

**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE
WITH
THE HON BILL SHORTEN MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE
RECONSTRUCTION**

**LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO FURTHER SUPPORT THE
VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE FUND AND BUSHFIRE VICTIMS**

The Assistant Treasurer, Senator Nick Sherry, and the Hon Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction, have today highlighted the introduction into Parliament of the legislation that makes possible a wider use of donations made by the public to support communities devastated in this Victorian bushfires.

'The Rudd Government has been working extensively with the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund and the community to broaden the allowable uses of the charitable donations made by the public,' said the Assistant Treasurer.

Scheduled 6 of the *Tax Laws Amendment (2009 Measures No. 5) Bill 2009* amends the *Income Tax Assessment Act (Cth) 1997* and was introduced into the House of Representatives this morning.

"While the Fund has been able to support this wider range of purposes for several weeks, the introduction of the Bill today is another step in assisting the Fund to support affected communities," said the Assistant Treasurer.

The amendments are backdated to January 28, preceding Black Saturday, and extend cover from the time of the first bushfire of the year, which occurred at Delburn.

"The generosity of Australians to the bushfire victims has been remarkable and inspiring – with more than \$370 million in donations collected," said Parliamentary Secretary Shorten.

"The Rudd Government has also been working with the Victorian Government and local councils and directing significant support to the bushfire-affected communities from day one."

"These changes will give the fund wider powers to help people and communities hit by the fires, which is what Australians who donated would want."

"We cannot bring back what was lost in those fires, but we are determined to help communities and individuals to rebuild."

The changes provided for in the Bill will allow the Fund to provide, should it choose to:

- funds for a wide range of community benefit projects;
- long-term assistance to orphaned minors (under the age of 18 years) without the need for annual assessments;
- reimbursement to individuals or organisations for performed eligible charitable activities which the Fund has subsequently funded for other people in the same circumstances and which the Fund would have funded but has not simply because the needs were already provided for through other arrangements;
- discretionary payments of up to \$15,000 to assist households for the period in which they are in transitional housing where such households have previously received a charitable grant from the Fund to assist in the reconstruction of their primary residence;
- grants of up to \$10,000 to affected primary producers to use for repair and restoration of farm activities, including in re-fencing properties.

The legislation will also protect the charitable status of the Red Cross.

The changes provided for by this Bill will be one-off, representing the unprecedented and tragic circumstances of the Victorian Bushfires, and will not apply to other cases, where the current charitable taxation law will continue to apply in full.

CANBERRA
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