

Dear <Salutation>,

We are living in extraordinary times. From bush fires to a global pandemic, it feels like the world has turned upside down.

But as we face significant challenges over the coming months, I am buoyed by the incredible acts of kindness and support we have witnessed over the summer.

Thank you from all of us at Bush Heritage.

Such simple words, but on behalf of all communities and wildlife affected by the widespread, devastating bushfires, I wanted to say it. Everyone has been so generous these past few months. It's inspiring.

I know you're very concerned about the survival of our reserves, our partners' country, and the native wildlife that call them home. I've read your emails, I've taken your calls, I'm heartened by your generosity.

Thank you for being there during the toughest bushfire season in our history. We are used to fire but this was like nothing we've seen or experienced before. We couldn't have supported our dedicated team on our bushfire-affected reserves without you.

Like you I struggled to comprehend the level of devastation I was seeing in the media, so relentless were the fires. As soon as it was deemed safe, I headed to one of our worst fire-impacted reserves, Burrin Burrin, near Canberra. I needed to see for myself what our teams were facing, and the impact of these large scale fires on the resilience of our landscapes.

Our reserves are vital habitats and homes that protect some of Australia's most endangered native species. A catastrophic event could mean disaster for them, and for us.

Burrin Burrin is in the upper reaches of the Shoalhaven River. It is a place of wild gullies with lush, ferny floors. Imagine mist-shrouded forests of Silvertop Ash and woodlands of Brittle Gum.

<Salutation, to/To> be honest, I felt very uneasy about seeing how this magical landscape had fared.

But that uneasiness didn't last long.

Being on the ground at Burrin Burrin brought home just how intense and widespread the blaze was, but it also rekindled a feeling of hope. Through the wreckage, I could see that life was already regenerating, mere weeks after the fire.

As I wandered through the reserve with our neighbours who are integral to our collaborative fire management strategies – I saw green sprouts shooting up through burnt soil. There were even stunning native cherry trees that had managed to evade the fire.

Every step I took felt more hopeful than the last.

A Red-necked Wallaby hopped past, and we were thrilled to discover fresh wombat scat, a sure sign that despite all odds, these iconic creatures have managed to survive.

Most significantly, and surprisingly, the reserve wasn't silent. I am so happy to share that the bush is still singing in some places. At Burrin Burrin I saw two lyrebirds, and heard a soundtrack of wonderfully familiar native bird calls.

It's a promise that despite the devastation wrought, and the challenging road to recovery, the bush has the potential to return to its former glory.

During this unrelenting bushfire season, Bush Heritage experienced considerable fire impacts and increased threats to seven of our reserves across New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

In scale and intensity, this was an unprecedented fire event, but thanks to the land management ground work that you so generously support, the impact of these fires has been minimised.

But we don't stop there. We have learnt more about further training, improved cultural burning and better support and programs for staff.

Our National Fire Program Manager, Richard Geddes has prepared a more detailed update on the current state of the individual reserves, which is enclosed. It includes reports from our reserve managers on how our fire-preparedness made a difference.

For our reserve managers like Paul Hales in Yourka in far north Queensland and our Healthy Landscape Managers like Brenda Duffy, who was fighting fires at home and at work on the south coast of New South Wales, it has been an exhausting and horrific summer on the firegrounds.

We are all so grateful for the support and efforts of our partners, and state agencies who have worked tirelessly over the last few months to help defend our reserves.

And a special note must be made for the Traditional Owners who we work with on their land and sea country. Aboriginal people have carefully managed fire regimes for thousands of years and continue to do so across large parts of the country.

As the fires hit the east coast, it brought home how powerful right-way fire management can be and how necessary it is that we continue to involve Traditional Owners in fire management and post-fire recovery processes.

As Brenda said to me, "Fires can be really confronting. But to see all our stakeholders, Traditional Owners and the community coming together on the firelines to support each other to suppress the fires, and in the aftermath, was amazing. That's a really important part of our work and will play a key role in the long term recovery of our landscapes."

Truly, it's been a heroic effort from everyone across the country, including our ground staff, neighbours, partners and you, our incredible supporters who are so critical to maintaining a healthy, resilient country.

Thank you for your abundance of generosity and compassion. You give me hope that together we can bring the bush back from the brink.

With warm regards,

Heather Campbell
Chief Executive Officer
Bush Heritage Australia