

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



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NIGHT AVIATION PATROLS TAKE OFF FOR HIGH-RISK FIRE PERIOD

Victoria is prepared for the highest fire-risk period of summer, with the state's Night Aviation Program taking off for a seventh consecutive year.

Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes and Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp today visited Essendon Airport where three helicopters engaged for night aviation operations are based. The craft are part of the state's 50-strong firefighting fleet.

The program will include two night firebombing helicopters, including a CH47 Chinook which has already been supporting operations during the day.

An aerial intelligence gathering Firebird 308 helicopter is supporting night operations, aided by new technology including an infra-red high-definition video camera. These enhancements will help operational decision-making and can be streamed to control centers to better inform operations.

While based at Essendon, the helicopters have the ability to be deployed across the state. Night crews are highly experienced and will complete reconnaissance flights during the afternoon before conducting water bombing flights at night.

The Andrews Labor Government's investment in fire surveillance and response is protecting Victorians in every part of the state and aircraft have responded to about 200 fires so far this summer.

These aircraft have also been important for the flood response over recent months, with helicopters like the Chinook along with a huge effort from their crews and support staff crucial to keeping Victorians safe.

Victoria's aerial firefighting fleet also includes two Large Air Tankers based at Avalon Airport, a Super Puma based at Mangalore, a Black Hawk based at Ballarat and a Bell 214ST helicopter flying out of Gippsland. An Aircrane capable of holding 9,000 litres of water is based at Moorabbin.

As part of national aircraft arrangements, the Q400 Large Air Tanker is shared with Queensland, and based in Victoria for our high-risk weather season. Victoria has a surge capacity of up to 100 aircraft, including thousands of dedicated emergency services workers from across all agencies.

For more information on how you can prepare for fires and other emergencies, download the VicEmergency app or visit emergency.vic.gov.au.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes

"As grasses dry out, the night aviation fleet provides a vital extra element in our efforts to protect communities across the state. This is the period where we know risk can be higher, and we're remaining vigilant night and day."

"I want to also thank the crews and personnel who have been operating aircraft right across Victoria through the massive flooding event – I saw first-hand the difference these assets made to regional communities."

Quote attributable to Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp

"While our air and ground crews will continue to do everything they can to protect our state, it's important for Victorians to be prepared for fires, have a plan, know when to leave your property and never rely on one source of information."

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