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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 1982

TASMANIAN FIRES

The following letter was sent to the Premier of Tasmania today:

My dear Premier,

I refer to your telex of 15 February to me and the Premier of Victoria concerning the possible use of the Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System installed in a RAAF Hercules aircraft for fire fighting in the present Tasmanian fires.

I also have your telex of 16 February in which you advise that your Government has found it necessary to declare a State wide special emergency.

The Commonwealth views with concern the serious fire situation both in Tasmania and Victoria. I am particularly distressed to learn of the extent of the emergency in your State. I note from your telex that you have arranged for my Office to be kept informed of developments and I am grateful for this action.

The Commonwealth obviously stands ready to do what it can to assist in combatting the immediate danger presented by the fires. To this end I have asked the Minister for Defence to assess what immediate Defence resources are available in Tasmania should you need to call on them. I understand that your emergency services are in touch with the Natural Disasters Organisation in Canberra so that any requests for assistance can be responded to promptly and in a co-ordinated manner.

I am advised that the difficulties associated with deploying the Hercules and the associated equipment to Tasmania have been explained to your officers and that Tasmanian fire authorities accept that the use of the Hercules would not be a suitable means of fire fighting at present.

I have also seen the response to your telex of 15 February from the Premier of Victoria and I am pleased to see that the Victorian authorities have offered to assist in mobilising smaller aircraft and providing technical assistance to help you in your efforts to control the fires.

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I extend our best wishes to all those engaged in the fire fighting and I sincerely hope that the crisis will soon be over.

Yours sincerely,

(Malcolm Fraser)

The Hon. H.N. Holgate, MHA
Premier of Tasmania
HOBART TAS 7000

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