

THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EMERGENCY RESPONDERS AND ANIMAL OWNERS IN BUSHFIRE: IMPROVING COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE OUTCOMES



Rachel Westcott^{1,2}, Mel Taylor^{2,3}, Kevin Ronan⁴

¹ Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, ² Centre for Health Research, School of Medicine, University of Western Sydney, ³ Department of Psychology, Macquarie University, ⁴ School of Human, Health and Social Sciences, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton

The purpose of this study is to develop best practice methods for preparedness and response practices in a bushfire hazard, with the aim of enhancing community well-being and safety. Effective collaboration between animal owners, emergency responders and the whole of community could be one way to narrow the gap between hazard awareness and hazard survival.

THE THEORY

Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers 1975) and **Community Engagement Theory** (Paton 2008) form the theoretical framework for this research.

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) connects perceived hazard severity, likelihood of occurrence, available mitigation measures and self-efficacy.

Community Engagement Theory (CET) examines organisational trust, information gathering and the transition from awareness to informed action.

THE PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Animal owners – of any kind and any number of animals – and

Emergency responders are the two groups in this study.

Responders may be primary (such as the Country Fire Service, CFS) or secondary (such as the RSPCA).

THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Positive preparedness and response behaviour

Synergism at animal owner/responder interface

Contribution to the dynamic evolution of communications and warnings

Bespoke community engagement programs

Community safety, striving for “post traumatic growth”

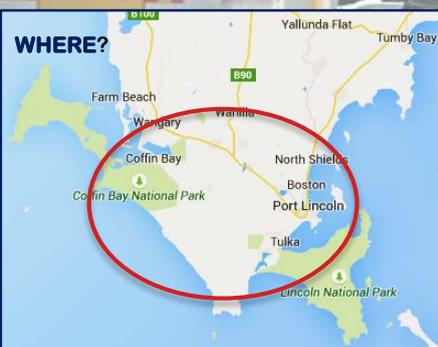
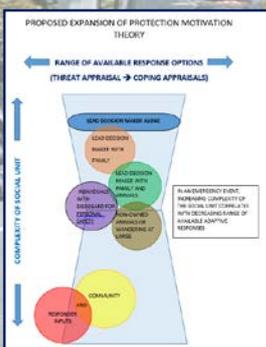
THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Can Protection Motivation Theory be applied *vicariously*?

Is Community Engagement Theory useful to help implement effective hazard mitigation behaviour?

Does understanding the elements of both theories contribute to community well-being?

Do some demographics need bespoke strategies and could these be applicable to other groups?



END USER STATEMENT

Dr Nancy Bombardieri, Manager, Emergency Management, PIRSA.
PIRSA will be able to apply the outcomes of “The Emergency Responders and Animal Owners in Bushfire Project” in the short term and long term. In the short term the outcomes will be used as inputs to PIRSA’s “Animals in Emergencies” project that will document the South Australian framework for the management of animals in emergencies. This will provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities for response agencies and the community with respect to the management of animals in emergencies. In the longer term the outcomes can be used to direct and inform operational plans with the expected end result of more effective response activities with lower levels of psychological impacts for both responders and animal owners.

