

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Pt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

The Commonwealth Government has made available to the Victorian authorities the services of the Army, Navy and Air Force to assist in any way they can in the fight against bushfires in Victoria.

Yesterday the Treasurer, Mr. Holt, on behalf of the Commonwealth Government informed the Victorian Government of the Commonwealth's concern and its anxiety to help.

Late last night the Deputy Premier of Victoria, Mr. Rylah, sent the following message to the Prime Minister's Department in Canberra:

"MR. RYLAH, THE DEPUTY PREMIER THANKS THE PRIME MINISTER FOR HIS OFFER OF ASSISTANCE FOR BUSH FIRE RELIEF. MR. RYLAH ASKS THAT NECESSARY INSTRUCTIONS BE ISSUED TO THE THREE DEFENCE SERVICES, ARMY, NAVY, and AIR FORCE, TO ENABLE THEM TO GIVE ASSISTANCE REQUIRED FOR BUSH FIRE PURPOSES ON THE REQUEST MADE BY THE CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, VICTORIA".

I have this morning despatched to the Victorian Premier, Mr. Bolte, a telegram in the following terms:

"YESTERDAY MY COLLEAGUE THE TREASURER ON MY BEHALF CONVEYED TO YOUR GOVERNMENT THE CONCERN FELT BY MY GOVERNMENT ARISING FROM YOUR DISASTROUS BUSH FIRE EXPERIENCE IN VICTORIA. HE EXPRESSED OUR SYMPATHY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED BEREAVEMENT, LOSS OF THEIR HOMES OR DAMAGE IN OTHER WAYS. HE INDICATED OUR READINESS TO DISCUSS APPROPRIATELY WITH YOUR GOVERNMENT ANY PROPOSALS YOU MAY BRING FORWARD FOR RELIEF OF DAMAGE AND HARDSHIP. LATE LAST NIGHT WHEN THE FIRE DANGER APPEARED MORE WIDESPREAD AND INCREASINGLY THREATENING WE IMMEDIATELY AGREED TO A REQUEST FROM YOUR COLLEAGUE THE CHIEF SECRETARY THAT YOUR GOVERNMENT BE GIVEN FULL AUTHORITY IN THE EMERGENCY TO REQUISITION ITS NEEDS FROM COMMONWEALTH SERVICES AND AGENCIES. WE ARE RELIEVED TO LEARN THAT HEAVY RAIN THIS MORNING HAS EASED THE POSITION AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. NO DOUBT THERE WILL BE A VARIETY OF MATTERS CONNECTED WITH SAFETY AND REHABILITATION IN WHICH YOU WILL STILL BE SEEKING SOME COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE AND CO-OPERATION. SO THAT THESE CAN BE PROMPTLY AND EFFECTIVELY DEALT WITH I HAVE ARRANGED FOR THE MINISTER FOR NAVY SENATOR GORTON TO ACT AS A CO-ORDINATING REPRESENTATIVE OF MY GOVERNMENT".

CANBERRA,

17th January, 1962.