



# TRANSCRIPT

## Senator the Hon Penny Wong

*Minister for Climate Change and Water*

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PW 151/09

5 June 2009

### TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW COUNTRY HOUR ABC 891

#### SUBJECT: WATER BUYBACK

#### E & O E – PROOF ONLY

**JOURNALIST:** The New South Wales Government's embargo on federal water purchases didn't influence the timing of the Victorian deal?

**WONG:** I do understand where New South Wales was coming from. We hope in light of the agreement with Victoria which will enable additional purchase of water in Victoria above the cap – we hope that New South Wales will reconsider its position.

**JOURNALIST:** With the latest agreement, Commonwealth and Victoria water agreement, it's expected that you'll move into Victoria to look at buybacks in that state. How much are you looking to buy from Victoria?

**WONG:** Can I be very clear because your question assumes that we're going to move from one state to the other. We purchase across the Basin, both northern and southern Basin. We do not target any particular State...

**JOURNALIST:** But you have been targeting New South Wales.

**WONG:** That is not correct – there's no targeting involved. It is where water is offered where we believe water has environmental benefits. This is all done at arm's length from Government and there is a process both involving the department as well as other advisers to assess the benefit of water purchase and how best to use it. There have been high profile purchases in New South Wales because they were offered and the Government negotiated to make those purchases and obviously they are Toorale and Twynam.

**JOURNALIST:** Have you looked at acquiring water from other states?

**WONG:** Absolutely. We have an open tender. We have purchased water if you look at the first round of water purchases that occurred last year, you will see we purchased across the Basin. We [are pursuing offers] in Queensland; we have purchased water in Victoria; as well as New South Wales and South Australia.

**JOURNALIST:** Looking at Victoria, how much are you looking to buy from Victoria?

**WONG:** Under the agreement we can purchase what we believe to be around 160 beneath the cap and including direct diverters. And the agreement enables us to purchase 60 gegalitres each and every year for the next five years. So that's an additional 300 billion litres of water over and above the 160 we anticipate we can purchase beneath the cap and from direct river diverters.

**JOURNALIST:** There has been some talk about which areas the Federal Government might look at really purchasing water in Victoria. Is there a particular area of type of area you are looking at?

**WONG:** Well again I emphasise we do not target any particular area. We look at what is offered from willing sellers. The department assesses against transparent criteria. This is available on the website and the decision is made by the department as to whether this represents value for money.

**JOURNALIST:** Can we just clarify how much water has actually been purchased by Government through buybacks?

**WONG:** I have not yet announced the total amount of purchase under the current tenders and that is because they are still open. We will be making all of those details public.

**JOURNALIST:** So we don't have a final figure now, what figure are you hoping to achieve? Is there a figure?

**WONG:** Look I think the best way to understand what we are seeking to do is to think about where it is we have to go. And I have travelled around the Basin. Whilst people might not like every aspect or might be disagreeing with some aspects of this reform process, I meet very few people who tell me that the Basin is not over-allocated. I meet very few people who tell me that no change is required. And really the policy question for the country is: How do we make that adjustment? What is the best way of doing that smoothly and managing as best we are able the impact on communities and on regional economies?

**JOURNALIST:** How much water are you wanting to purchase?

**WONG:** If I could finish. If you decide that this adjustment has to occur, obviously the scale of that adjustment – which is how much water is needed – is something that will be ultimately determined by the Basin Plan. Now we have established the Authority and we will undertake a plan. And that will give us clarity about exactly how much we need to put back into the rivers to ensure that they are sustainable. Until that occurs we don't have clear quantum, a clear amount, that the community has agreed has to be returned to the rivers.

**JOURNALIST:** Minister for Water Penny Wong speaking there and Senator Wong says there's about two billion dollars in the forward estimate period put aside for water buybacks. And the full interview is available on the web: [abc.net.au/rural](http://abc.net.au/rural)

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