



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 316/09

28 October 2009

COMMONWEALTH WATER FOR MURRUMBIDGEE WETLANDS

The Commonwealth is providing almost two billion litres of water for wetlands containing endangered species in Yanga National Park, in southern New South Wales.

A total of 1,904 million litres from the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings, purchased through the Australian Government's Murray-Darling Basin water buyback program, is being provided to two sites this month.

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, said the water was being released at Mercedes Swamp and Twin Bridges wetland, upstream of Balranald on the Lowbidgee Floodplain in the Murrumbidgee Catchment.

"In this era of extended drought and climate change, we face monumental challenges in the Murray-Darling Basin," Senator Wong said.

"The Rudd Government is taking action to meet these challenges.

"We have taken over Basin-wide planning and will put a new, lower, scientifically-based limit on water use in the Basin for the first time ever.

"We have committed more than \$4 billion so far to upgrade and modernise water and irrigation infrastructure in the Basin to help our farmers and regional communities and to protect food security.

"And we are buying back water to help restore health to our rivers, securing the purchase of 612 gigalitres of water entitlements at a cost of \$947 million to 30 September this year."

The two sites receiving the environmental water are important breeding areas for the Southern Bell Frog, listed as an endangered species in NSW and as vulnerable under the national *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.

Species protected under international and bilateral treaties on migratory birds have been recorded at the sites which are listed on the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia.

A range of other species listed under the EPBC Act, including the Painted Snipe, White Bellied Sea Eagle and Regent Parrot, could also benefit from this watering action through maintenance of habitat and other wetland values.

It is anticipated that the water will maintain, and perhaps improve, the health of the River Red Gums as well as result in a general improvement in the extent and diversity of wetland vegetation.

The sites have been watered by the NSW Government for the past two years, resulting in frog and bird breeding, and improved health of trees and other vegetation.

“On this occasion, the Commonwealth’s allocation of environmental water is in addition to two billion litres to be provided by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Environment and Water,” Senator Wong said.

The sites to receive water were selected by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) based on input by the NSW Government and after receiving advice from the Environmental Water Scientific Advisory Committee.

This watering allocation is the first undertaken by the CEWH for this financial year. A total of 10.9 billion litres was released in 10 locations in 2008-2009.

More information about the sites and the Australian Government’s environmental watering program can be found at: www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/index.html