

News Release Minister Michael O'Brien

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MFS to donate fire trucks to Tonga

The Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) will restore and donate two obsolete fire trucks to Tonga Fire and Emergency Services as part of its alliance with the Pacific Island nation.

It comes as four Tongan firefighters are currently visiting Adelaide for three weeks to receive training with the MFS.

Emergency Services Minister Michael O'Brien said the visit was part of a supportive partnership shaped by a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies in 2004.

"The Kingdom of Tonga is rated as one of the world's poorest nations and its Memorandum of Understanding with the MFS allows for the exchange of personnel, information and equipment," Mr O'Brien said.

"Over the last nine years the MFS has supplied obsolete fire appliances, breathing apparatus and uniforms and provided training.

"The MFS is currently preparing to restore and donate two obsolete fire trucks, largely through volunteer work.

"I met with the Tongan Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Services Lofia Heimuli last week and he is very appreciative of the support."

The Tongan Government, which will fund the transport of the donated trucks to Tonga, will receive one later this year and the other from mid next year.

Mr O'Brien said during their three week visit to Adelaide, the four Tongan firefighters have participated in a firefighting awareness and skills course, community education courses and awareness sessions on broader disaster risk reduction roles. These included Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), command and control systems and community warnings.

"After training with the MFS for three weeks, they'll be able to return to Tonga with new information that can be shared throughout their organisation to create a more resilient community," he said.

MFS Assistant Chief Fire Officer Glenn Benham said MFS firefighters can recall first visiting the Kingdom of Tonga in 2003 and were shocked and deeply concerned with the realities that existed at the time.

"The 50 paid Tongan firefighters responded to emergencies without helmets, gloves, boots or breathing apparatus and only four old, disintegrating firefighting jackets were available for the entire service," Mr Benham said.

"There were no fire rated firefighting pants and most firefighting was done in coveralls and work boots.

"Through the strategic alliance between our fire services, we've shared information, training opportunities, educational materials, professional visits, equipment and friendship."