



ACT Government
2004-2005 BUDGET

MEDIA RELEASE

**ACT BUDGET MAKES ONGOING COMMITMENT
TOWARDS BUSHFIRE AFFECTED PEOPLE AND PROPERTY**

The ACT Government remains strongly committed to providing support and assistance to people affected by the January 2003 Canberra bushfires, Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said today.

The Chief Minister said the 2004-2005 ACT Budget maintains an ongoing commitment to helping people directly impacted by the January 2003 Canberra bushfires.

“The bushfires of 2003 caused unprecedented destruction, both in our natural environment and to many parts of our beautiful city. Tragically, we lost some 500 homes in the fires and the lives of four people.

“The recovery from such a disaster can, for many people, be a long and painful process and my Government has taken many steps to relieve the burden experienced by fire affected residents.

“While the initial phase of the disaster recovery has passed, we recognise the need to provide ongoing support and to ensure people have ready access to advice and support.

“We have maintained a specialised Bushfire Support Unit which continues to offer care and assistance to those in need. Recovery workers from the Recovery Centre work in partnership with community agencies to ensure that bushfire affected households are provided with the information, support and assistance they need.

“Within existing agency resources, bushfire affected people will continue to receive long-term care through individual case management.

“We have allocated \$250,000 within ACT Health agency funding to provide for personal and respite care, clinical interventions, specialist equipment and home modifications for the seriously injured.

“In addition, we have allocated more than \$1.3 million in the Budget for the ongoing repair and replacement of rural fences which were damaged or destroyed in the fires. This should enable completion of the work which began last year,” said Mr Stanhope.



The Chief Minister said the Budget has also directed funding within existing agency resources for the employment of two community development workers to assist with bushfire recovery activities, including the rebuilding of important community networks, in Weston Creek, Tuggeranong and Canberra's rural communities.

Mr Stanhope announced \$500,000 a year for the next four years for ongoing bushfire hazard reduction and \$920,000 in recurrent funding for the further establishment of Community Fire Units to assist in the protection of Canberra properties.

The 2004-2005 ACT Budget has also provided significant ongoing impetus for the restoration and regeneration of bushfire-affected areas. This includes:

- \$6 million for the massive ongoing clean-up and debris removal program in ACT forests and nature parks over the next three years;
- \$9 million over four years (\$2.5 million next year) for pine plantation re-establishment; and
- \$650,000 in 2004-05 to plant 350,000 native and exotic plants across an area of 700 hectares;

Mr Stanhope said over the next four years, ACT Forests would replant nearly 5000 hectares – nearly half of the plantation area destroyed during the 2003 bushfires.

“In addition, nearly \$1 million will be spent through a Greening Australia project for the renewal and revegetation of the ACT's bushfire devastated landscape. We are pleased that the community will be engaged in this important process which will also see the rehabilitation of rivers, streams and degraded drainage lines,” Mr Stanhope said.

The Chief Minister said the Government has already provided a great deal of bushfire recovery support, including the:

- establishment of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce to guide recovery efforts;
- creation of the Bushfire Recovery Centre to provide one-stop support and advice and counselling and recovery services;
- provision of financial assistance in the immediate aftermath of the fires;
- provision of grants to help meet demolition, rebuilding and relocation costs; and
- provision of building advisory services

In addition the Government has undertaken a major bushfire readiness program, to help reduce the risk of such a disaster occurring again. This program includes the implementation of a major bushfire awareness education campaign; significant hazard reduction activities; the restructure and relocation of the Emergency Services Bureau and increased resources and training for fire and emergency authorities.

Statement Ends