



*Australian Government Minister for
Climate Change and Water*
Senator the Hon Penny Wong



*Victorian Minister for the Environment,
Climate Change*
Gavin Jennings

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

PW 318/09

30 October 2009

HATTAH LAKES WETLANDS RECEIVE ENVIRONMENTAL WATER

The Australian Government will provide 3.1 billion litres of water to the internationally significant Hattah Lakes wetlands in Victoria, providing increased drought refuge for water birds and maintaining the health of River Red Gums.

The water will be released into Lake Yerang and Mournpall to complement 2.1 billion litres to be delivered by the Victorian Government. This is in addition to one billion litres Victoria delivered in September.

Federal Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, said the Federal Government's contribution was part of the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings, purchased through the Government's water buyback program for the Murray-Darling Basin.

"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 gegalitres of water entitlements at a cost of \$947 million to 30 September this year."

Victorian Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings said the environmental water for Hattah Lakes would keep threatened species and communities alive.

"The lakes are not only an important ecological site, but have a cultural significance for the local Aboriginal community and are important for regional tourism," Mr Jennings said.

"This latest allocation of water will build on the Victorian Government's environmental watering program protecting strategic sites during the drought."

Hattah Lakes is listed under the Ramsar convention as a site of international importance for migratory birds and supports a range of aquatic-dependent species listed under

bilateral agreements and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.

The lakes are important for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of the region because the floodplain complex supports a large variety and number of waterbirds and includes breeding habitat for many species.

The Hattah Lakes have previously received Commonwealth, Victorian, Living Murray and private donations of water aimed at avoiding irretrievable loss of River Red Gums and providing a drought refuge for water-dependent species.

It is anticipated that this watering will maintain, and perhaps improve, the health of the River Red Gums as well as improve the extent and diversity of wetland vegetation.

Other species listed under the EPBC Act could also benefit through maintenance of habitat and other wetland values.

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

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/