

A.C.T. BUSHFIRES DELIBERATE?

CANBERRA, January 25. — The Minister for the Interior (Mr Kent Hughes) has set up a court of inquiry to investigate the outbreak today of one of the worst bushfires in Canberra's history.

Today's fire, which broke out early this morning, threatened two of Canberra's most exclusive suburbs and forced many people, including members of the diplomatic corps, to leave their homes with personal belongings.

Announcing the appointment of the court of inquiry, Mr Kent Hughes said that it would also investigate the whole administration and organisation of the fire-fighting body in the ACT.

The decision to set up the court follows suggestions by the Minister and the Chief Fire Officer of the Bushfire Council, Mr Cole, earlier this week that fires at Brindabella, just over the ACT border, were started deliberately.

Today's fires were swept along by almost gale force, blistering hot north-westerlies, which at times reached 55 miles an hour.

Throughout the day local radio stations broadcast appeals for volunteer fighters. Only by a supreme effort of the fighters were magnificent homes in the Mugga Way area, including several overseas legations, saved.

The neighbouring town of Quenanbeyan — about eight miles from Canberra—had been threatened throughout the day and Government employees living in Queanbeyan but working in Canberra, were called from their jobs to fight the fire outside Quenanbeyan.

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The maximum temperature in Canberra was 101.9 deg. — the fourth successive day on which the century has been recorded.