

# Further UK assistance to fight Australian bushfires announced as Foreign Secretary visits worst-hit state

The UK's support to fight the destructive Australian bushfires was strengthened today (6 February) in a further demonstration of the deepening relationship between the two countries.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne announced a package of UK support, including assistance from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to support emergency seed collecting in areas affected by the bushfires, and collaboration between the UK and Australian space agencies on preparedness, response and mitigation measures. A team of UK experts visited Australia last month to scope how the UK can best contribute to the response.

The Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister Payne will also travel to the New South Wales Rural Fire Service headquarters tomorrow (7 February) to meet those involved in the response to the bushfires.

The package of UK support builds on the long-standing relationship between Kew and the Australian Seed Bank Partnership (ASBP), to conserve Australia's incredible biodiversity through seed banking.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

This further collaboration between the Australian Seed Bank Partnership and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew will help protect Australia's precious biodiversity following the terrible bushfires.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the Australian people in the face of this challenge.

Kew has worked in collaboration with Australian seed banks since 2000, sharing expertise on seed collection processes, conservation and research so that the seeds of plant species considered rare or threatened can be banked and conserved for the future.

So far, 12,450 seed collections representing 8,900 Australian species, all of which are saved in local seed banks, have been duplicated and stored in Kew's Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) in Wakehurst, Sussex, as a safe back-up to in-country storage. Banked seeds offer future possibilities for both research and conservation and can be used to grow a new generation of plants in years to come.

Dr Elinor Breman, Senior Researcher at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew's Millennium Seed Bank:

The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew has a long-standing and productive relationship with the Australian Seed Bank Partnership (ASBP), with whom we have worked with for 15 years. We offered our assistance with the emergency response to the bushfires and are pleased to be able to support their efforts, as part of our ongoing partnership to address biodiversity loss through seed-banking in Australia.

Kew's scientists will work with the ASBP to conduct emergency seed collecting in areas devastated by the bushfires and longer-term germination research, which will hopefully aid the international effort to restore habitats more quickly in this precious and biodiverse region.

### **Further information**