

FOR PRESS!

P.M. No. 19/1967

TASMANIAN BUSHFIRES

Statement by the Acting Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon.
John McEwen

We feel today for all Tasmanians, For the Commonwealth Government, on my own personal behalf, and on behalf of the entire Australian community, I express deep distress and sorrow at the bushfire disaster in Southern Tasmania, including in and around Hobart. I add particular feelings of sympathy for those who have been bereaved and also for those who have lost their homes, or their livelihood, or both.

One immediate question is, of course, relief of personal hardship and distress. The Commonwealth Government will share the financial side of this work with the State Government. The Commonwealth would always do this in a disaster of this dimension. I have already taken steps to let the Premier of Tasmania know this.

But in addition, we wish to give such other immediate practical help as we can. As soon as the fires were reported yesterday, Army personnel were made available for fire-fighting and other services, including emergency accommodation and transport. Army assistance will continue to be available.

Further, I am letting the Premier know that I am appointing the Minister for Air, Mr. Howson, to take personal charge of Commonwealth arrangements for assistance to the Tasmanian authorities. He will be authorised to receive and co-ordinate requests and take action on behalf of the Commonwealth. He will be assisted in this by a group of officials from Commonwealth Departments and the Services.

The arrangement to allot co-ordinating responsibilities to Mr. Howson does not change the understanding that Senator Henty, as a Tasmanian Member of the Commonwealth Government will, as a first personal priority, be in close touch with both the Tasmanian and Commonwealth authorities. This has been so since the news of the fires yesterday and will continue.

CANBERRA,
8th February, 1967