



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION  
PRETORIA

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Australia and Botswana deepen cooperation on fire management**

Australia and Botswana will today take important steps to strengthen Botswana's capacity to fight wildfires when the Australian High Commissioner to Botswana, Ms Ann Harrap, this afternoon formally hands over fire fighting equipment to the Botswana Minister of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, The Hon Onkokame Kitso Mokaila.

The Australian equipment is part of a proposed broader Australian assistance and training package to assist Botswana in developing an effective fire management system. This will include the development and conduct of a training program for Botswana fire management officials, to be delivered by experienced officers from the NSW RFS.

The Australian High Commissioner, Ms Harrap, said "We are very pleased to see this exchange of expertise going ahead. Australia knows full-well the costs of bushfires to communities and their livelihoods. In early 2009, almost 200 people tragically lost their lives in the Australian state of Victoria to the worst bushfires Australia has probably ever seen."

"And I know that wildfires in Botswana have caused significant damage in recent years, particularly in the north of the country. And as we stand on the cusp of wildfire season in Botswana, the equipment will help Botswana limit the damage of the fires."

The proposed package of fire management assistance arises out of a scoping mission undertaken by senior officers from the NSW RFS in February 2009 in cooperation with the Botswana Department of Forestry and Range Resources (DFRR). The report from that mission was recently presented to the Botswana Government.

The NSW RFS has considerable experience in community education in fire prevention and planning, prescribed burning, and training in the latest fire management technology and techniques.

The handover ceremony follows the recent visit by Australia's Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC, to Botswana, which helped strengthen Australia's engagement with Botswana – a relationship which is growing rapidly.

This assistance for fire management in Botswana also comes at a time when Australia is expanding its development assistance program in Africa, as part of a commitment to broaden its engagement with Africa. The Australian Government will provide an estimated A\$163.9 million in development assistance to Africa in 2009-10, a substantial increase on the previous year. Despite the international economic downturn, Australia's commitment to increasing its development cooperation efforts on the continent remains strong.

For further information, please contact William Blomfield on +27 83 409 3619 or [william.blomfield@dfat.gov.au](mailto:william.blomfield@dfat.gov.au).

Note to Editors: The handover will take place at 2pm until 2.30pm on the lawns in front of the Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism. Media are welcome. Officers from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) will also be in attendance.