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NEW SOUTH WALES BUSHFIRES

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

This afternoon the Premier of New South Wales advised me that his Government had contributed a further \$50,000 to the joint Commonwealth/State scheme for the relief of personal hardship and distress in the New South Wales bushfires. In accordance with what I said in the House yesterday, the Commonwealth readily agreed it would itself match this contribution with an additional \$50,000 to the relief scheme.

As is usual in disasters of this nature, the armed services have assisted with all means at their disposal to alleviate the effects of the fires. For more than the last week troops, at the request of the Bushfire Control Organisation, have maintained a permanent round-the clock watch in the threatened areas. When the crisis struck yesterday, the Air Force made 350 men available to the bushfire control and police in the Glenbrook area. These ground parties were backed up with water tankers, fire beaters and knapsack spray equipment. The Air Force received no requests for aircraft to assist but it has had a C130 aircraft patrolling the Newcastle and Sydney districts on fire spotting duties. This aircraft fed back to ground control the intelligence about the fires gained from the air.

Mr Willis, the Chief Secretary of New South Wales, was in touch with me today after an inspection of the disaster area. He asked whether the Army could provide six fire tankers and crews to be held at standby alert, two bulldozers with crews, a mobile canteen, a generating set and two arc lights for night work. I readily agreed with this request and the equipment and personnel are now on their way to the area.

CANBERRA
29 November 1968