



PM urged to review fire aid

TONY Abbott is under pressure from the opposition to "urgently amend" the eligibility criteria of the relief payments granted to bushfire victims, after they were tightened by the Coalition.

Days after firestorms ripped through the NSW Blue Mountains, razing about 200 homes and damaging more, Justice Minister Michael Keenan said that taxpayer-funded relief payments of \$1000 for adults and \$400 for children would only be made available to those who had lost their homes, whose homes had been damaged, who were seriously injured, or who lost an immediate family member.

The decision meant hundreds of people who were cut off from their homes for days, or went without essential services, were ineligible for the rapid-relief payments granted in previous natural disasters, including the

Queensland floods of 2011 and the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has criticised the Coalition's decision to withhold the payments from individuals unable to access, or trapped within, their principle place of residence for at least 24 hours, as well as those living in bushfire-ravaged areas whose homes were cut off from electricity, water, gas or sewage services for more than 48 hours.

"I am sure you would agree that Australians in these circumstances should be entitled to assistance from the commonwealth," he wrote.

Mr Keenan said yesterday the situation was "under review" and the emergency declaration had been signed quickly to channel funding to those most in need.

LAUREN WILSON

2013-14 Supplementary Estimates

Committee: Community Affairs

Document #: 1

Date and Time: 21/11/13 9:35pm

Tabled by: Senator Cameron

Pages: 1