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PRIME MINISTER

16 February 1983

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN FIRES

I have this afternoon spoken to the South Australian Government about the disastrous fires which broke out in that State today.

I want to make it clear that the Commonwealth stands ready to assist the South Australian Government and the people of South Australia who are suffering grievously as a result of the present bushfires.

Already some 120 Defence Force personnel from Army Woodside and RAAF Edinburgh are deployed fighting the fires. Additional Army personnel at Keswick are being recalled to assist. If there are any additional Defence facilities needed, we stand ready to assist forthwith within the limits of Defence capacity.

The Commonwealth will supplement immediately on a dollar for dollar basis measures designed for the immediate relief of personal hardship and distress in accordance with the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements.

It will also, in accordance with the arrangements, provide assistance on a \$3 Commonwealth/\$1 State basis above the agreed base figure for expenditure on restoration of public assets and emergency protection and repair work by State, Local and Semi-Government authorities and a range of assistance measures for primary producers affected by the fires.

I have told the South Australian Government that if there are particular circumstances in relation to this fire, and particular proposals that the State would want to put forward to assist in recovery from this very serious disaster, then we would stand ready to examine the position as a matter of urgency. This is the practice we have adopted in all States in these circumstances.

I have asked Ian Wilson to consult personally with the South Australian authorities and to give me an immediate and personal assessment of the damage.

I extend my very real sympathy to the families of those who have died, to those who have been injured and who have suffered grave and serious loss. I also extend my good wishes to those who are battling this disaster.

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