

## Santos Welcomes Coongie Lakes Decision

Australian oil and gas major Santos Limited has welcomed a decision by the South Australian Government to protect the unique Coongie Lakes wetlands, located about 110 km north of Moomba on the Cooper Creek floodplain in the state's far northeast.

The catalyst for the decision was a historic agreement between Santos, which previously held the exploration rights to the Coongie Lakes area, and the South Australian conservation movement, which represents 50 environmental groups.

Early in 2001, Santos initiated negotiations for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the South Australian Conservation Council and the Wilderness Society. The MoU recommended that the government protect the Coongie Lakes and adjacent areas not covered by petroleum licences.

The MoU called on the SA Government to make the Coongie Lakes Control Zone (CLCZ) a 'no-go' area for resource activities and to increase the size of the CLCZ to include important wetlands nearby.

The lakes are part of an important freshwater wetland system in arid Australia. In

recognition of their significance, they were declared wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1987.

"The Coongie Lakes are a series of unique freshwater wetlands and lakes in arid Australia. Santos therefore decided it needed to bring the parties together on this important environmental site", said Santos' Managing Director, John Ellice-Flint.

"While Santos has held exploration rights to this area in the past, we recognise that we have a community responsibility to protect this important wildlife habitat and refuge.

"I am particularly proud of the way our employees and contractors have operated in this area, to the highest possible environmental standards over time. Because of this, the values and beauty of the area remain.

"Santos took a leadership position on this issue against the wishes of some. It has been an arduous and at times frustrating process, but the outcome is worth it. The challenge now is to find ways to improve dialogue between all the key stakeholders." ■