

**Question for written answer E-000755/2013
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Proposal for an international cooperation agreement with southern hemisphere countries to exchange fire-fighting resources

Over the last few days, Australia has been struck by a wave of forest fires that have mainly affected the most populous part of the country, namely the states of New South Wales and Victoria, as well as Tasmania. Fed by record temperatures and strong winds, the fires have incinerated more than 350 000 hectares of forests, crops and pastures, threatening the civil population's safety.

The issue of forest fires also closely concerns Europe, particularly the Mediterranean area, where, according to data from EFFIS (European Forest Fire Information System) there have been 1 494 219 fires over the last 30 years, with a total of almost 15 million hectares going up in smoke. The cross-border dimension of forest fires has led the authorities of the Member States to implement coordinated and multilateral measures within the framework of the European Civil Protection Mechanism, a system set up by the European Union to respond to emergencies both within and outside the EU (in addition to the 27 Member States, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Croatia and Macedonia are also members), by sharing the resources of all the Member States.

The proliferation of forest fires mainly occurs in the summer months, and the start of the summer season in the southern hemisphere coincides with the start of winter in the northern hemisphere and vice versa. The Member States of the EU possess a sizeable air fleet, particularly Canadair, which remains almost unused during the winter, and those who work in the industry say that these fire-fighting aircraft could travel from one hemisphere to the other in just a few days.

Can the Commission answer the following:

1. Does it consider it useful to bring about an international cooperation agreement with southern hemisphere countries affected by forest fires that provides for the reciprocal supply of fire-fighting resources such as Canadair, as well as the exchange of qualified and competent personnel specialised in extinguishing fires?
2. Could such a mutual cooperation agreement be set up as an extension of the European Civil Protection Mechanism, so as to benefit from the coordination procedures adopted on the basis of this instrument?