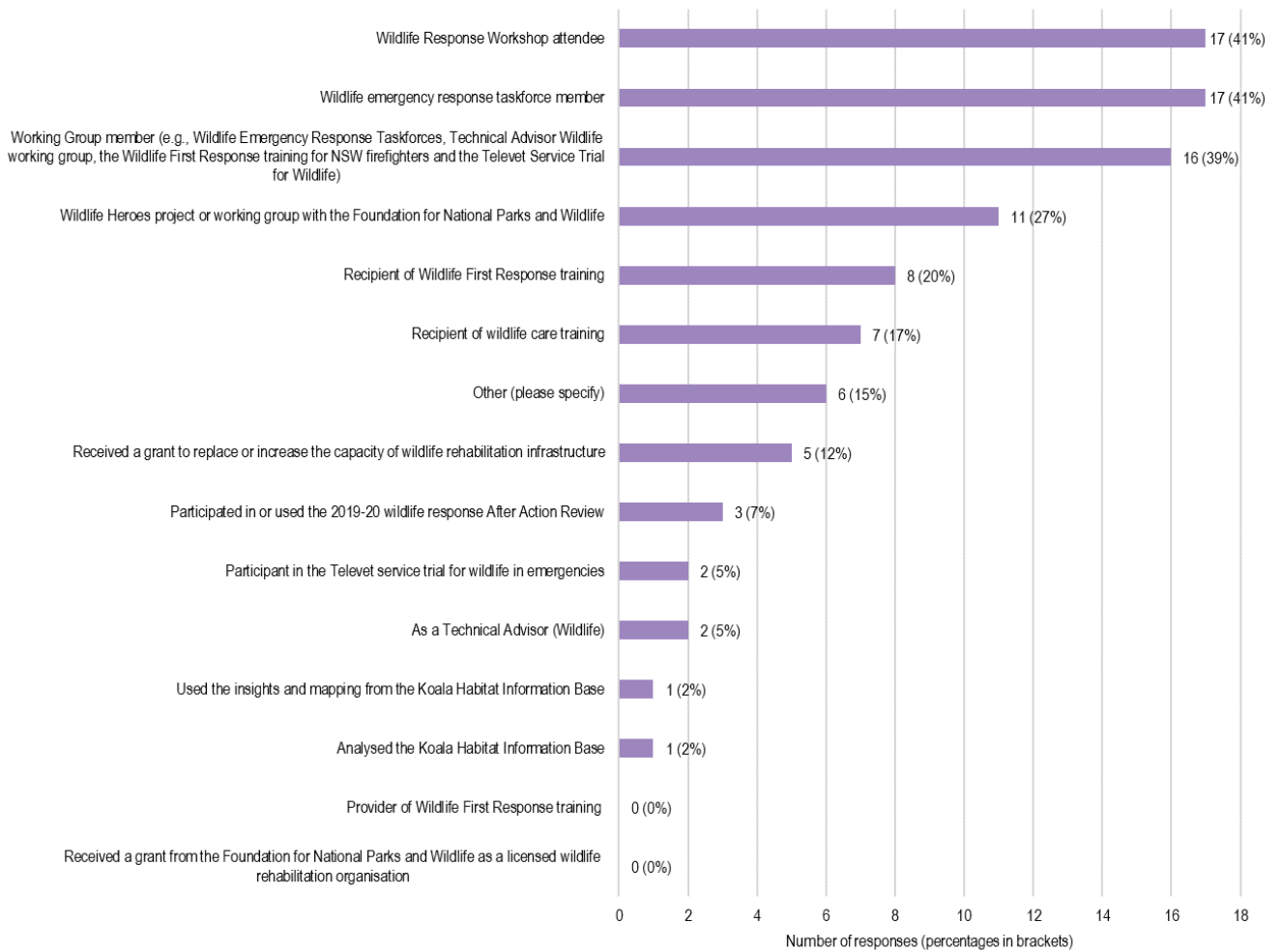
n=43

Note: Respondents were able to select multiple organisation types.

Source: ACIL Allen

Figure B.2 highlights the nature of respondents' involvement with the Bushfire Relief Fund, with 17 responses selecting both *Wildlife Response Workshop attendee* and *Wildlife emergency response taskforce member*, followed by *Working Group member* with 16 responses. The responses that selected *Other* did not provide any additional information.

Figure B.2 Which of the following best describes your involvement in the Bushfire Relief Fund?



n=41

Note: Respondents were able to select multiple answers.

Source: ACIL Allen

Figure 2.2 highlights the activities enabled by the Fund, and their importance. The respondents that selected *Other* highlighted that the Fund enabled the procurement of emergency supplies for immediate needs and equipment for future wildlife care, writing of the NSW Wildlife Emergency Subplan for EnvSFA³², and broadly building response capacity.

B.2.3 Funding need

Figure 2.1 examines respondents' perceptions of the importance of funding certain needs or challenges for organisations. Of the 5 respondents that selected *Other*, 2 respondents provided a qualitative response; *Capacity building of wildlife organisations to respond to emergencies that my organisation coordinates in the State Emergency Operation Centre* and *Awareness about procedures and possible ways to support local wildlife carers*.

³² NSW Government (2019). *Environmental Services Functional Area Supporting Plan*. Accessed January 2024: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/supporting-plan-Enviroplan.pdf>

What other needs could the funding have been used to address?

Respondents were provided an opportunity to identify any needs that the funding could have been used to address. A total of 12 free text responses were received. Responses include suggestions for supply of certain resources, support, and materials with particular emphasis on:

- veterinary supplies, resources and training required to adequately respond to emergencies
- resources and training to ensure safety of wildlife carers in emergencies
- triage centre vet kits and trailers for response
- reimbursement for general practice vets that treat injured native wildlife
- getting the WERT program up and running (not yet as of November 2023).

A response highlighted that while the Fund’s activities have been incredibly important, many have not been fully achieved. The respondent reported that “*further funding is essential to allow these aims to be fully realised to better support the wildlife rehabilitation sector at emergency events and ensure integration of systems and across agencies*”.

B.2.4 Management

Figure B.3 demonstrates diverse respondent perceptions regarding whether the amount of funding provided was sufficient. Of 16 respondents, 6 (38%) reported that the amount of funding provided was *About right*, while 4 respondents reported that it was *More than enough to complete the agreed activity* and 4 respondents reported it was *Not enough to complete the agreed activity*.

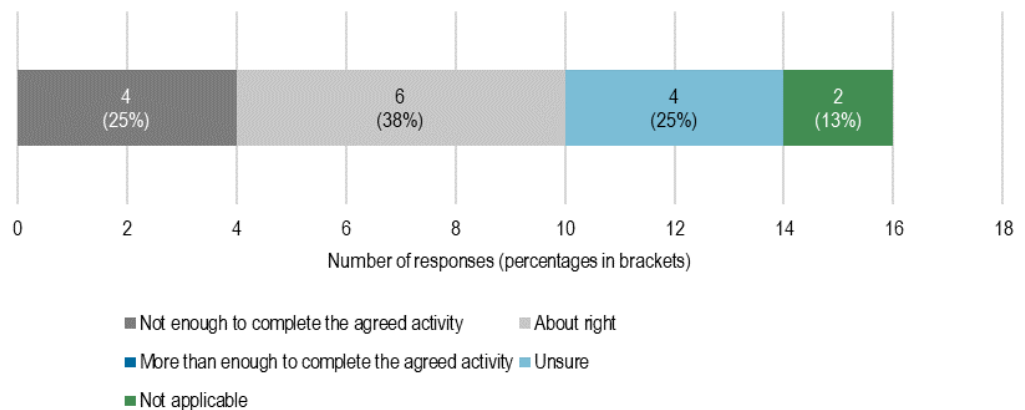
Those that selected that the funding was not enough to complete the agreed activity specified that:

- PPE requirements are unaffordable to volunteer groups
- more interaction with wildlife rehabilitation organisations could have been undertaken, and that the wildlife response plan was not available to wildlife organisations.

Those without adequate funding reported that:

- they could not complete the agreed activity
- they received funds from a charity
- they used their own funds.

Figure B.3 At the start of the activity, was the funding provided:



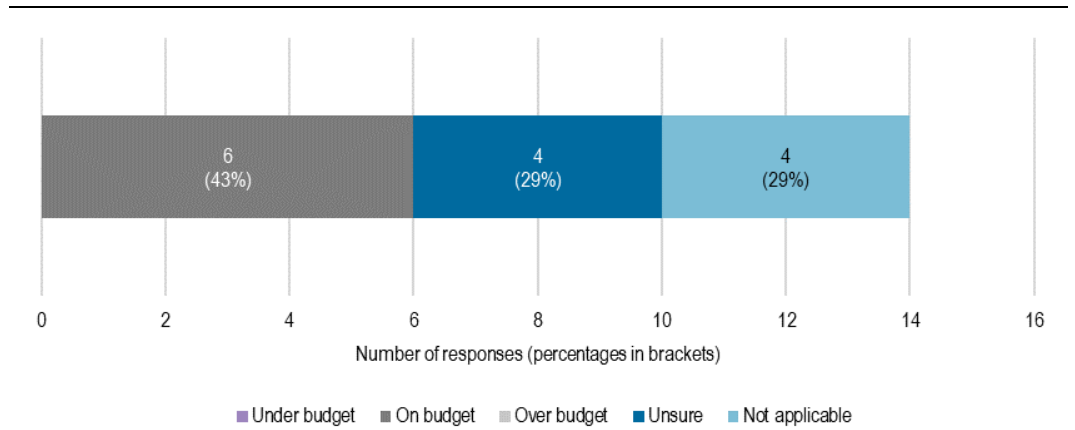
n=16

Source: ACIL Allen

Figure B.4 shows the activity delivery in relation to its allocated budget. Of the 14 responses, 6 reported that the activity was delivered *On budget*, while the remaining 8 either selected *Unsure* or *Not applicable*.

One respondent commented that immense monetary pressure was placed on Wildlife Rehabilitators as a result of the 2019-20 ‘Black Summer’ bushfires, and that this generated the need for further funding in future to fully realise the objectives of the Fund.

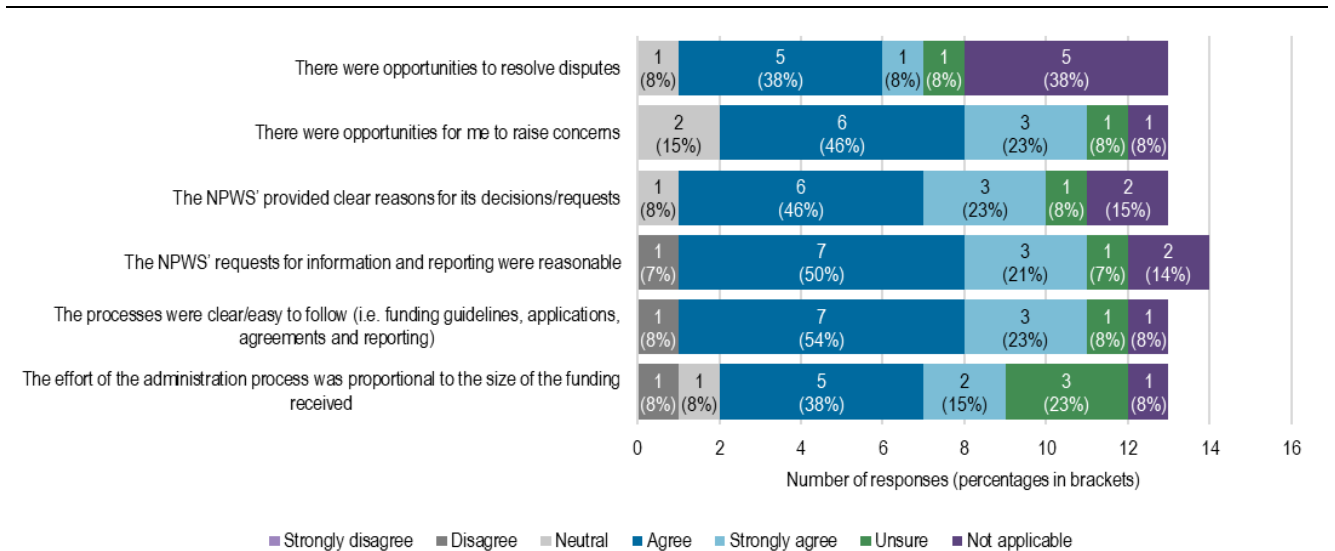
Figure B.4 Overall, was the activity delivered:



n=14
Source: ACIL Allen

Figure B.5 shows respondents perspectives on the management of the Fund. Between 46% and 77% of respondents selected either *Agree* or *Strongly agree* with the statements.

Figure B.5 Thinking about your experiences with the program, to what extent do you agree with the following statements:



n=14
Source: ACIL Allen

B.2.5 Impact

What other benefits has the Bushfire Relief Fund delivered to your organisation?

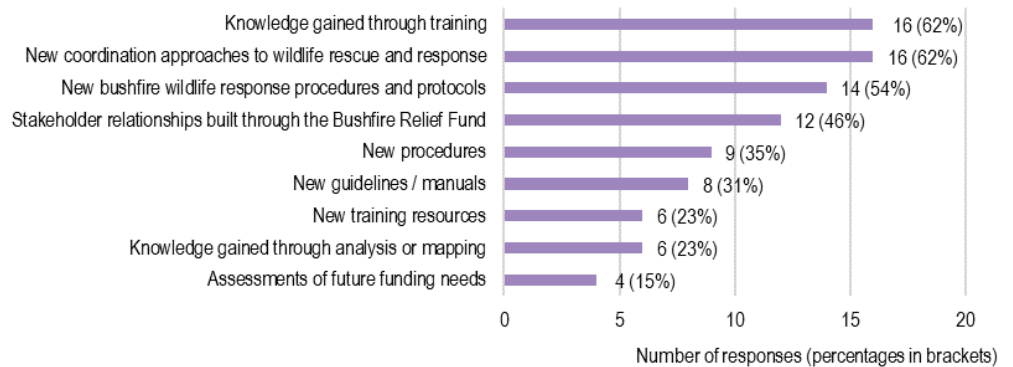
Respondents were asked to identify any other benefits the Fund provided their organisation. The question received 10 responses. Responses include:

- peace of mind in knowing that equipment is available
- PPE
- provided a forum for wildlife organisations in the region and emergency response agencies (NPWS and RFS), allowing them to work together in emergency situations such as the October 2023 Byron Bay bushfire
- practical workshop to trial roles in emergency response management

Two responses highlight that more benefit could be achieved with ongoing funding and after the WERT program is finalised.

Figure B.6 highlights the outputs that respondents still use. *Knowledge gained through training* and *New coordination approaches to wildlife rescue and response* are both used by 62% of respondents. This is followed by *New bushfire wildlife response procedures and protocols* (54%) and *Stakeholder relationships built through the Bushfire Relief Fund* (46%).

Figure B.6 Do you still use any of the following outputs from the Bushfire Relief Fund?



n=26

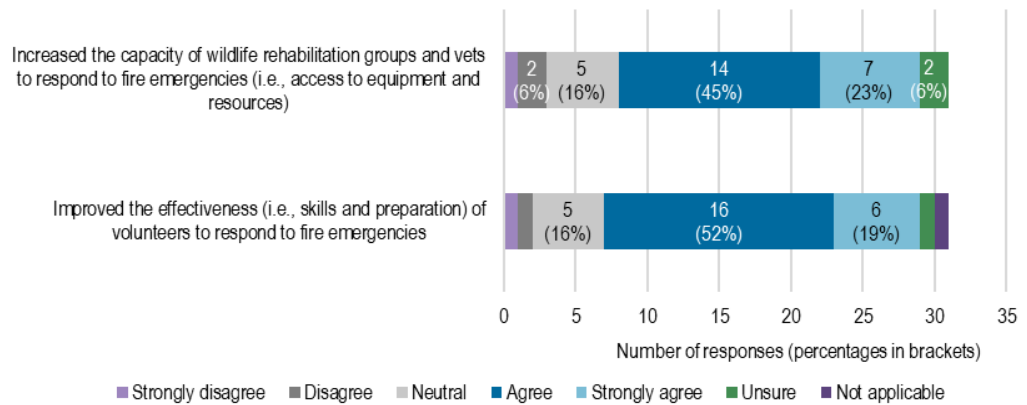
Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options. As a result, percentages do not sum to 100%.

Source: ACIL Allen

Respondents perceived the Fund to be effective (see Figure B.7). Most respondents (71%) *Agree* or *Strongly agree* that the Fund has *Improved the effectiveness (i.e., skills and preparation) of volunteers to respond to fire emergencies*. Similarly, 68% *Agree* or *Strongly agree* that the Fund has *Increased the capacity of wildlife rehabilitation groups and vets to respond to fire emergencies (i.e., to access equipment and resources)*.

When asked to provide any comments, 7 respondents provided further information. Five responses highlighted either the importance of the Fund, or the need for ongoing funding.

Figure B.7 Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the Bushfire Relief Fund has:



n=31

Source: ACIL Allen

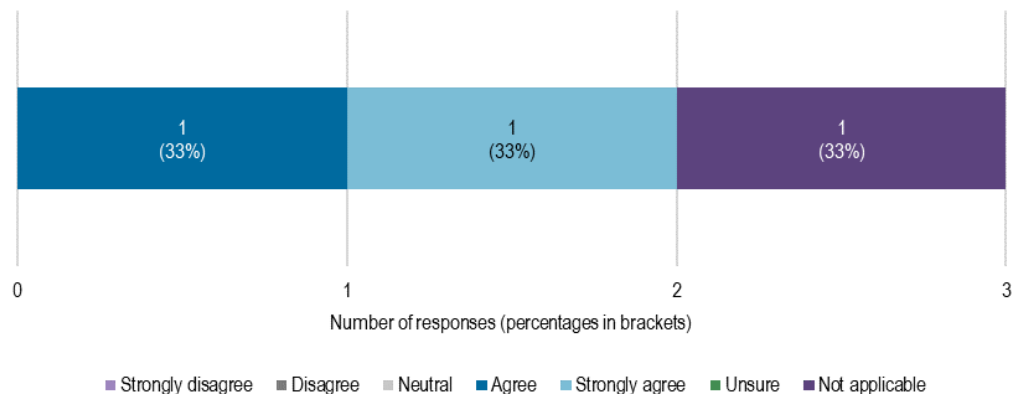
Respondents were asked to provide a qualitative answer to the question *What would be the consequences if the Bushfire Relief Fund had not provided support?* Of 17 responses, the most common sentiment (12 responses) was that without the Fund, the response to bushfires would be insufficient. This was attributed to one or more of the following reasons:

- unable to respond meaningfully to emergency due to reduced preparedness
- poor coordination in event of fire, resulting in avoidable loss of wildlife
- lacking essential equipment
- severely limited capability of wildlife groups
- volunteers not adequately and safely trained.

Co-contributions

The evaluation survey received limited but positive data on the impact of co-contributions on grant recipient outcomes, shown in Figure 2.6. Of the 4 respondents that selected that they had provided co-contributions, 3 respondents provided insight as to the degree to which it benefitted them (see Figure B.8). The responses were split evenly (1 each) between *agree*, *strongly agree* and *Not applicable*.

Figure B.8 To what extent do you agree or disagree that this additional support helped you deliver better outcomes for the project?



n=3

B.2.6 Improvements

Respondents were asked *How could the Bushfire Relief Fund, or similar programs, be improved to better support the sector?* A total of 22 qualitative responses were received, with the most common sentiment addressing a need for continued or expanded support (10 responses). This was followed by a need for more clarity, promptness, and simplicity in the process (4 responses) and greater resources for certain NSW regions (2 responses).

Finally, respondents were given the option to provide any further comment, which received 13 responses. The most common sentiment was that the program has made progress in the right direction (9 responses), of which, 6 responses highlight a need for further funding, a greater focus on recovery and resilience, and expanded capabilities to address the challenges that future emergencies may bring.

