



**Australian Government**  
**Commonwealth Environmental Water Office**

---

Good morning committee members and thank you Chair for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

This year has been difficult for communities in the Murray-Darling Basin. While recent rain has provided some relief, we understand recovery is not immediate, and dams are not full.

We all need good news, and I can assure you that even in record-breaking drought, environmental flows support positive outcomes across the Basin.

For instance, this year marks ten years of continuous flows into the Coorong since the breaking of the Millennium drought in 2010.

This means the Basin Plan has worked – as the recent drought did not result in the same terrible impacts and risk for the end of the river system.

Today my Office is attending a function at the Murray Mouth celebrating the Commonwealth environmental flows that enabled that connection to be maintained through severe drought.

Over the last five years environmental water has:

- supported 25,000 kilometres of rivers, 28,000 hectares of lakes, 158,000 hectares of wetlands and 26,000 hectares of floodplain;
- it's helped to maintain 11 of the 16 Ramsar sites in the Basin;
- supported over 1 million waterbirds;
- promoted vegetation diversity across the Basin supporting more than 640 species; and
- supported native fish spawning and migration.

This is only possible with careful and considered water use when, like all other users, as our allocations in drought have been low.

Earlier this year, the Commonwealth's largest environmental watering in the Northern Basin, saw 163 GL of flow into the Lower Balonne.



**Australian Government**  
**Commonwealth Environmental Water Office**

---

Following seven dry years, critically needed water flowed into the internationally important Narran Lakes, a place of immense significance to First Nations' Peoples.

As I outlined at the last Estimates hearing, we undertook an innovative grant process to maximise water to this wetland. More than 30 waterbird species have been observed in the recently flooded Lakes.

Environmental flows provided drought refuge for wildlife and improved water quality in many of the northern and southern catchments.

Currently in the Lower Darling we are delivering water for the environment to help improve the condition of the river, and help native fish like Murray cod breed this spring – this is their first chance since the devastating fish deaths two summers ago.

Last year, Murray flows supported native birds and fish in 5,000 kilometres of river – including breeding and feeding habitats for endangered Australasian bitterns and Murray hardyhead fish.

All of this work would not have been possible without engagement with communities including irrigators, First Nations People's, catchment managers, scientists and environmental groups.

So, we are achieving positive environmental outcomes from the top of the Basin to the bottom.

While there have been many achievements, we still face some challenges in the delivery of water for the environment. In the coming years we look forward to getting even better environmental benefits through actions such as the alleviation of the current constraints to delivery in many catchments and further implementation of measures which allow for the most efficient use of our water.