



# Wetlands in a Dry Land

More-Than-Human Histories of Australia's Murray-Darling Basin

Emily O'Gorman

FOREWORD BY PAUL S. SUTTER

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**A COMPELLING ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF A CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM UNDER THREAT**

In the name of agriculture, urban growth, and disease control, humans have drained, filled, or otherwise destroyed nearly 87 percent of the world's wetlands over the past three centuries. Unintended consequences include biodiversity loss, poor water quality, and the erosion of cultural sites, and only in the past few decades have wetlands been widely recognized as worth preserving. Emily O'Gorman asks, What has counted as a wetland, for whom, and with what consequences?

Using the Murray-Darling Basin—a massive river system in eastern Australia that includes over 30,000 wetland areas—as a case study and drawing on archival research and original interviews, O'Gorman examines how people and animals have shaped wetlands from the late nineteenth century to today. She illuminates deeper dynamics by relating how Aboriginal peoples acted then and now as custodians of the landscape, despite the policies of the Australian government; how the movements of water birds affected farmers; and how mosquitoes have defied efforts to fully understand, let alone control, them. Situating the region's history within global environmental humanities conversations, O'Gorman argues that we need to understand wetlands as socioecological landscapes in order to create new kinds of relationships with and futures for these places.

“Clearly developed from deep research and long familiarity with these places as well as close conversations with many people along these waterways, this lucid, moving, and beautifully written book is a great achievement.” —Heather Goodall, University of Technology Sydney

“Superb. An important contribution to the water and wetland history of Australia and of interest to scholars focusing on water in arid lands elsewhere in the world.” —Robert Wilson, author of *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway*

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Emily O'Gorman is senior lecturer at Macquarie University.

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