



Australian Government

# WATER for the FUTURE

## Commonwealth Environmental Water

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What are the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings?**

A: Water rights acquired by the Australian Government through programs under *Water for the Future* become part of the Commonwealth environmental water holdings. The amount of water available for use depends on the volumes acquired and seasonal water allocations. For information on the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings see: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/holdings.html>

**Q: How does the Commonwealth acquire water?**

A: Water for the environment is being acquired through programs under the Australian Government's *Water for the Future* initiative. These programs are managed separately within the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and include investments in:

- the *Restoring the Balance in the Basin* program to purchase water entitlements from willing sellers; and
- the *Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program* to fund infrastructure improvements and other projects that deliver lasting returns of water for the environment and help the long-term future of irrigation communities. Water entitlements acquired by the Government through water savings from these projects will also be managed as part of the environmental water holdings.

**Q: Does the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder have special rights for its water?**

A: The entitlements being purchased by the Commonwealth retain their existing characteristics. This means that the Commonwealth is subject to the same rules, restrictions and fees as other holders of the same kind of title. In this way the Commonwealth is treated no better or worse than any other holder of the same kind of entitlement.



November 2009: Plant and vegetation regeneration after a period of environmental watering at Katarapko Floodplains (M Mohell & DSEWPaC)

**Q: How are the holdings managed?**

A: The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) is a statutory position established under the Water Act 2007. Its role is to manage the holdings to protect or restore the environmental assets of the Murray-Darling Basin, and other areas outside of the Murray-Darling Basin where the Commonwealth holds water; so as to give effect to relevant international agreements.

Water that is held in the Murray–Darling Basin must be managed by the CEWH in accordance with the environmental watering plan, that is being developed by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority. The environmental watering plan is part of the Basin Plan whose objectives are to protect and restore key environmental assets and key ecosystem functions. These objectives are strongly aligned with those of the CEWH.

*Water for the Future* is preparing Australia for a future with less water. The 10-year initiative is addressing four key priorities:

- Taking action on climate change
- Using water wisely
- Securing water supplies
- Supporting healthy rivers

This consistency in objectives and the intent of the CEWH and MDBA to work collaboratively on matters of mutual interest will ensure that there is a smooth transition in the CEWH's operations during and after the Basin planning process.

**Q: Where is the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder based?**

A: The position is based within the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities in Canberra. The Environmental Water Branch has been established within the Department to support the functions of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder.

Mr Ian Robinson has been appointed as the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. Mr Robinson is also the First Assistant Secretary of the Water Governance Division in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.



Carpark Lagoon at Katarapko Floodplain in March 2009 prior to environmental watering (M Mohell & DSEWPaC)

**Q: How does the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder decide where to use the water?**

A: In making decision on the use of the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings, the CEWH takes into account input from Basin state governments and local site managers, as well as advice from the Environmental Water Scientific Advisory Committee. The Department also continues to consult closely with state jurisdictions and environmental asset managers to ensure that prioritisation is robust and responsive to changes in environmental conditions.

The use of Commonwealth water in 2009–10 is aligned with the objectives for an extreme dry period outlined within the CEWH's Prioritisation Framework:

- Avoiding the loss of threatened species.
- Avoid irretrievable damage or catastrophic events.
- Providing drought refuges to allow recolonisation following drought.

The priority given to individual sites and watering acts during 2009–10 is based on evaluation against assessment criteria which were developed after consultation with Basin jurisdictions and agreed by the Environmental Water Scientific Advisory Committee.

More information on the 2009–10 approach can be found in the Prioritisation Framework, Assessment Criteria and in the 2009–10 CEWH Business Plan, at the links below:

[www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/action/cewh-framework.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/action/cewh-framework.html)

[www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/criteria-2009-10.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/criteria-2009-10.html)

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/action/cewh-business-plan.html>

**Q: Does the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder receive advice on watering actions?**

A panel of scientific experts has been appointed to advise the Department and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder on the use of water purchased. The Environmental Water Scientific Advisory Committee comprises prominent scientists and experts in fields such as hydrology, limnology, river operations management, river and floodplain ecology and the management of aquatic ecosystems.

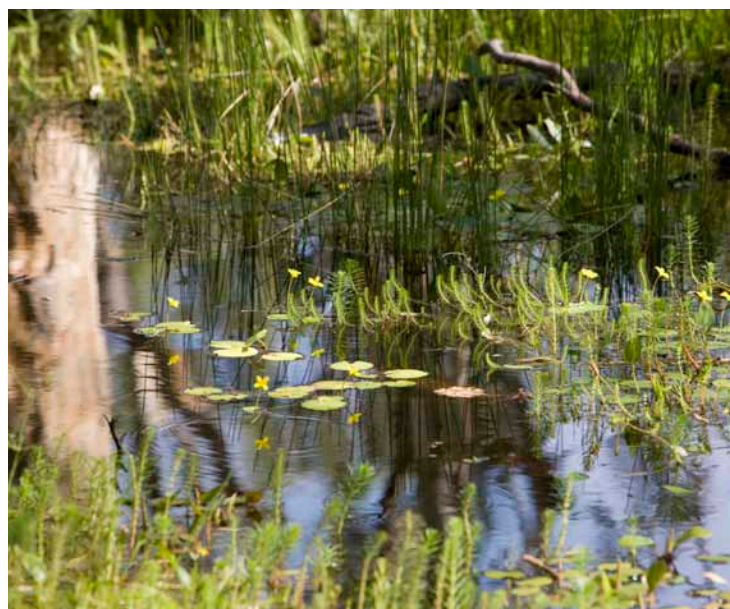
Committee members provide advice on:

- methods for determining relative priorities for environmental watering;
- areas which merit additional investigation, including additional research; and
- assessing the benefits of the environmental watering.

**Q: When did the first use of environmental water occur?**

A: The first use of the Commonwealth's environmental water occurred in March 2009, at Chowilla floodplain, South Australia. As at 22 March 2010, the total volume of Commonwealth water allocated to floodplain and wetlands in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales was approaching 80 billion litres.

Further information on watering actions and the results of that watering can be seen at:  
[www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/watering/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/watering/index.html)



January 2010 environmental watering event at Yanga National Park. (D Markovic & DSEWPaC)

**Q: Are there other environmental water holders, and how does the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder operate in relation to these?**

A: Yes. There are other organisations which manage environmental water. These include The Living Murray initiative (a partnership of the Australian and State Governments managed through the Murray-Darling Basin Authority), Water for Rivers (a joint Federal, NSW and Victorian Government entity), RiverBank (a NSW Government organisation) as well as state jurisdictional planned environmental water.

In accordance with the principles on the complementary management of environmental water agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder works cooperatively with the states and territories, other environmental water holders and environmental asset owners to ensure the maximum environmental benefit is achieved from the available water.

**Q: Can the Commonwealth environmental water holdings be traded?**

A: The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is only allowed to sell water in limited circumstances. In particular:

- Annual water allocations and permanent water entitlements can be sold if they are not required to meet environmental objectives and if the water cannot be carried over to the next year.
- In addition, annual allocations and permanent water entitlements may also be sold if the proceeds are used to acquire other water that will improve the capacity to protect and restore the environment.

**Q: Does the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder report on its activities? Can I get further information?**

A: Yes. In accordance with the *Water Act 2007* the CEWH produces an Annual Report, which is published and tabled in Parliament each year by the responsible Minister.

The CEWH business plan and Annual Report, along with regular information updates can be found on the website:

[www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/index.html)

**More Information**

For more information call 1800 218 478, email [cewh@environment.gov.au](mailto:cewh@environment.gov.au) or visit [www.environment.gov.au/water](http://www.environment.gov.au/water)

Alternatively you can write to:  
Environmental Water Branch  
Water Governance Division  
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water,  
Population and Communities  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT 2601



Websters Lagoon, Lindsay Island. Environmental watering between April and December 2009. (M Mohell & DSEWPaC)

Published by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, October 2010.