



PRIME MINISTER

Reference: MC20-012604

5 February 2020

Dr Bronte Somerset  
[bjsomerset@gmail.com](mailto:bjsomerset@gmail.com)

Dear Dr Somerset

Thank you for writing to me about the bushfires.

Our Government, working with state governments and local communities, is providing all the necessary resources to fight the fires and to ensure individuals and communities get the support they need to recover.

The Australian Defence Force has boots on the ground, planes in the sky and ships at sea to support this effort and the recovery.

For the first time in our history, the Government has enacted a compulsory call-out of the Australian Defence Force Reserve Brigades. This is providing about 3,000 Reservists, including personnel with skills in engineering, medical, logistics and transport support.

The Navy's largest ship, HMAS Adelaide, joined HMAS Choules and MV Sycamore in supporting the evacuation of citizens. The Adelaide is fully equipped for disaster relief and humanitarian aid. It can operate all ADF helicopters. It has 400 crew, including medical staff, and 300 tonnes of emergency relief supplies.

The Government has also deployed additional ADF air lift and reconnaissance capacity, including Chinook helicopters, C-17 Globemasters, C-130 Hercules and C-27 Spartans.

And we immediately responded to a request for extra water-bombing aircraft with \$20 million to lease four more planes. This is in addition to \$26 million already delivered in 2019-20 to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, which provides specialised firefighting aircraft.

The Government has established a National Bushfire Recovery Agency under the leadership of former AFP Commissioner Andrew Colvin. The Agency has an initial \$2 billion commitment to help rebuild communities and livelihoods, and will act as a 'one-stop shop' to co-ordinate the response.

We are providing immediate financial support to fire-affected communities. This includes a non-means tested Disaster Recovery Payment of \$1,000 for eligible adults, with the initial \$400 payment for children now doubled to \$800. A Disaster Recovery Allowance is providing up to 13 weeks of income support for those who have lost income.

We have announced a small business package, including \$50,000 grants to fire affected businesses and \$75,000 for fire affected farmers and primary producers to help them repair and rebuild.

We are providing loans of up to \$500,000 with zero interest and no repayments for two years and ongoing concessional rates for up to ten years for small businesses and farmers in fire affected areas.

We also have developed and are now rolling out a comprehensive plan to help communities to recover and build back better including:

- More than \$100 million to support the states to clear debris and clean up all residential and commercial property sites impacted by the fires;
- \$76 million for the tourism industry to run campaigns to get the tourists back;
- \$60 million is going out to councils in affected areas so they can respond to immediate and urgent needs in their communities;
- \$76 million for mental health support through counselling and Medicare including for first responders and volunteer firefighters;
- \$50 million down payment to protect wildlife rescue and rehabilitation;
- \$40 million paid to charities – including the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul – to provide direct assistance on the ground with food, fuel and cash; \$10 million for expanded financial counselling for families;
- \$15 million for rural financial counsellors; and
- \$8 million for mental health support to fund an extra 25 Beyond Blue liaison officers and clinicians to support local schools and early childhood services.

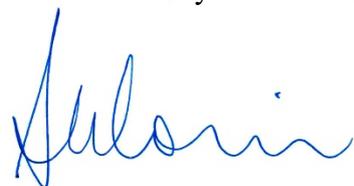
The Government is also funding financial support of up to \$6,000 for volunteer firefighters who have lost income as a result of going above and beyond their usual volunteer effort.

Public servants who are emergency services volunteers are being provided with additional paid leave. We thank the Australian companies that have matched this.

In times like these, we have to work together and look out for each other. There is much more to do, and our Government stands ready to deliver whatever further assistance is requested by the states as they battle these devastating fires.

Further information you might find useful can be found on the National Bushfire Recovery Agency website at [www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au](http://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



SCOTT MORRISON