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Minister for Defence
Senator for Western Australia

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE LEGISLATION
COMMITTEE – ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES,
OPENING STATEMENT

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**** Check against delivery ****

As the Committee knows, this has been a difficult summer for many Australians. The Australian Defence Force has been at the forefront of responding to our country's bushfire crisis. Operation Bushfire Assist is the largest ADF mobilisation for domestic disaster relief in our history – with over 6,500 ADF personnel, including 3,000 Reservists, deployed at any one time.

ADF efforts have been widespread, and like all emergency response efforts, the priority has been providing support:

- where the need is most critical,
- and where the ADF's unique capabilities are best applied.

The ADF are well trained in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. We regularly come to the aid of Australians and our regional friends, but never before on this scale.

I would like to highlight to the Committee some statistics that illustrate the extent of ADF involvement:

- Three (3) Navy ships.
- 24 Helicopters.
- Over 1000 defence vehicles.
- 75 engineering vehicles and 3 water purification units.
- 7,900 personnel and over 2,500 tonnes of cargo, moved by fixed wing aircraft.
- 1,500 people, many with their pets, evacuated by ship and air.
- 500 evacuees accommodated on Defence bases.
- 380 evacuees returned to Mallacoota.
- 4,800 kilometres of road cleared

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- 240 kilometres of firebreaks made.
- 1,200 kilometres of fences repaired or cleared.
- 5 million litres of water, 73,000 litres of fuel and 1.3 million kilograms of fodder delivered.
- 70,000 meals served in Defence messes, and 6,000 meals provided in the field.

These statistics clearly speak to the magnitude of this effort.

But they don't tell the story of the thousands of quiet acts of compassion and kindness by our ADF members and our international friends – around the clock, every day, in communities across the nation. When Australians saw a man or woman in uniform – on foot – or at the controls of a ship, helicopter or vehicle – they knew they were not alone, not forgotten, and that things would be okay.

Australians whose lives, livelihoods and communities were devastated by relentless blazes, and yet they demonstrated unshakeable courage, dignity and resilience. We can all feel immensely proud of this united and outstanding effort. I – with my colleagues across the Government – am immensely grateful too for the generous military support offered by over 70 of Australia's trusted international allies and partners through the bushfire season.

I thank the governments and military forces that came to our aid – Canada, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore and the United States. It's in tough and testing times like those we've experienced that deep bonds and friendships between nations are forged and strengthened.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the efforts of the Reserves who answered the call-out with commitment and passion, and the support of their civilian employers and families who made their vital service possible.

Media Contacts

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Authorised by Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, Minister for Defence, Australia.