

Unexpected outcomes on the road to recovery after the Black Summer Fires - and its mostly Australian natives!

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Summary In the summer of 2019/20, Kangaroo Island experienced the most devastating bushfires in living memory. The fires burnt around half of the island, with 56 houses lost and many tens of thousands of animals killed. Kangaroo Island is world renowned for its unique and pristine natural environments and clean and green agricultural sectors. The island is free of many of the weeds, pests and diseases found in other parts of the country. Unfortunately the firefighting and recovery activities have exposed the island to many biosecurity threats. The introduction of weeds on firefighting units, army equipment and heavy machinery brought to, and moved around the island; weeds and pests in imported fodder brought over to feed stock and in grain and other food stuffs distributed for wildlife. The disturbance from the bushfires also makes these environments particularly susceptible to these biosecurity risks.

A number of projects have been developed to minimise these biosecurity risks to the island's

fragile environmental and agriculture sectors. Some of the weed incursions have been as expected – woody weeds spreading along new fencelines dispersed by the fencing plant and declared weeds that have not been established previously on the island coming in with new stock. However there have been several unusual and unprecedented weed explosions. Declared weeds like Salvation Jane and Cape tulip have appeared in new areas. Fire adapted Western Australian natives have spread from gardens burnt in the fires. Even more concerning is the weed outbreak in the forestry sector which may prove to be one of the biggest challenges the island will face following the bushfires, but also has the opportunity for the community and many stakeholders to pull together and solve the challenge, thereby protecting the valuable and pristine environments Kangaroo Island is famous for.

Keywords Fire; unexpected; declared