



**PRIME MINISTER**

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8 1981

Controlling Bushfires in Victoria

At the request of the Victorian Government, the Commonwealth Government is to provide a RAAF Hercules Aircraft to Victoria for the bushfire season in 1981/82.

The Prime Minister, Mr Malcolm Fraser and the Premier of Victoria, Mr Dick Hamer, today announced this important initiative which will permit the Victorian Government to utilise a technologically advanced fire bombing system in the fight against the bushfire menace in Victoria. The Hercules will be equipped with a Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) which has a capacity of about 11,000 litres of water and fire-retardant chemicals. The US Forest Service has undertaken to make this system available for evaluation in Victorian conditions. The Commonwealth and Victoria will share the costs of the evaluation equally.

Mr Fraser recalled that on 22 September he had announced the Commonwealth's decision to carry out an evaluation of the use of aircraft for fighting bushfires. This study, being undertaken by the CSIRO, involves a thorough scientific assessment of the effectiveness of bombing fires of varying intensity with water and fire-retardant chemicals. The CSIRO will be comparing this technique with conventional fire fighting methods and will conduct a cost-benefit analysis of bushfire suppression methods.

Mr Fraser and Mr Hamer agreed that the CSIRO will be able to take full advantage of the trials and operations of the Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System in Victoria to collect data on bushfire behaviour and control.

The Prime Minister and the Premier concluded by acknowledging the very great damage caused by bushfires in Victoria since 1967. The initiative announced today will build on the experience gained to date and will also assist in collecting information on the performance of large fire-bombing systems in Australia.