SOUTHERN BELLE HEADS SOUTH

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The DC-10 Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT) firebomber Southern Belle has relocated from New South Wales to Avalon in Victoria.

The DC-10, temporarily named Southern Belle for its deployment to Australia, had been based at RAAF Base Richmond, alongside an L-100-30 Hercules Large Air Tanker, after arriving in Australia in late September.

“Now the risk is decreasing in the northern part of NSW, it has been relocated to Victoria to support what is traditionally now the peak of our season,” Victoria’s Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley said in a statement on Thursday.

The DC-10, registered N612AX, joins two Large Air Tankers already based at Avalon, a Coulson C-130Q Hercules and a Conair RJ85, both of which have been busy this fire season, having been used on the Scotsburn, Lancefield and Wye River fires.

According to Emergency Management Victoria, due to its size and capacity – it is capable of carrying 43,910 litres of fire suppressant per load – the DC-10 will only be used on specific fires where long lines of retardant might need to be dropped for indirect attack.

The aircraft returns to Victoria after having been operated out of Avalon under a trial for the 2009-10 bushfire season.

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But an assessment of the trial by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Council found that the potential of the 40 tonne load to cause injury or property damage meant that it was unsuited to Victorian conditions, particularly around urban interface areas. That finding saw the Victorian Government scraps plans to bring the aircraft back to the state for the 2010-11 season.

The deployment of the VLAT and LAT firebombing aircraft to Australia is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and respective state governments, with Southern Belle under contract from 10 Tanker Air Carrier in Albuquerque, New Mexico in the US.

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