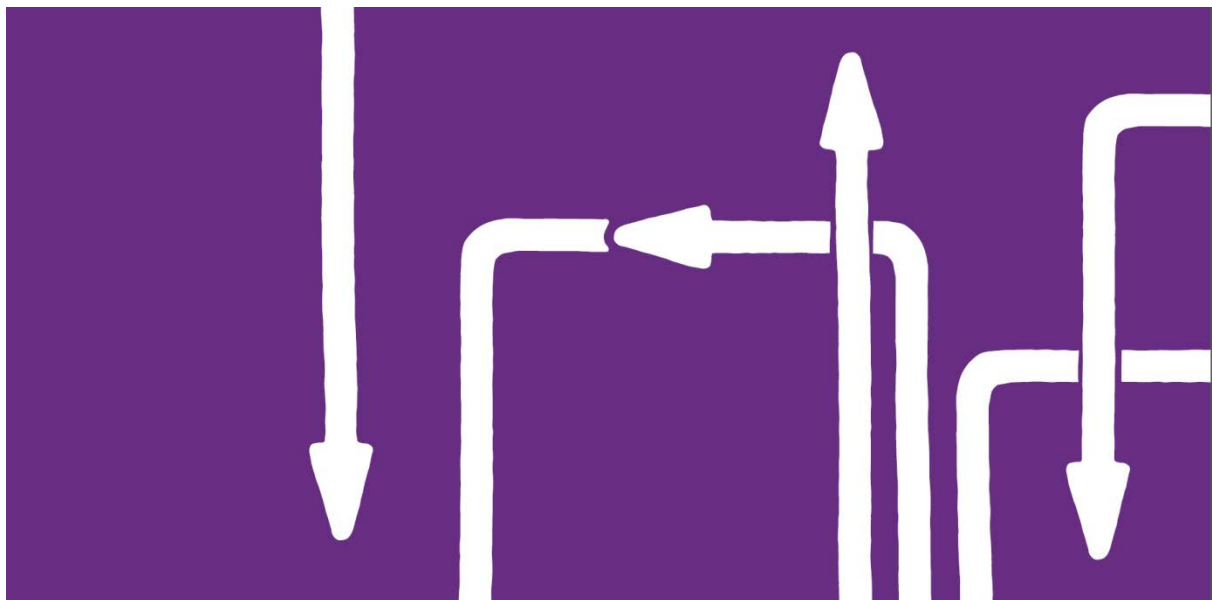




Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Foodbank Australia Response

NTG-HB2-296

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Donations and Funds Received

1. The approximate total value of donations received by Foodbank Australia during the 2019-2020 bushfire season, for the purpose of or in connection with the bushfires is:

Federal Government Grant (Department of Social Services)	\$2,000,000
Corporate	\$1,567,096
Individuals	\$20,175
Total	\$3,587,271

2. Details of pledges

Value of pledges not ultimately forthcoming: \$0.

3. Distribution to date

Please note: Foodbank Australia does not distribute the funds to end recipients. The funds are used to purchase key staple food and groceries for distribution to state/territory Foodbanks, who in turn disseminate them to charities (who provide food relief to their clients) or make them available to clients through regional Foodbank 'hubs'. Most of the 196 Emergency Relief Providers registered with the Commonwealth (through the Department of Social Services) are registered with Foodbank.

As per the comments below, Foodbank initially used existing stock in its warehouses to meet the urgent need for food relief arising from the bushfires. Major food procurement was planned for March/April 2020 (and beyond) for the dual purposes of replenishment and ongoing demand for food relief throughout the bushfire relief and recovery period. However, the onset of COVID-19 led to major food/grocery supply chain interruption which meant that procurement was not possible for some time. Of the total value of donations received in connection with the 2019-2020 bushfire season, \$1,271,459 has been spent on food and groceries to date. This figure will increase quickly from now as food/grocery supply chains are returning to some semblance of normal, meaning that products are now available for procurement.

4. Other than the Federal Government funds, Foodbank Australia's donors during the 2019-2020 bushfire season were almost entirely corporate organisations. Donors were informed that their investment would go towards food purchasing programs.

Foodbank Australia made clear to corporate donors that their contributions would go towards replenishing the existing stock despatched to affected areas during the early days of the crisis, understanding that it takes time for us to produce/source replacement product. Furthermore, Foodbank Australia explained to donors that, where possible, we would purchase products from regional areas to protect jobs and stimulate local economies in those specific zones, noting that many regional areas have been hit hard by drought and some had the double whammy of bushfires on top.

Information about Foodbank's bushfire-related activities was primarily provided to donors through phone calls, emails and then a detailed two-page summary of when and how funds would be used by Foodbank Australia.

5. The food and groceries purchased by Foodbank Australia using funds received in connection with the 2019-2020 bushfire season has been and will continue to be distributed according to need as reported by the State & Territory Foodbanks. This included immediate supplies needed for emergency relief efforts in fire-affected areas and the replenishing of provisions of other State & Territory Foodbanks that directed stock to the fire-affected States in the early days of the disasters. 5% of the funds received are retained for the operating expenses of Foodbank Australia.
6. There were no limitations affecting the decisions made as to how to allocate the funds received in connection with the 2019-2020 bushfire season.

7. As previously noted, Foodbank Australia does not distribute the funds to end recipients. We purchase key staple food and groceries for distribution to state/territory Foodbanks, who then provide food and groceries to charities which disseminate them to the public. The identification of potential recipients for the food/groceries resides with the charities on the ground (noting that most of these charities are registered with the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission).
8. The most useful information for Foodbank Australia is the real-time identification of the need of charities by the State & Territory Foodbanks, combined with updates via Federal committees/working groups (see below).
9. Allocation of funds

Total funds received	\$3,587,271
Allocated to food & grocery procurement	\$3,407,907
Allocated to Foodbank Australia operating expenses (5%)	\$179,364
Distributed (spent) to date on food & grocery procurement	\$1,271,459
Remaining to be distributed (spent) on food & grocery procurement	\$2,136,448

It is Foodbank Australia's intention to spend all funds before the end of FY21 and based on our most recent discussions with food and grocery manufacturers and retailers alike, this should be achievable.

10. All funds, other than the 5% operating expenses, are to be spent on food & grocery procurement.
11. As mentioned above, Foodbank Australia does not distribute funds to individuals or agencies registered with State/Territory Foodbanks. Funds received from the Department of Social Services (DSS) on 23 March 2020 were to *"immediately increase the provision of services ... to communities affected by bushfires, for services to be provided to 30 June 2021. This funding can be used to supplement business as usual to support Commonwealth funded Emergency Relief providers due to the demand on resources because of the bushfires"*. The funds and the contributions from corporate partners for bushfires are used for our Key Staples Program ie food/grocery procurement. It should be noted that, consistent with advice from the National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA) and the National Charities Bushfire Recovery Forum, our food relief efforts were and are focused not only on the immediate crisis phase, but also the relief and recovery phase, which - experience tells us - will last for years in many regions. As such, we are preparing for additional food procurement to be required for regions recovering from the 2019/20 bushfires right throughout FY 2021.
12. As mentioned above, except for a very small amount of Facebook donations passed on to state/territory Foodbanks, Foodbank Australia does not distribute funds to charities or their clients. Funds raised have been directed to food procurement. Given the supply chain interruption experienced because of unusual buying patterns arising from COVID-19, food procurement for bushfire-related purposes has been delayed. This delay has been communicated to DSS and donors alike, with existing stock and public food/grocery donations received at State/Territory Foodbank warehouses in January 2020 filling the gap in the interim.

Coordination of Response

13. Foodbank Australia is a member of the Trusted Information Sharing Network (TISN) Food and Grocery Sector Group (FGSG) led by the Departments of Home Affairs and Agriculture. This group generally only meets once or twice a year, but the group was activated during the 2019/20 bushfire season and met frequently throughout the bushfire period (initially daily, moving to weekly over time). This forum allowed timely, accurate sharing of critical information to ensure affected communities could continue to access food and groceries, whether via supermarkets or via Foodbank. This forum, which included industry as well as both Federal and State/Territory Government representation, was helpful

in identifying priority regions for food relief, and overcoming barriers to food relief (eg transport/distribution challenges; supply chain interruption issues; unreliable power supply; access to cold storage etc).

The National Charities Bushfire Recovery Forum was established in mid-January 2020, originally convened by the Prime Minister. Foodbank Australia had representation on this forum from the outset, reporting on issues of national significance and playing a role in national coordination of charity effort. This forum, particularly the mapping/data reporting, was helpful in identifying any gaps or potential duplication of effort in food relief distribution noting our important role as an enabler to the 196 Emergency Relief Providers across Australia.

It should be noted that the above comments refer to Foodbank Australia involvement only, not state/territory level involvement by state/territory Foodbanks, which will be canvassed in their submissions.

14. It is assumed this question relates to funds distribution. As previously stated, Foodbank Australia does not distribute funds.

Opportunities for Improvement

15. Foodbank Australia can only comment from a food relief perspective, and in an observational capacity only, noting that the physical distribution of food relief is conducted by State/Territory Foodbanks.
 - It appeared that State/Territory Foodbanks with a formal and/or recognised role on state/territory disaster relief committees (or equivalent) were able to distribute food relief more easily, as the priority communities were agreed upon and communicated promptly. Those state/territory Foodbanks without a formal role on government committees were reliant on local intelligence/communications (including via emergency services) and the existing Foodbank agency network, as well as any local intelligence reported from industry or government via the Trusted Information Sharing Network Food and Grocery Sector Group.
 - In all affected states/territories, we were made aware of duplication of effort arising from (presumably) well-meaning individuals/organisations sending or even personally delivering unsolicited food/groceries to bushfire-affected communities, which created storage, food safety (notably arising from lack of chilled capacity during lengthy periods without reliable power supply), disposal and volunteer/personnel challenges for communities at a time of extreme stress. Proactive messaging encouraging the community to donate to food relief organisations like Foodbank rather than direct into community would greatly assist in streamlining efficiencies and minimising pressure on local communities.
 16. Foodbank Australia does not believe there is a need for a national charter for the distribution of charitable funds and resources following a natural disaster. In addition to the reporting requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, charities understand that transparency and meeting the expectations of all donor groups is paramount in earning and retaining their trust and future support.
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