

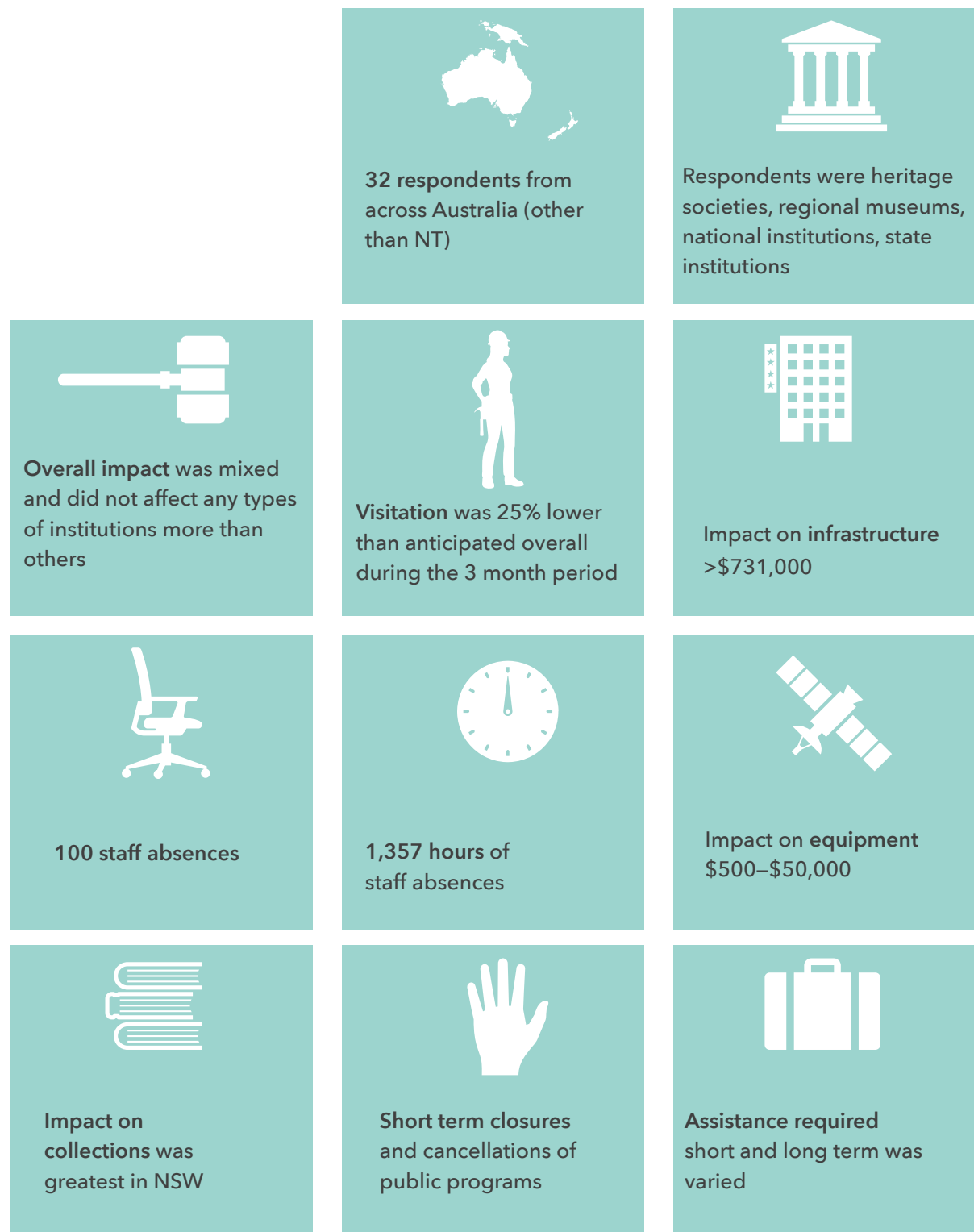
# IMPACT OF FIRE AND STORM EVENTS ON GLAM INSTITUTIONS IN AUSTRALIA 2020



## Contents

Findings at a glance	3
Background	4
Survey respondents	6
Overall impact	7
Impact on visitation	8
Impact on infrastructure	9
Impact on staff	10
Impact on equipment	11
Impact on collections	11
Building closures	11
Impact on programming and activities	11
Assistance required	12
Conclusion	13
APPENDIX - SURVEY	14

## Findings at a glance



## Background

Blue Shield is an international organisation that works to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by conflict and natural disaster. Blue Shield Australia (<http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au>) is the Australian committee, formed in 2006 to provide information and communication for cultural heritage organisations and sites following natural disasters in Australia. During 2019 and 2020 Blue Shield Australia joined with GLAM Peak <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/glam-peak> and other creative industry peak bodies as part of a Roundtable, to provide advocacy, communication and support through the disaster season on behalf of the cultural sector on behalf of the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) and creative arts sectors.

Over the summer of 2019-2020, Australia experienced unprecedented bushfires, causing smoke-filled air, dust and ash, and extreme weather – high temperatures, strong winds, heavy rainfall with threats of flooding, as well as golf-ball sized hail.

Blue Shield Australia managed this study on behalf of the Roundtable. Members of the Roundtable wanted to determine the impact of these extreme weather events on small and large organisations in all the affected areas, and to discover what assistance could be provided in the immediate aftermath of the events as well as in the months following.

Blue Shield Australia provided brief updates on many of the affected GLAM institutions and sites during January and February. These summaries can be found at <http://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/category/news/> All BSA and GLAM Peak Associations kept members up-to-date as best they could from news sources and emails from members and shared these on their websites and social media e.g. <https://www.alia.org.au/which-sector-are-you-interested/how-you-can-help-bushfire-recovery> and <https://www.amaga.org.au/news/amagas-response-bushfire-crisis>

While the impact of fire and weather events on GLAM institutions during the period was significant, it was dwarfed by the advent of COVID-19 in March 2020, which, by the end of the month had seen nearly all GLAM institutions closed to the public, volunteers isolated at home, reduced staff on-site, casual employees stood down and activities suspended.

## Approach to the study

In March 2020, Blue Shield Australia conducted a survey targeted at GLAM institutions, to assess the impact of the 2019-2020 extreme fire and storm events.

The survey was available on the Blue Shield Australia website (<http://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/news/blue-shield-australia-impact-survey-2020/>) for a four week period, from 9 March to 9 April 2020. It was promoted through Association websites, news articles and social media.

The survey attracted responses from 32 representatives of GLAM institutions.

## Limitations

There are limitations with any form of data collection. There are three main limitations in this study:

1. While a range of institutions were included in this survey, the small sample of 32 can not be considered to be a representative sample of the GLAM sector. Caution should be taken when interpreting the findings and using them to generalise them to the broader cultural sector;
2. This survey did not capture many of the GLAM institutions that were most severely impacted by the severe weather events (for example, that were reported in news items);
3. Responses to some questions were difficult to analyse because of the way the questions were worded and the survey designed.

### Note to reader

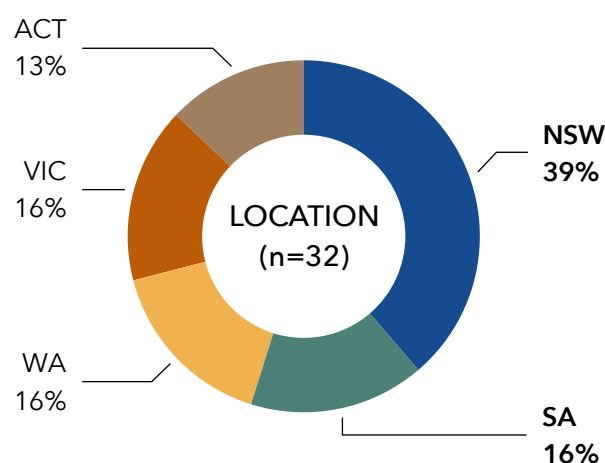
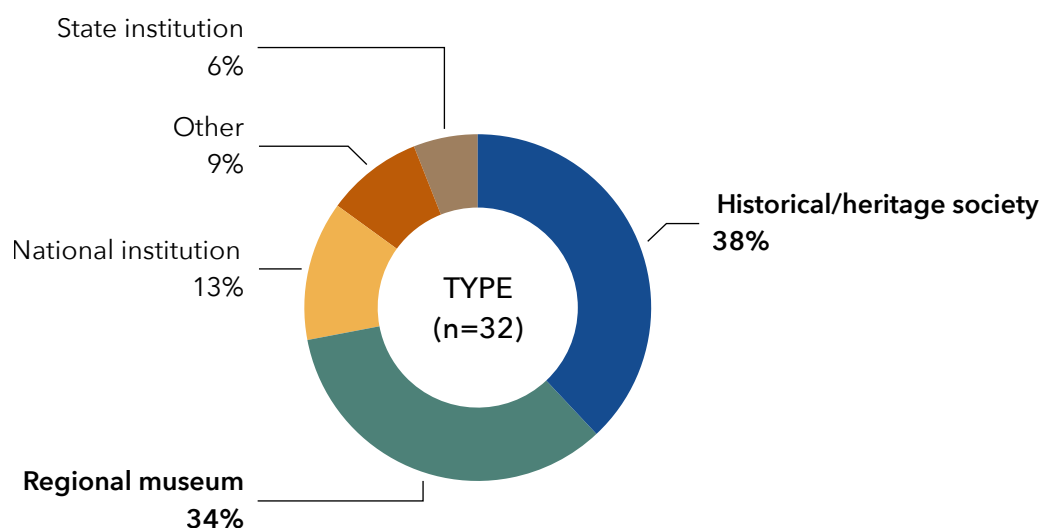
These survey results were based on a small sample size. NSF Consulting had no input into the questionnaire design and was brought in on this project on a pro bono basis after the data had been gathered.

It is understandable that this questionnaire was designed and distributed quickly so that findings would be available as soon as possible to inform government. However, for future studies we would recommend further questionnaire development and a more structured design.

## Survey respondents

Of the 32 survey respondents, approximately a third (38 per cent, 12 respondents) represented an historical/heritage society, another third (34 per cent or 11 respondents) a regional museum, 13 per cent (four respondents) were from a national institution, six per cent (two respondents) were from a state institution and nine per cent (3 respondents) were from another institution, such as a metropolitan museum, a council institution or a regional council facility that was not a museum or gallery.

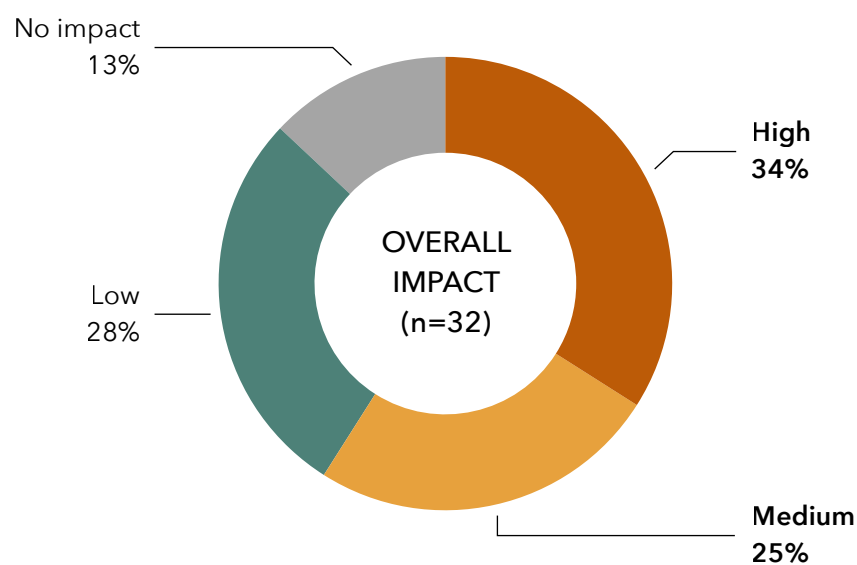
Respondents were from all states and territories (except Northern Territory, the state least impacted). More than a third (39 per cent) from NSW, 16 per cent from South Australia, a further 16 per cent from Western Australia, another 16 per cent from Victoria, and 13 per cent from ACT.



## Overall impact

The overall impact of the extreme weather conditions on institutions around Australia was mixed. More than half (59 per cent) of respondents to a **medium** or **high** extent, with just over a third (34 per cent) reporting **high** impact. Those highly impacted were venues ranging in size and type, including small historical or heritage societies, regional museums, state institutions and national institutions, located in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and ACT.

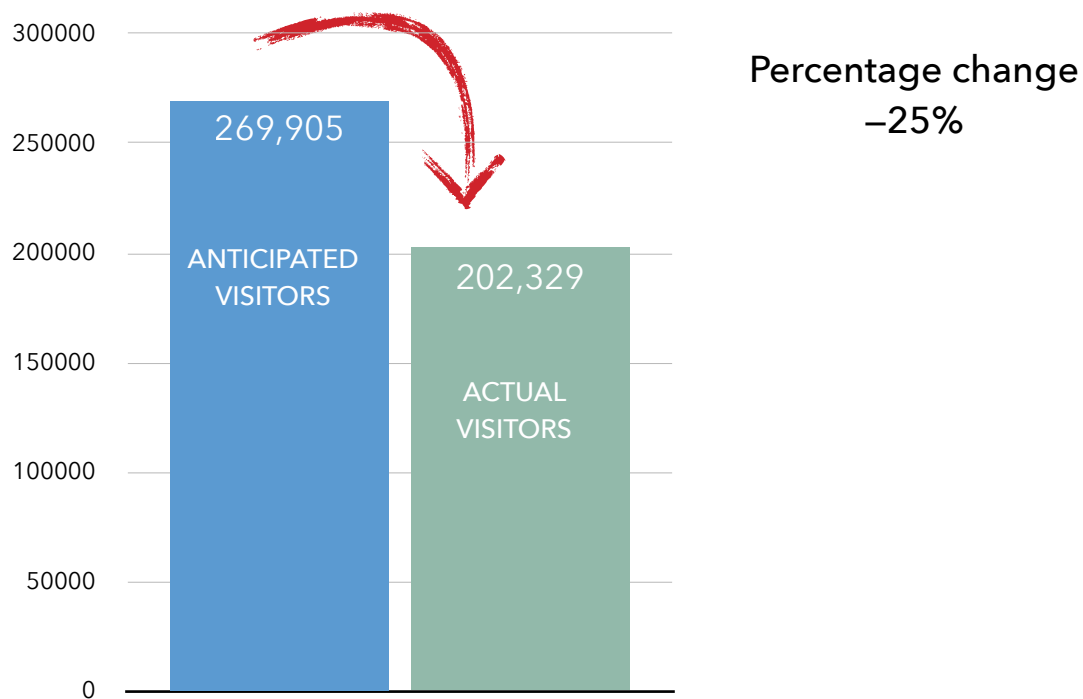
Close to half of the sample (41 per cent) were impacted to a **low level** or **not at all**. They included a range of institution types, sizes and locations.



## Impact on visitation

The extreme weather negatively impacted visitation levels on the whole. There were 25 per cent fewer visitors in the three month period than had been anticipated. Close to 270,000 visitors had been estimated, whereas just over 200,000 people actually visited. This is shown below.

Impact on visitor numbers (n=32)



However, despite those institutions reporting a drop in visitors, five institutions recorded an increase in visitor numbers. They were mostly historical societies in states other than NSW, with visitor numbers in the hundreds, usually about 50 to 100 more than they anticipated over that period of time.



## Impact on infrastructure

The impact to infrastructure exceeded rebuild costs of more than \$730,000 amongst the survey respondent cohort, and included damage by fire, floods and lightening strikes, affecting buildings, electrical infrastructure, and vehicles. Damage costs ranged from minor damage to a shed in SA at \$1,000, to an estimated building cost of \$500,000 for cottages destroyed at an historical society in SA.

STATE	TYPE OF VENUE	DAMAGE	EST. VALUE
ACT	National institution	Building burned	unknown
SA	History/heritage society	Two cottages destroyed	\$500,000
SA	History/heritage society	One small shed	\$1,000
VIC	History/heritage society	A number of building destroyed	Unknown
NSW	Regional museum	Track infrastructure burned	\$150,000
NSW	Regional gallery	Electrical infrastructure damaged by lightning strike	\$50,000
WA	Council building	Private sheds and houses destroyed by wind	\$30,000
Total estimated damage (n=32)			\$731,000

## Impact on staff

Staffing was an issue for regional and local institutions, as many volunteers and paid staff needed to take leave to deal with their own situations at home.

There were approximately **100 staff members** who needed to take **leave of absence** during the period of extreme weather events. Staff leave ranged from small or regional institutions losing a few staff members, to a major national institution losing up to 40 staff.

### Staff absences



An estimation of **1,357 hours** of staff absence was reported to have resulted from these events.



1,357 hours of staff absence

## Impact on equipment

Damage to plan and equipment were reported, including to smoke detectors, air conditioning filters, solar panels, fire alarms and fume hoods. Damage was also sustained to curtains and drop sheets, with dust and ash damage also widespread. Wind took the roof off a heritage cottage in WA and created havoc to landscaping, at a cost of at least \$50,000, and a rail museum in NSW saw \$150,000-worth of track destroyed by fire.

Additional equipment had to be purchased, such as air filters, air curtains and air purifiers to assist with air quality. The costs incurred varied, from \$500 to \$50,000.

## Impact on collections

Institutions in NSW were particularly badly affected by bushfires. Two museums, at risk of fire and flood, moved their collections into storage; another took in personal items from members of its community for safe storage. Works in at least one gallery were damaged and additional action was widespread to prevent harm to vulnerable items in the collection.

A third of all respondents took remedial action to prevent their works being damaged or destroyed, such as moving them into storage or taking other action.

## Building closures

While most institutions tried to stay open, there were short term closures. Almost half (**47 per cent**) of respondents **closed their buildings** to the public for some time over the three month period as a result of extreme weather and fire events during this time. Closures were short for some (a few hours or days), and longer for others. An historical society in Victoria closed for the entire three month period due to fire threat.

## Impact on programming and activities

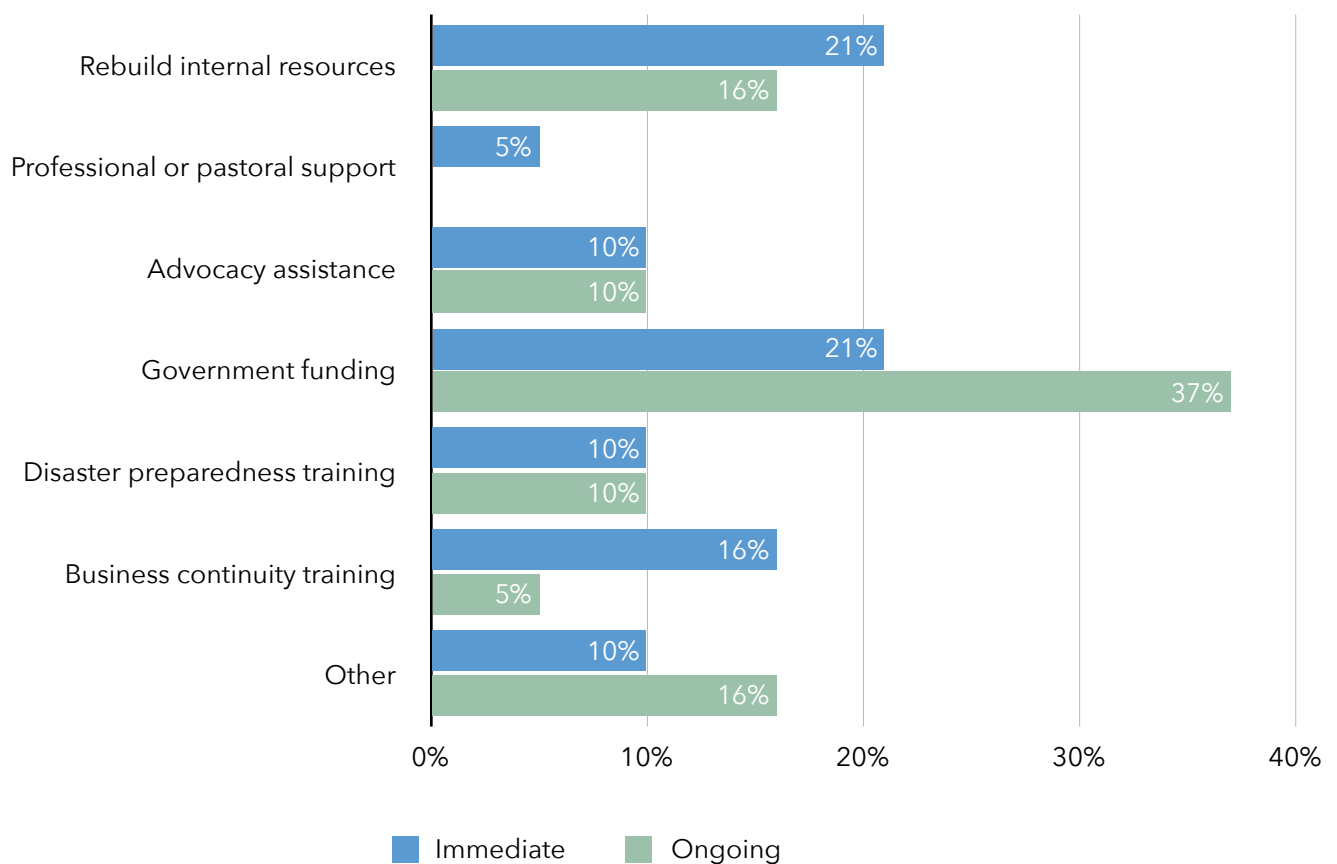
Public programs and exhibitions were cancelled at a number of sites in Victoria, NSW and ACT. By the end of March 2020 nearly all GLAM institutions were closed to the public, due to Covid-19, which then provided additional challenges to disaster planning, business continuity and vacated premises risks. For other institutions, their shops and café takings were considerably reduced, and others saw a decrease in visitation to town. Losses were reported up to \$15,000. Group tours had to be postponed. For one museum in NSW, bushfires meant its largest annual event, expected to attract 5,000 visitors, could not take place in 2020, at an estimated loss of \$50,000. A reduction in visitor income was a significant issue for a number of survey participants.

The situation was exacerbated by the need for staff to be absent if they suffered from respiratory difficulties or their own homes were in the path of the bushfires.

## Assistance required

Funding from government was clearly a requirement for the heavily affected institutions—particularly in the longer term—and especially for the smaller organisations with insufficient resources to cope with a disaster on the scale seen during the summer period. At the same time, organisations recognised the need to rebuild their own internal resources and do more to prepare for future disasters based on this experience. Less well-resourced institutions flagged their desire for support from the sector in terms of advocacy and capacity building to make them more resilient. There was also a need for professional and pastoral support for smaller organisations and for the staff and volunteers working in them.

Assistance required (n=32)



## Conclusion

The scale of the bushfire and storm disasters experienced from 1 November 2019 to 31 January 2020 across Australia caught everyone by surprise. It highlighted weaknesses in disaster preparedness and business continuity planning and provided the impetus to revisit these with increased understanding.

Although this survey cannot be generalised to represent the wider and larger GLAM sector throughout Australia impacted by the fires and storms, it clearly represents a sense of what occurred on a micro level.

## APPENDIX - SURVEY

### Blue Shield Australia impact survey

The purpose of this survey is to quantify the impact of the bushfires and extreme weather events experienced across Australia from 1 November 2019 to 31 January 2020. The information will be aggregated to provide an overall cost to the sector of natural disasters this season. A report will be published on the Blue Shield Australia website. We will not identify individual institutions' results.

The questions in the survey relate to visitor numbers, building closures, staff absences, technical issues, impact on collections and on revenue. Please respond on behalf of your institution, rather than on an individual or department basis.

There are 20 questions and it should only take 10-15 minutes to complete. All questions are optional, so if you don't know the answer, move on to the next.

Deadline for responses is close of business Monday 30 March, 2020 - extended to Thursday 9 April. If you have any questions, please contact [info@blueshieldaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@blueshieldaustralia.org.au).

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your response will help us advocate for greater future investment by government in disaster preparedness for cultural institutions.

Blue Shield Australia is supported by the Australian Society of Archivists, ICOM Australia, Australia ICOMOS, the Australian Library and Information Association, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, the Federation of Australian Historical Societies and the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives.

1. Please enter the name of your institution (and the name of your particular location if your institution has several sites).

2. Choose your location from the drop down menu.

3. Who is the best contact for any follow up to this survey?

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

4. How serious would you say the impact of bushfires and extreme weather conditions during the period has been for your institution?

☐ High

☐ No impact

☐ Medium

☐ Don't know

☐ Low

5. How many visitors did you anticipate versus the actual number between 1 November 2019 and 31 January 2020?

Anticipated number of visitors

Actual number of visitors

6. Were any of your buildings damaged or destroyed during the period? If no, leave the box blank. If yes, please briefly describe the cause and damage.

7. If buildings were damaged or destroyed, please provide a dollar estimate of the cost of repair or replacement.

8. Did you close your building to the public as a result of fire and weather events during the period?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

9. If yes, for how many normal opening hours was your building closed?

10. Were there any unplanned staff absences due to fire and weather events eg staff absences to protect property, staff granted leave during building closures etc?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

11. If yes, how many staff experienced absences?

12. If yes, what is the estimate of the total hours of absence resulting from these events?

13. Was there any noticeable impact on your plant/equipment, for example air conditioners? If no, leave the box blank. If yes, please provide brief details.

14. If there was damage to your plant/equipment eg air conditioners, what impact did this have on your service delivery? Please provide brief details.

15. Did your institution need to buy additional equipment eg improved filtration, additional air quality testing kit, and if so, at what cost?

16. Was there any impact on your collection items (your own items or items on loan for exhibitions)?

- ☐ Additional action was taken to prevent damage to works
- ☐ Works were moved into storage
- ☐ No impact
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Works were damaged or destroyed and/or other effects - please provide brief details including the number of works

17. Has there been an impact on your revenue for times of closure, as a result of reduced visitation and/or for other reasons? If no, leave the box blank. If yes, please provide an estimate of the dollar value - positive or negative.



**18. Did the bushfires or weather events impact your institution in any other ways?**

- ☐ Exhibitions were cancelled
- ☐ Public programs were cancelled
- ☐ Collections required remedial action
- ☐ Special measures to support staff
- ☐ Other (please provide brief details)

**19. What is the most important help you need now?**

- ☐ Rebuild internal resources
- ☐ Professional or pastoral support from peers/local organisations
- ☐ Advocacy assistance from sector organisations
- ☐ Funding from government
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Counselling for staff
- ☐ Disaster preparedness training
- ☐ Business continuity planning

**20. What is the most important help you anticipate needing in the year ahead?**

- ☐ Rebuild internal resources
- ☐ Professional or pastoral support from peers/local organisations
- ☐ Advocacy assistance from sector organisations
- ☐ Funding from government
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Counselling for staff
- ☐ Disaster preparedness training
- ☐ Business continuity planning

**21. Any other comments?**

**22. If you would like to receive a copy of the final report to your inbox, please provide your email address.**

**Name**

**Email Address**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Blue Shield Australia and GLAM Peak would especially like to acknowledge and thank the work of Sue McKerracher, ALIA CEO and Alex Marsden, National Director of AMaGA for their leadership and co-ordination of this survey and the work and secretariat support of the Cultural Response/GLAM Peak Roundtable to keep member organisations and the broader arts representative bodies up to date during the bushfire and disaster season of 2019/2020.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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Please direct any questions about this survey or findings report to Blue Shield Australia.