

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 247
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 4
Program: Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO)
Topic: Ramsar responsibilities
Hansard Page: n/a
Question Date: 28 October 2016
Question Type: Written

Senator Rice, Janet asked:

Could the department please outline how it is meeting its' Ramsar responsibilities by carrying out ecological thinning programs?

Answer:

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is the Australian administrative authority for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, and has an overarching responsibility for ensuring that Australia's obligations under the Ramsar Convention are fulfilled.

The responsibility for individual Ramsar sites however rests with the agencies responsible for their day to day management. The responsibility for managing the Central Murray Ramsar site, including the ecological thinning trial, rests with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service as part of its management of the Murray Valley National Park.

The Australian Government is not responsible for the ecological thinning trial, but did consider the proposal as a referral under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity and Conservation Act. The trial was approved with conditions on 29 January 2016.

The ecological character of the Central Murray Ramsar site has been under threat due to competing dense thickets of River Red Gums as a result of changed flooding regimes. The lack of natural culling has created a dense forest structure, as opposed to open forest or woodland, and this has restricted the ability of trees to progress into mature growth stages. This reduces the availability of habitat features such as hollows and crevices required by many fauna species for breeding and roosting, including the Superb Parrot which is part of the ecological character of the site.

The ecological thinning trial involves thinning dense thickets of river red gum regrowth at different densities within the Ramsar site. The trial will provide data to inform ongoing management of dense thickets in the Central Murray Ramsar site and therefore help to maintain its ecological character.