

## Protesters set fire to Old Parliament House



*Firefighters responding at the fire-damaged front entrance of Old Parliament House following a protest in Canberra on Thursday.*

By Katina Curtis  
December 30, 2021

Federal politicians have criticised protesters who set fire to the front doors of Old Parliament House in Canberra on Thursday leading to a stand-off with police that lasted nearly two hours.

Former Nationals leader Michael McCormack said there should be “swift and severe” repercussions for those responsible.

Several dozen protesters had a stand off with police after the fire was put out, lasting almost two hours.

They chanted “long live us” and “stop telling lies” and spoke through a megaphone about Indigenous rights and colonisation.

Some involved in the protest assaulted media representatives filming the incident.

Other protesters told media fire was a smoking ceremony that got out of control.

Witness Cameron Duschka, who was not involved in the protest, said he was walking past Old Parliament House when he noticed the cluster of protesters.

He saw a small fire and police arriving to remove the protesters.

“I saw a little fire, I guess akin to a ceremony or something, then eventually it kind of went up in flames, the whole front door,” he said.

“There was a lot of arguing, shouting. I can’t remember if the police came before the fire or after but I think they came to move them on, they [police] got forced back into the building and then not long after that the fire came up.”



*The fire-damaged front entrance of Old Parliament House.*

The front doors of the building appear to be destroyed and there is extensive damage to the portico and front entrance.

There were five fire engines and about 40 police officers on the scene.

Last week, Old Parliament House was forced to close when members of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy held a sit-in at the building’s entrance.

Mr McCormack said the protest was “disgraceful”.

“An outrageous attack on our democracy, our history, our sovereignty. This modern penchant for tearing down our past serves no purpose,” he said on Twitter.

Resources Minister Keith Pitt said he hoped everyone who had been inside the building was safe.

“No matter what your cause, setting old Parliament House on fire and endangering all those inside is not the answer. Expect [the] full force of the law to be applied,” he said.