



MENINDEE LAKES WETLANDS PROJECT - RAMSAR NOMINATION

FACT SHEET 1

WHAT IS THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS ?

WHAT IS RAMSAR ?

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance holds the unique distinction of being the first modern treaty between nations aimed at conserving natural resources.

The signing of the Convention on Wetlands took place on 2 February 1971 at the small Iranian town of Ramsar and came into force on 21 December 1975. Since then, the Convention on Wetlands has been known as the Ramsar Convention.

The Ramsar Convention's broad aims are to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise use and management, those that remain. This requires international cooperation, policy making, capacity building and technology transfer.

The Ramsar Convention works closely with five other organisations known as International Organization Partners (IOPs). These are Birdlife International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Wetlands International and WWF International. These support the work of the Convention by providing expert technical advice, helping implement field studies and providing financial support. The IOPs also participate regularly as observers in all meetings of the Conference of the Parties and as full members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

What are Ramsar wetlands?

Under the Ramsar Convention, a wide variety of natural and human-made habitat types ranging from rivers to coral reefs can be classified as wetlands. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, fens, peat bogs, or bodies of water - whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary. Water within these areas can be static or flowing; fresh, brackish or saline; and can include inland rivers and coastal or marine water to a depth of six metres at low tide. There are even underground wetlands.

The Ramsar Convention encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity. Once designated, these sites are added to the Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance and become known as Ramsar sites. In designating a wetland as a Ramsar site, countries agree to establish and oversee a management framework aimed at conserving the wetland and ensuring its wise use. Wise use under the Convention is broadly defined as maintaining the ecological character of a wetland.

Wetlands can be included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance because of their ecological, botanical, zoological, limnological or hydrological importance.

For a wetland to be designated to this list it must satisfy one or more of the criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance.



Australia's Ramsar Wetlands

Australia was one of the first countries to sign the Ramsar Convention, and in 1974 designated the world's first Wetland of International Importance: Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory.

Australia currently has 64 Wetlands of International Importance listed under the Ramsar Convention, covering approximately 7.5 million hectares, an area greater than Tasmania.

Contracting Parties to the Convention

Australia was one of the first nations to become a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention .

There are now more than 155 Contracting Parties to the Convention, who have designated more than 1840 wetland sites throughout the world to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Contracting Parties make a commitment to:

- designate at least one site that meets the Ramsar criteria for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands
- include wetland conservation within their national land-use planning
- establish nature reserves on wetlands and promote wetland training, and consult with other Contracting Parties about the implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

Conferences of Contracting Parties

The Contracting Parties meet every three years at a Conference of the Contracting Parties (CoP) to discuss policy issues and to report on the activities of the previous three years through National Reports. The most recent Conference of the Contracting Parties (CoP10) was held in the Republic of Korea in 2008. Australia's report to CoP10 includes information provided by Australian, state and territory governments and from non-government organisations with an interest in wetlands.

National guidelines for Ramsar wetlands - Implementing the Ramsar Convention in Australia

National Guidelines for Ramsar Wetlands are currently being developed. The aim of the guidelines is to facilitate improved management of Ramsar sites and maintenance of ecological character, in line with Australia's commitments under the Ramsar Convention and responsibilities under the EPBC Act. The guidelines will provide a framework for Ramsar Convention implementation in Australia and provide jurisdictions and other interested parties with clear guidance on the management of Ramsar sites.

Ramsar Snapshot Study

The Ramsar Snapshot Study was commissioned by the Department of the Environment and Water Resources to provide a preliminary review of the current status and management of all Australian Ramsar sites. The report identifies a number of administrative, information and reporting gaps and makes a number of recommendations to assist Australia in meeting its obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

