



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION PRETORIA

MEDIA RELEASE

15 May 2013

Australia and Botswana deepen cooperation on fire management

Australia and Botswana will today take an important step to strengthen Botswana's capacity to fight wildfires when the Australian High Commissioner to Botswana, HE Mr Graeme Wilson, formally hands over protective fire fighting clothing worth AUD\$ 65 000 (Pula 530 000) to Botswana's Minister of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, the Hon Tshekedi Khama.

The Australian equipment is part of a broader Australian assistance and training package to assist Botswana in developing an effective fire management system. The program began in 2009 and the Australian Government has recently approved new funding of AUD\$ 500 000 (Pula 4.1 million) for the next two-year phase of the program.

Under the program, the New South Wales (NSW) Rural Fire Service has provided a range of technical assistance, training and firefighting equipment to the Botswana Department of Forestry and Range Resources (DFRR), particularly in the Chobe, Ngamiland, Ghanzi and Central districts.

To date, the program has trained over 2,500 Botswana firefighters. More than 70 members of the NSW Rural Fire Service have worked in Botswana over the past three years, including more than 45 volunteers. The Australian Government also supported the first national fire management conference for all district coordinators in Botswana in 2012.

During the next iteration of the program, in addition to further training in Botswana, DFRR personnel will undertake short-term training secondments with the NSW Rural Fire Service in Australia. At the handover ceremony held in Gaborone today, the Australian High Commissioner to Botswana, HE Mr Graeme Wilson, said the benefits of the Botswana Fire Management Program were evident, with the number of fires down and seasonal fire teams in place.

"We are very pleased to see the continuation of this exchange of expertise. The Government of Botswana has recognised the need for a more robust, strategic and country-wide approach to fire management. Australia, with its vast experience and expertise in tackling seasonal bushfires, is very well placed to provide assistance to Botswana towards meeting this challenge", he said.

"The NSW Rural Fire Service has established a strong and productive working relationship with the Botswana Department of Forestry and Range Resources, as well as other stakeholders, and is well positioned to provide the final two years of assistance," Mr Wilson added.

The Fire Management Program is part of Australia's broader bilateral development assistance to Botswana. Capacity building, training initiatives and the placement of Australian volunteers are the focus areas of the program. Since 2008, the Australian Government has supported 86 Botswana to undertake Australia Awards (scholarships) to Australia. Botswana also benefits from Australia's regional development assistance programs, including the AUD\$ 17.5 million (Pula 143 million) SADC transboundary water management program. For more information, see www.ausaid.gov.au

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