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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

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BUSH FIRES IN THE COLONY:

1. STATEMENT OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE PREMIER
  2. INTERIM REPORT OF THE CENTRAL RELIEF COMMITTEE.
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## CENTRAL FIRE RELIEF COMMITTEE.

IN view to making Honourable Members and the people of the Colony acquainted with the proceedings of the Central Fire Relief Committee, the cost of relief distributed to the unfortunate sufferers by the bush fires of last summer, and the amount expended by way of loan or otherwise in relation thereto, I make the following statement:—

Briefly put, the charges against Consolidated Revenue on this account are as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
Subsidy on the £ for £ principle to the Central Relief Committee.....	3332	5	5
Wire and grass-seed supplied on credit.....	2582	19	6
Repairs to bridges, culverts, &c. ....	714	14	10
Sundry expenditure by Public Works Department .....	281	15	4
Making a Total of .....	6911	15	1
To which has to be added—	£	s.	d.
Damages and cost of suit "Dobson v. The Queen" .....	1474	18	5
Damages paid other residents of the Châlet at the time of the fire .....	280	9	3
Costs of the Crown in defending action .....	213	11	4
Making a Gross Total of.....	£8880	14	1

Thus, while the total cost to the State of this national disaster has been £8880 14s. 1d., (including £2582 19s. 6d. advanced on credit), the actual work of relief to sufferers has been carried out effectively at a cost of £3332 5s. 5d. contributed to the funds of the Central Committee, and £281 15s. 4d. expended under the direction of the Public Works Department before that Committee took the work in hand; and, of the fund held by the Central Relief Committee, £1495 remained in hand on the 30th June for the further relief of cases of distress through the next few months.

The Hobart Committee, upon whom the greater part of the work has fallen, were reduced in number by the lamented death of the late Chief Justice, who almost up to the day of his death gave his heart-whole energy to this charitable work. Subsequent to the decease of Sir Lambert Dobson the duties were taken up by the two surviving Southern members, and have been and continue to be performed by them in an unexceptionable manner. As to Mr. E. M. Fisher, it has to be stated that he has devoted himself to these duties continuously day by day with unflagging zeal, perseverance, and tact, and has in the course of those duties visited several of the scenes of the bush fires, and by local inquiry, personally made, saved a considerable sum of money.

It is impossible to speak in terms too high of the admirable service rendered to the Colony by the Central Relief Committee. This Committee, consisting of the late Sir Lambert Dobson, the Mayor of Hobart, and Mr. E. M. Fisher, for the South, with the Mayor of Launceston, Mr. Alex. Fowler, M.H.A., and Mr. Alderman Wilson, for the North, have administered the funds entrusted to them with scrupulous care, discrimination, and thoroughness that have ensured the extension of relief in all cases of distress at a cost that, with less careful management, would have altogether failed to meet the occasion.

To all these gentlemen I desire on behalf of the Government to convey my cordial thanks, and the assurance that their excellent work has been recognised and appreciated as it deserves to be.

It is a satisfactory feature of the administration of the Relief Fund that nothing whatever has been expended by the Committee in the shape of establishment or clerical assistance. Mr. Mackay gave his services as Secretary to the Hobart Committee for some two months when the work was heaviest, and Mr. Steward has since that done the necessary secretarial work. In the North Mr. Wilson acted in this capacity; and to these gentlemen the thanks of the community are due.

In thanking the Northern Committee, I would express my sense of the obligation under which they have placed the Government and the country by their hearty co-operation with their Southern colleagues in measures of relief conducted in the South, and the thorough sympathy they have shown for the sufferers of that end of the Island.

The Government have also to thank the Members of the various Sub-committees for the valuable work done by them in collecting information, and advising the Central Committee as to the proper objects of charity.

I lay on the Table the Interim Report of the Central Relief Committee for the period ending 30th June, 1898.

E. N. C. BRADDON.

*Hobart, 30th June, 1898.*

SIR,

FIRE RELIEF FUND.

THE Central Committee appointed to disburse the fund as contributed by the public, and supplemented by the Government to the extent of £1 for £1 on the amount of the contributions, are now in a position to report for your information that the total of subscriptions to 30th June, 1898, is £3332 5s. 5d., which, taken together with the £1 for £1 subsidy from the Government, £3332 5s. 5d., makes the amount at the disposal of the Committee to the 30th June, £6664 10s. 10d.; the expenditure to date is £3169 18s. 0d., and the expenditure authorised but not yet paid is estimated at £2000; thus leaving a balance of £1494 12s. 10d. at the disposal of the Committee for further relief to those most in need.

We desire, in the first place, to name the method in which it was arranged the fund should be disbursed to the best advantage. Immediately after the position had been accepted by those forming the Central Committee, action was taken by providing temporary relief for those who had been rendered homeless and destitute, and also by at once seeking the assistance of gentlemen in the several districts where the fires had occurred, who were asked to form Local Committees, and assist the Central Committee in administering the fund. Printed forms were supplied in order that the sufferers might the more easily furnish the information required by the Committee. The forms were filled up and returned through the Local Committees, accompanied by their recommendations. The work done by Local Committees in this direction has been of immense value to the Central Committee, and has also been the means of ensuring relief without delay, and the supervision necessary for the faithful disbursement of the fund.

After the second outbreak of the bush fires the fund was considered to be national, and therefore to be disbursed for the benefit of all poor sufferers throughout Tasmania; consequently we sought assistance from our Northern friends, and a Committee was appointed to work with the Central Committee, which included S. J. Sutton, Esq., Mayor of Launceston, A. H. Fowler, Esq., M.H.A., with Alderman Wilson, who acted as hon. secretary to that Committee.

The Northern Committee dealt with Northern claims, and our thanks are due to the gentlemen forming that Committee for their valuable assistance and hearty co-operation.

In addition to thanking the Local Committees for what they have done in the interests of those who were sufferers by the bush fires, we have pleasure in recording our appreciation of the work done by a number of ladies in Hobart, Launceston, and country districts, who gave their time to the making of underclothing and other things needful, for distribution among those who had been rendered destitute. Neither must we omit to acknowledge the large quantities of clothing (approximately worth £300), so freely given by those who had sympathy with the sufferers, and so thoroughly appreciated by those upon whom they were bestowed; but, beyond all, it is our pleasure as well as our duty to acknowledge the generous response to the appeal made by the Mayor, and this from all parts of Tasmania and from Tasmanian residents abroad. We also desire to give special thanks to the Civil Service, including the Railway Department, for their liberal contribution to the fund.

*Receipts and Expenditure.*

All contributions were, and continue to be, received by the Mayor, as Treasurer of the Fund, acknowledged through the Press, and paid into the Commercial Bank to the credit of the Fire Relief Fund, which is only operated upon by the signature of the two members of the Committee, so the bank pass-book is a complete record of receipts and expenditure.

It will be a satisfaction to you to know that the sympathy of the public, as represented in a practical manner by the total of the contributions, and the endeavours of the Committee as represented by their work, are for the most part gratefully recognised by those who have received assistance from the fund. In proof of this we will quote from letters received from two or three districts.

No. 1.—Under date 7th May, 1898 :—

*The Chairman Central Committee Fire Relief Fund.*

DEAR SIR,

I have the honour to forward a statement showing the expenditure to date. All the smaller claims are settled, and there are six cases where aid is still being given in the form of fortnightly allowances. A great deal of work has been done in the way of repairing damages done by the fire. The fund has been of very great assistance to the sufferers by the fire. The grass-seed supplied by your Committee, with that sold on credit by the Government, will be the means of restoring prosperity to many settlers, and will enable them to reap a good deal of benefit from what would otherwise have been to them a great calamity.

No. 2.—Under date 13th May, 1898 :—

*To E. M. FISHER, Chairman Central Fire Relief Committee.*

DEAR SIR,

I herewith enclose balance-sheet promised to you by our Secretary, also statement showing how we propose to expend a further sum so generously allowed to this district.

I am desired by our Committee to convey to you their thanks for the splendid results accruing to this district through your visit, and I can assure you that those sufferers whose burdens you have lessened fully appreciate your endeavours to ameliorate their distress.

The relief has been given in building material, labour, rations, clothing, bedding, tools, and other necessaries, and in a few instances in cash.

In the Huon district great assistance has been given by the rebuilding of huts and cottages which had been destroyed by the fires.

Beyond the relief obtained direct from the Central Committee, considerable assistance has been given as the outcome of the arrangements made with the Government to supply grass-seed and fencing-wire on credit to those who were recommended by the Central Committee; and, in addition, it was arranged with the Government to give yet further relief to sufferers by making postponement of their payments on land purchased from the Crown under the credit system.

We also desire to place upon record the great assistance given by our colleague the late Chief Justice, and to say that we have carried on the work upon the lines agreed upon when he was with us, and hope that we may be considered to have been fairly successful in our endeavours to disburse the fund judiciously in the interests of those it was intended to benefit; but we cannot conclude this interim Report without acknowledging the great interest you have taken in our work, and the assistance given to the Committee by Mr. Pillinger during your absence in Victoria, and that Mr. Back, as General Manager of Railways, has done all within his power to assist the Committee, as also Mr. Tabart, who had the management of the distribution of wire and seed for the Government, and that our former Hon. Secretary, Mr. McKay, and Mr. Geo. Steward, who at present occupies that honorary position, have given valuable assistance to the Committee, and taken a great interest in the work we have in hand.

We are,

Yours obediently,

GEO. HIDDLESTONE, *Treasurer,* } *Central Committee*  
E. M. FISHER, *Chairman,* } *Fire Relief Fund.*

*The Honourable the Premier.*