



**PRIME MINISTER**

FOR MEDIA

FRIDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 1983

**BUSHFIRES - COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE TO  
VICTORIA AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

The disastrous bushfires in Victoria and South Australia have been on an immense scale. The tragedy has affected all Australians. I have, over the last two days, by visiting affected areas, seen the stark evidence of loss and suffering.

I have informed the Premiers of both States that the Commonwealth stands ready to give urgent and sympathetic consideration to measures they may wish to propose to restore and rebuild communities. Officials of the three Governments are in constant liaison to identify needs and develop measures for meeting these needs.

These measures would be in addition to the standing natural disaster relief arrangements under which the Commonwealth is providing assistance to alleviate immediate hardship through the resources of the Defence Force and other Commonwealth agencies.

I announced yesterday "seeding" contributions to emergency relief funds in Victoria (\$400,000) and South Australia (\$200,000) to help in floating these public appeals.

Much more will, of course, be needed and will be provided by the Commonwealth once the total damage has been assessed. This will take some days and is likely to run into tens of millions of dollars.

I have now proposed to the Premiers of Victoria and South Australia initial instalments of that Commonwealth assistance in advance of settling final details. In the case of Victoria the Commonwealth will immediately advance \$10 million, and \$6 million will be provided to South Australia against Commonwealth contributions under the Natural Disasters Relief Arrangements (NDRA).

The Commonwealth is also prepared to extend categories of assistance beyond the core measures under NDRA (set out in the attachment) to meet the following:

- . low-interest loans of up to \$50,000 to primary producers and small business;
- . concessional loans of up to \$22,000 to owner-occupiers to meet the difference between insurance recoveries and the cost of replacing their principal residence;

- . assistance with freight costs of stock and fodder, including cost of transport of saleable stock to local abattoirs, and also the cost of disposal of dead stock;
- . up to \$1,200 per kilometre for materials for boundary fencing abutting roads, railways, water frontages, game reserves, Forestry Commission and unalienated Crown land;
- . concessional loans for re-establishment of facilities such as recreation camps.

These programs will be administered by the States. The Commonwealth reimburses the States on a 3:1 basis for their expenditures on NDRA measures.

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ATTACHMENT

NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF ARRANGEMENTS - CORE MEASURES APPLICABLE  
TO BUSHFIRES

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- . Grants for relief of personal hardship and distress (on a 1:1 basis where such expenditures do not qualify for 3:1 assistance);
- . grants for restoration of public assets and emergency protection and repair works by State, local and semi-government authorities;
- . concessional loans to primary producers for carry-on, restocking and restoration purposes;
- . freight subsidies for primary producers;
- . assistance to State, local and semi-government authorities for the disposal of helpless and unsaleable stock.