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Information bulletin Australia: Bushfires

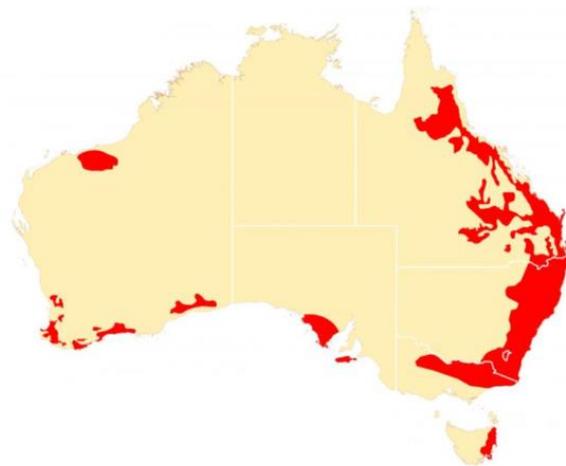
 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Glide n°	Date of issue: 8 January 2020
Date of disaster: From November 2019	Point of contact: Simon Rickard, National Operations Manager
Operation start date: 7 November 2019	Expected timeframe: Minimum 5 months
Category of disaster: Orange	
Host National Society: Australian Red Cross	
Number of people affected: TBC	Number of people to be assisted: TBC
N° of National Societies currently involved in the operation (if available and relevant): N/A	
N° of other partner organizations involved in the operation (if available and relevant): N/A	

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. Australian Red Cross is extremely grateful for the huge outpouring of support from people within Australia and abroad. Australian Red Cross is accepting donations to the Red Cross Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund which helps our national emergency teams to do their work – including the bushfires and heatwaves we're currently seeing and disasters yet to come. At this time, Australian Red Cross is not seeking other forms of assistance from our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners for the bushfire operation.

The situation

High temperatures and prolonged dry conditions have resulted in multiple bushfires in the states of New South Wales (NSW) since early November 2019, in Victoria (VIC), Western Australia (WA) and South Australia (SA) since early December 2019, and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in January 2020. At least 23 people have died as a result of the bushfires, with six people still missing in VIC and NSW. The bushfires continue to burn through a reported six million hectares across Australia, destroying bush and farmland, and multiple towns. An estimated 4,200 residential and public structures have been destroyed. Loss of wildlife is estimated to have surpassed one billion, along with tens of thousands of livestock. Due to prevailing drought conditions over all affected states during 2019, agricultural and horticultural sectors will be impacted well into the long-term. Due to the changeable nature of this crisis, rapid assessments are ongoing and all reported figures are expected to change as the situation evolves.



Above normal fire conditions for 2019-2020 bushfire season highlighted in red. (Source: *Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre*)

The intensity and size of bushfires in some areas has led to the creation of their own weather systems, generating pyrocumulonimbus clouds, trapping heat and generating strong wind and lightning strikes, in turn sparking further fires. High winds have also helped the bushfires to spread, with some fires jumping over highways and other

major containment lines. The pace at which the bushfires have spread and the subsequent heavy smoke have made it difficult for emergency services to access and evacuate some communities, at times forcing residents to flee to beaches and other water bodies to avoid impact and await rescue. Power, fuel, and food supplies have been severely interrupted to some communities and road closures have been common. This has resulted in some communities being isolated, or only accessible by air or sea (when smoke conditions allow). The bushfire and weather conditions have also severely impacted telecommunications across most affected areas. Smoke haze has also significantly worsened air quality across southern and eastern Australia, with some areas reaching 20 times above levels considered safe by the Australian Government, including in the major cities of Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne. The reduction in air quality is a major public health concern and the Australian Ministry of Health is warning of significant long-term health risks, particularly for vulnerable members of the population such as elderly, infants and those already managing serious health conditions. Mental health is also a significant concern as people face the stress posed by living through prolonged heatwave and bushfire events, the loss of friends and family, loss of livelihoods, property, pets and livestock, and for some, extended periods of displacement.

The NSW State Government has declared a state of emergency and the VIC State Government has declared a state of disaster, granting them each significant authority to mobilise additional resources and coordinate services and population movement in the emergency management of the bushfires. Current forecasts anticipate that the current bushfires will continue to burn at their current scale or higher, until at least March 2020. Though NSW and VIC have been the worst hit so far, extreme heat and drought conditions across Australia threaten a high likelihood of further bushfires in existing, and new areas over the coming months.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Australian Red Cross' role as auxiliary to government in national emergency response is primarily to provide psychosocial support, community outreach and, in some states, evacuation centre management. This role applies across the disaster management continuum, including community preparedness and early warning messaging, emergency response and continues into long-term recovery. In the lead up to the current bushfire emergency response, the Australian Red Cross Emergency Services team (ARCES) has been supporting communities in affected areas through drought and extreme heat conditions over much of 2019, and then shifting into emergency response mode when the bushfires first escalated in early November 2019.

ARCES has mobilised over 1,590 staff and volunteers from across Australia for the bushfire emergency response. They are working from multiple emergency operations centres across the affected states and supporting 105 evacuation centres.

So far over 18,600 people have been supported by ARCES through the bushfire emergency response across the following areas:

- Community outreach
- Psychosocial First Aid (PFA)
- Relief distribution (food, water and hygiene items)
- Support to evacuation centres and services
- Emergency cash grants
- Restoring Family Links (known as "Register. Find. Reunite" in Australia)

Australian Red Cross is also monitoring smaller bushfires affecting the states of Tasmania (TAS) and Queensland (QLD), though they are not at a level that yet require emergency action.

The overall coordination of the bushfire response is managed by each state's governmental disaster management department, the main actors being the State Fire Services, state police and government relief agencies. The Australian Army, Navy and Air Force (defence forces) has also been mobilised to provide support and a significant

number of wildlife rescue organisations are also in action. Australian Red Cross is working in coordination with all bushfire emergency response actors.

The following table provides a summary of key *available* information by state, as of 7 January 2020.

State	Key areas as affected	Hectares burned/ currently burning	Housing /infrastructure damage	People evacuated	Volunteers activated
NSW & ACT	NSW South Coast through to VIC border South Coast Snowy Mountains Southern Highlands	Over 4.9 million hectares 130 active fires	1588 properties	4,900	400
VIC	East Gippsland Mallacoota Cudgewa Corryong Tintalra Towong	Over one million hectares 30 active fires	110 properties	~35,000 (5,000 residents & 30,000 holidaymakers)	300
SA	Adelaide Hills Kangaroo Island Fleurieu Peninsula Eyre Peninsula Yorke Peninsula	Over 244,000 hectares 25 active fires	88 properties	~60	200
WA	Eucla Goldfields	1.5 million hectares 30 active fires	1 property	None evacuated, 300 holidaymakers currently stranded (now evacuated)	15

The IFRC Country Cluster Support Team in Suva and the IFRC Asia-Pacific Regional Office in Kuala Lumpur have offered support to Australian Red Cross should they need it and are working to direct donor enquiries and share information on the bushfire response to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



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1. Australian Red Cross [website](#)
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How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives,
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.
