

News Release

National Interagency Fire Center
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United States Welcomes Australian Firefighting Aircraft

Assistance Comes 18 Months After Firefighters from the U.S. Helped Battle Australian Wildfires

Boise, Idaho, July 28, 2021— A Boeing 737 airtanker from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service in Australia arrived at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho over the weekend. The firefighting aircraft is being made available to fight fires in the U.S. through an agreement between the USDA Forest Service and Australia.

The 737 Fireliner is considered a Large Airtanker (LAT) with a capacity of 4,000 gallons that are discharged from two internal tanks. The aircraft is operated and maintained by Coulson Aviation. The aircraft is named “Marie Bashir” after Dame Marie Bashir, the former Governor of New South Wales.

“We greatly appreciate having this airtanker from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service assisting us,” said Kim Christensen, deputy assistant director for operations for the USDA Forest Service. “We’re proud of the long history of cooperation we have with Australia and other countries.”

The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group, comprised of representatives from wildland fire agencies, requests and orders international firefighting resources through the National Interagency Coordination Center. Both are located at NIFC.

The international assistance is reciprocal and includes a recent deployment of U.S. wildland firefighters to Australia. From December of 2019 through the spring (fall in Australia) of 2020, several hundred federal wildland firefighters and fire managers from the U.S. assisted with wildfires in Australia during a very difficult fire season.

The airtanker joins firefighting efforts in the U.S. at a time of significant fire activity across several regions of the country. The National Wildfire Preparedness Level was raised to 5, the highest level, on July 14, to reflect the high level of sustained wildfire activity in the U.S. Wildfires have burned more than 3.4 million acres so far this year and more than 21,500 firefighters and support personnel are currently mobilized to large fires across the U.S.

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The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) located in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support center for wildland firefighting. Eight different agencies and organizations are part of NIFC, including the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, National Weather Service, U.S. Fire Administration, and the National Association of State Foresters.

