**Submission to the South Australian Biodiversity Act Review 2024**

**by South Australian Veterinary Emergency Management (SAVEM) Inc**

**28 February 2024**

SAVEM has submitted notes to the survey provided by the review. This submission seeks to elaborate on some matters raised during the survey questions.

**Who we are and why we are writing a submission**

*SAVEM is a Tier 2 Participating Organisation (PO) within the South Australian State Emergency Management Plan (the SEMP). SAVEM's remit is animal welfare for all animal species in all hazards emergency incidents, working within the One Health approach. SAVEM has deployed to 20 wildfire and flood events since its formation in 2009, with practical real-world experience in witnessing the effect of bushfire and flood on the natural environment and biodiversity. SAVEM operates in all phases of a Prevention, Preparedness and Relief/Response and Recovery (PPRR) model of Emergency Management (EM). Veterinarian Dr Rachel Westcott leads SAVEM. Her PhD (2018) focused on public health and preparedness in bushfire emergencies.*

Biodiversity is closely linked to the One Health concept. One Health acknowledges and describes the intricate interconnection between people, animals and plants, and their *shared* environment. Therefore, biodiversity cannot be viewed in isolation. It is integral to human health and underpins everything we do. It is not something that is separate from, or parallel to, human existence and activity.

One Health is closely linked to the United Nations' Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) (2015-2030). Australia is a signatory to Sendai. Sendai advocates for *the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social,*

*cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.*

The Act will be strengthened by direct reference to SFDRR and One Health to help more South Australians understand the holistic nature of biodiversity. Robust biodiversity brings with it triple bottom line benefits: social, economic and environmental.

In accordance with the discussion paper to this review, notes contained in this submission will address Topic 2, Topic 4 and Topic 6.

**Topic 2 – Avoidance of impacts**

The avoidance of impacts on biodiversity must include reference to natural hazard emergencies and climate change. In Emergency Management terms, avoidance is closely aligned with prevention and preparedness. Public education in prevention of and preparedness for natural hazard emergencies will contribute to avoidance by limiting adverse impacts on people and the environment we all share - due to the actions of informed communities. Education in this sphere will need to be resourced and funded from multiple sources, possibly including the Emergency Services Levy fund. Such an investment will save government money in the medium to long terms, by decreasing the funding needed for response and recovery.

**Topic 4 – Threats to biodiversity**

Identifying and mitigating threats to biodiversity must include rigorously addressing the effects of increasing natural hazard emergencies and the frequency and severity of extreme weather events due to climate change. Climate change exacerbates the damage already done and continuing to be caused by poor urban planning, population growth, clearing of native vegetation and intensifying land use. Climate change increases the magnitude of threats to biodiversity, and natural systems have less time and capacity to respond,

evolve and compensate. This new normal, or new reality, needs to be recognised in the Act, as it increases the efforts and actions needed to mitigate threats. A cross-disciplinary, coordinated approach is required, and a framework for the identification of threats, and a statutory obligation for actions to address threats would be helpful.

Addressing biodiversity issues needs to include emergency services, including their contribution to minimum compliance assessment of developments. Emergency services are active across the continuum of Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR). In the Prevention phase, emergency services have obligations to assess minimum compliance requirements on development e.g. SA CFS assessing Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) and asset protections zones, which have impacts on the ability to respond during an emergency event. Minimum building standards contribute to the Preparedness phase where preservation of human life and minimising impacts on biodiversity are direct goals. The Recovery phase involves the "building back better" concept, and this also applies to creating more resilient natural systems. *Building back better* is the Recovery mantra whereby the replacement for built and natural environments anticipates coming obligations so as to be more resilient in future emergency events, which also improves biodiversity performance.

**Topic 6 – Biodiversity planning and reporting**

Emergency services have real-world, first-hand experience of the degree to which adverse impacts upon biodiversity are increasing due to climate change. Therefore, emergency services are a source of valuable, naturalistic environmental data and should be part of the reporting structure. This data can be a direct contributor to the objectives of the Act, effectively integrating the inputs of the emergency services to the objectives, outcomes and outputs of the Act.

The operation of the Act will require financial support from a diverse range of sources. This could include the Education budget, to support public awareness of threats to biodiversity, and the Emergency Service Levy fund. Again, investment in prevention, preparedness and mitigation will save public money in the medium and long term.

Thankyou for the opportunity to contribute to the Biodiversity Act review.



Dr Rachel Westcott PhD BVMS(Hons) BSc DipAppSc

Coordinator, SAVEM Inc.