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## **MEDIA RELEASE**



**METROPOLITAN  
FIRE  
SERVICE  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

### **MFS FIRE OFFICERS TO ASSIST IN TONGA**

Two (2) Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) Fire Officers are being deployed to Tonga to assist the Tongan Fire Service in recovery operations following the recent riots in Nuku'alofa.

The MFS has been providing support to the Tongan Fire Service for the past five (5) years through a sustainable development program as part of a regional assistance initiative for the South Pacific.

Commander David Schmerl and Station Officer Jeff Steele will depart Adelaide at 0900 on Monday November 20, 2006 and travel via Sydney on the first commercial flight into Tonga since the riots, arriving on Monday evening.

Both Fire Officers have been to Tonga on previous fire service training initiatives and have strong ties with the Tonga Fire Service and the South Australian Tongan Community. Station Officer Steele attended a special church service in Adelaide on Saturday night held by the local Tongan Community and will be passing on their thoughts and prayers upon arriving in Tonga.

The SA Government has donated a wide range of surplus fire and rescue equipment to Tonga over the past five (5) years including nine (9) fire appliances, crash rescue tools and protective clothing for their fire fighters. Tonga Fire Officers regularly travel to Adelaide to train with the MFS and a number of MFS Fire Officers have visited Tonga on previous support missions. Funding for the program is provided through the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) and coordinated through the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC).

MFS Chief Officer, Grant Lupton, said "Its important that we support our South Pacific neighbours who have clearly been overwhelmed by this crisis. We have built very close ties with the Tonga Fire Service through our sustainable development partnership and now they need us more that ever."

Chief Lupton said he has spoken with the Tonga Fire Chief a number of times over the past two days and they are desperately looking for our support to help them recover. "Apparently three (3) Tongan Fire Officers were injured in the riots. One of the injured Officers was recently in South Australia with two other Tongan Fire Officers on a one month training program with the MFS, so we are especially concerned about his and the other Officers' well-being."

The two MFS Fire Officers are anticipated to be in Tonga for an initial deployment of seven (7) to ten (10) days. During this time they will conduct a critical needs assessment for the fire service and will assist in hazard mitigation and recovery operations. Funding for the deployment is being provided through SOPAC, which is supported in part by AusAide and NZAide.

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**Government  
of South Australia**