



## **The 2003 Canberra Fires (C)**

On Saturday 18 January 2003 bushfires, which had been burning in the hills to the west and south-west of Canberra for more than a week, reached the perimeter of the city. The advance of the fire was driven by strong winds gusting from the west up to 70 kilometres an hour. The temperature peaked at 37 degrees near midday.

Chief Minister Jon Stanhope declared a State of Emergency at 2.45pm on 18 January as the fires began to enter the city and police sought to enforce evacuations by residents.

The result was widespread damage to rural properties, parks and forests, houses and urban infrastructure, estimated at \$300 million. Tragically, four people died.

The Mt Stromlo pine plantation and its historic observatory were burnt to the ground. Over 500 houses were lost. 160,000 hectares were burnt in the ACT, 70 percent of land area of the territory.

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This case was written by Tim Watts, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, for Professor John Alford, ANZSOG and Professor Dutch Leonard, Kennedy School of Government, as a postscript to Cases 2004-16.1 and 2004-16.2. All quotes and descriptions are attributable to Transcript of Proceedings, *Inquiry into the Deaths of Dorothy McGrath, Alison Mary Tenner, Peter Brooke, Douglas John Fraser, and the Fires of January 2003*, Coroner's Court of the Australian Capital Territory and McLeod, R., "Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires", Australian Capital Territory, August 2003, except where indicated.

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