

Australia's National Report to the 13th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention United Arab Emirates, 21 – 29 October 2018

Report is available here: <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/788e4369-f465-4fe9-bbc3-db9d0374e004/files/national-report-cop13.pdf>

References to Peel-Yalgorup System

Section 2: General summary of national implementation progress and challenges

In your country, in the past triennium (i.e., since COP12 reporting)

A. What have been the five most successful aspects of implementation of the Convention?

3)

› Improved national frameworks for assessing the condition of wetlands have enhanced, improved standardisation of and clarified the way we regularly assess the condition of Ramsar sites, including for potential change in ecological character. This has led to the finalisation of assessments for Towra Point, Riverland, Muir-Byenup and Lake Gore, and will improve national consistency of the approach to Article 3.2 assessment. This will be enhanced by greater adoption of wetland condition assessment and inventories in the state and territory jurisdictions.

The completion of development of a national Framework for identifying the ecological condition of wetlands, the Integrated Ecological Condition Assessment (IECA) Framework for Aquatic Ecosystems. The use of the Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar site as a case study was useful to demonstrate the application of the Framework.

Use of the Australian National Aquatic Ecosystem (ANAE) Classification System, and an extension of the system to classify and map intertidal and subtidal habitats in Queensland.

I. Please list the names of the organisations which have been consulted on or have contributed to the information provided in this report

› Australian Government Departments of the Environment and Energy, Agriculture and Water Resources, Prime Minister and Cabinet, Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Industry, Innovation and Science.

Agencies, including Geoscience Australia, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

State and Territory Governments, including:

ACT Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

NSW Office of Environment and Heritage

NT Department of Environment and Natural Resources

QLD Department of Environment and Science

SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources

TAS Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

VIC Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

Non-government organisations, including the Australian Wetlands Network, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia, Sydney Olympic Park Authority and Peel Harvey Catchment Council.

Target 3 Public and private sectors have increased their efforts to apply guidelines and good practices for the wise use of water and wetlands. {1.10}

3.2 Additional information

› a) Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) has been working with private land managers to improve the catchments of a number of Ramsar sites, including Bowling Green Bay, Queensland. CVA has worked with private companies to manage wetland values at Ramsar-listed wetlands including Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group at Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar Site, and Exxon Mobil at Cheetham Wetlands, part of the Port Phillip Bay Ramsar Site.

Greening Australia has worked with the Alcoa Foundation which provided \$2 million for environmental projects in the Peel-Harvey Catchment in WA, to improve the Murray, Serpentine and Harvey rivers, reverse the loss of threatened species habitat and restore and relink the landscape.

As part of its Reef Aid initiative, Greening Australia (with Birdlife Australia, CVA, WetlandCare Australia) has partnered with the Australian Government Reef Trust program on a \$14 million project to restore 700 ha of coastal habitat in the Great Barrier Reef region.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is an active participant in the Lower Burdekin Water Alliance – bringing together private and public sector activities in the Bowling Green Bay Ramsar area.

In the Hunter Estuary Ramsar site, funds from Industry compensation schemes have been applied to wetland revegetation schemes, and satellite tracking of threatened waterbirds (freckled duck). The Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia has propagated waterplants for planting in artificial ponds built by coal companies to offset impacts on endangered frogs in the Hunter Estuary.

Goal 2. Effectively conserving and managing the Ramsar Site network Target 5 The ecological character of Ramsar Sites is maintained or restored through effective, planning and integrated management {2.1.}

5.7 How many Ramsar Sites have a cross-sectoral management committee? - 27

5.7 Additional information

If at least 1 site, please give the name and official number of the site or sites› See Section 5 of this National Report. Examples include:

Australian Government – Kakadu National Park has a cross-sectoral committee.

NSW - Narran Lake (MoU with Traditional Owners); Paroo River Wetlands –(involvement of Traditional Owners);

Myall Lakes (involvement of Traditional Owners)

SA – Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Wetland – cross sectoral management arrangements

WA – Toolibin Lake (Recovery Catchment Team); Peel-Yalgorup (Technical Advisory Group); Roebuck Bay (jointly managed with Traditional Owner Groups); Eighty Mile Beach (jointly managed with Traditional Owner Groups); Lake Warden (Ramsar Management advisory group); Lake Gore (Ramsar Management advisory group); Vasse-Wonerup (Technical Working Group and Technical Advisory Group)

NT – Cobourg Peninsula (joint management with Traditional Owners), Kakadu National Park

ACT – the Ramsar site is wholly within Namadgi National Park. A range of consultative and management approaches are used to inform management of the broader area including with Traditional Owners.

Target 7 Sites that are at risk of change of ecological character have threats addressed {2.6.}.

7.1 Are mechanisms in place for the Administrative Authority to be informed of negative human-induced changes or likely changes in the ecological character of Ramsar Sites, pursuant to Article 3.2? - Yes

Australian governments have an agreed approach for making Article 3.2 notifications. The assessment and notification of change in ecological character must be evidence-based and undertaken in accordance with the National guidance on notifying change in ecological character of Australia's Ramsar wetlands (Article 3.2).

A practice note to guide the process has recently been developed.

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) places an obligation on a person to not take an action that has, will have or is likely to have, a significant impact on the ecological character of a declared Ramsar wetland. The EPBC Act also obliges a person proposing to take an action that they think may have a significant impact to refer the proposal to the Minister of the Environment and Energy for approval. This is the primary mechanism for the Department of the Environment and Energy (the Ramsar Administrative Authority) to be informed of negative human-induced changes or likely changes in the ecological character of Ramsar sites.

Specific projects and actions are being undertaken to assess threats to Ramsar sites and potential changes in condition, for example:

- NESP Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub Project 2.6 'Guidelines for the management of threats to savanna riparian zones' has a component that is assessing the condition of and threats to Kakadu floodplains and surrounding floodplains. The project is developing maps of current threats, potential future distribution of key threats, key high-priority assets, critical areas to protect to avoid tipping points at which floodplains fail to support ecosystem function or cultural values. The project will provide baseline information for Ramsar reporting for Kakadu's Ramsar wetlands, and information on monitoring ecosystem health.

<http://www.nespnorthern.edu.au/projects/nesp/managing-savanna-riparian-zones/>

- Regular assessments of site condition are undertaken, for example the status of the Coongie Lakes Ramsar site was assessed in relation to the limits of acceptable change (LAC) in ecological character, including for hydrology and waterbirds, as part of the draft Lake Eyre Basin: State of the Basin Condition Assessment 2016.

See: <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/national/lake-eyre-basin/public-consultation-draft-conditionassessment-report>

- The Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia (site manager of Shortland) has been in communication with Ramsar administrators at state and federal level regarding likely changes in the ecological character of the Shortland extension of Hunter Estuary Ramsar site as a result of climate change and changes to water flows. HWCA has hosted site visits by state and federal wetlands policy managers to address ECD and RIS matters, including to discuss changes in ecological character and potential Article 3.2 notification.
- The **Western Australian Government** has assessed and reported on the condition of Becher Point Wetlands, Forrestdale and Thomsons Lakes and **Peel-Yalgorup** systems as part of supporting documents for the **Strategic Assessment** - Perth Peel Region.

Target 9 The wise use of wetlands is strengthened through integrated resource management at the appropriate scale, inter alia, within a river basin or along a coastal zone

9.4 Have Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) expertise and tools been incorporated into catchment/river basin planning and management (see Resolution X.19)? - yes

9.4 Additional information

CEPA expertise and tools are widely used in catchment and river basin planning and management. Under the National Water Initiative Agreement, all jurisdictions have agreed to engage water users and other stakeholders, including through open and timely consultation with all stakeholders on plans and decisions that might affect them. The planning frameworks outlined in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan require transparent community consultation at all scales of planning. The Murray Darling Basin Authority, under its Strategic Goal 2 (Strengthen engagement with the community) consults extensively with the community about their water needs, preferences and the impact of water policy on their industries and communities. The MDBA seeks to continually improve its stakeholder engagement in Basin scale initiatives like the Northern Basin Review and the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment process through a range of initiatives including establishing regional offices and staff with a focus on community engagement staff across the basin and providing educational and communication resources for students and teachers and the community on various aspects of river basin planning. The CEWO employs six local engagement officers in regional locations across the Basin to work with communities to ensure local knowledge and views are taken into account in environmental water management decisions. The CEWO also works closely with communities in relation to environmental water use planning and management by participating in existing local engagement processes established by State agencies and CMAs, such as environmental water advisory groups. Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), a national NGO, undertook Newcastle Wetland Connections, a 4-year CEPA program in the upstream catchment of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar Site, engaging 1800 participants in wetland education and community conservation. CVA launched two CEPA programs: Revive Our Wetlands and One Reef, to engage citizens in wetland protection, monitoring and restoration. **The Peel-Harvey Catchment Council,**

Mandurah Western Australia produced Australia's first CEPA Action Plan for site 482 - Wetlands and People Plan-Peel Yalgorup System The Plan was launched in November 2017. The Hunter Estuary Ramsar site provides an example of a small sub-catchment where CEPA expertise and tools underpin management of the Ramsar site. The Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia Visitors Centre and site support a range of interpretive materials and signage, which help inform catchment managers. Each of Tasmania's three Natural Resource Management organisations has developed regional strategies which include annual public Ramsar education activities. These are promoted through a range of events, such as World Wetlands Day. The South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources implements a program of active management of 46 floodplain wetland complexes that actively involves the community in the planning, management and assessment of effectiveness of management in the wetlands. The Department is currently developing a CEPA Action Plan for The Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar site. The Queensland Wetlands Program provides CEPA expertise and tools to inform wetlands management, including Walking the Landscape workshops and training and online resources.

Target 11 Wetland functions, services and benefits are widely demonstrated, documented and disseminated.

11.1 Has an assessment been made of the ecosystem benefits/services provided by Ramsar Sites and other wetlands? – yes

11.1 Additional information

If 'Yes' or 'Partially', please indicate, how many Ramsar Sites and their names:

Ecological Character Descriptions (ECDs) for each Ramsar site set out the benefits/services provided by the site. ECDs are available on-line at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications> In this triennium, the following additional assessments have been completed:

- Coorong Ramsar site - Ecosystem services from the Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar site (2015) <https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP141696&dsid=DS4>
- Ecosystem Services and associated critical processes and functions: A review relevant to the Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar site (2014). Water's Edge Consulting The National Inventory Systems and International Reporting Branch of the Department of the Environment and Energy has estimated the carbon stored in intertidal wetlands (mangroves and tidal marsh) within the Great Barrier Reef catchment and nationally as an indicator of their importance as a contributor to climate change mitigation. Some preliminary work on ecosystem benefits and services has been completed as part of implementing the Murray Darling Basin Plan, in the context of better environmental water planning, and improved social and economic outcomes.

At a national level, the **Aquatic Ecosystems Tool Kit** has been finalised to assist with management and monitoring of wetlands (Modules 1 – 5). Module 5 of the toolkit 'Integrated Ecological Assessment of Condition (IECA)' provides a framework to assess ecological condition, including assessment of ecosystem benefits/services.

11.3 Have socio-economic values of wetlands been included in the management planning for Ramsar Sites Ramsar National Report to COP13 [Leanne Wilkinson] Page 36 of 124 and other wetlands? – yes

11.3 Additional information If ‘Yes’ or ‘Partially’, please indicate, if known, how many Ramsar Sites and their names

› Socio-economic values continue to be included in management planning for Commonwealth national parks, World Heritage areas, National Heritage places and Ramsar wetlands. Initiatives in this triennium include:

- Development of management plans for Victorian Ramsar sites

- **Strategic Assessment for the Perth and Peel Regions (which includes the Peel-Yalgorup System Ramsar wetland)**

In Victoria, regional waterway strategies set out an eight year program of actions to protect and improve rivers, wetlands and estuaries. Priorities for actions take account of the environmental, cultural, social and economic values of waterways. For example, see the West Gippsland Waterway Strategy at: <http://www.wqcma.vic.gov.au/our-region/waterways/waterway-strategy>

Target 16 Wetlands conservation and wise use are mainstreamed through communication, capacity development, education, participation and awareness {4.1} 16.1 Has an action plan (or plans) for wetland CEPA been established?

16.1 Has an action plan (or plans) for wetland CEPA been established? {4.1.1} KRA 4.1.i Even if no CEPA plans have been developed, if broad CEPA objectives for CEPA actions have been established, please indicate this in the Additional information section below Please select only one per square. a)

At the national level A=Yes B=No C=In Progress D=Planned **b) Sub national level** A=Yes B=No C=In Progress D=Planned **c) Catchment/basin level** A=Yes B=No C=In Progress D=Planned **d) Local/site level** A=Yes B=No C=In Progress D=Planned

16.1 Additional information If ‘Yes’ or ‘In progress’ to one or more of the four questions above, for each please describe the mechanism, who is responsible and identify if it has involved CEPA NFPs

› a) Australia is developing a Ramsar CEPA Action Plan to implement the Ramsar CEPA Program 2016-2024, setting out actions by the Australian Government, state and territory governments and NGOs.

b) c) A Communication, Education and Awareness Management Program is outlined in the marine park management plans for the Coral Sea, and North-west and Temperate East Marine Park Networks (that include Ramsar sites). This program will support communication and public education about the natural, cultural and socio-economic values marine parks, including Ramsar wetlands. States and territories have plans for wetland CEPA activities. For example:

- The Victorian Waterway Management Strategy includes policy and actions for community participation in the management of Victoria’s waterways.

- The Wetlands in the Great Barrier Reef Catchments Management Strategy 2016-21 outlines a range of education, communication and capacity building goals, objectives and actions related to in the management of wetlands in the catchments of the Great Barrier Reef.

d) The Peel-Harvey Catchment Council, in Western Australia, has developed a Wetlands and People Plan to promote communication, education, participation and awareness of the Peel-Yalgorup Wetland System. This CEPA Plan is being developed in accordance with a strategy under the Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar Site System Management Plan, Peel Harvey Catchment Council (2009). It is available at: http://www.peel-harvey.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/WPP_Final.pdf

CVA prepared and implemented a CEPA program for the upstream catchments of Hunter Estuary Wetlands and Bowling Green Bay Wetlands Ramsar Sites, with funding assistance from the Australian Government. Individual Ramsar site ECDs and management plans set out CEPA messages and priorities related to the site. Many sites have a program of CEPA activities, including newsletters, training activities, signs and brochures. These include for the Hunter Estuary Ramsar site, Sydney Olympic Park wetlands, Warren Wetlands, etc

**Goal 2 Target 5: Ecological character of Ramsar Sites The ecological character of Ramsar Sites is maintained or restored through effective, planning and integrated management {2.1.}.
Contributes to Aichi Target 6,11, 12.**

Target 5: Ecological character of Ramsar Sites - Outcomes achieved by 2018

Outcomes achieved by 2018 and how they contribute to achievement of the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals

› During the triennium, wetlands advice was provided on over 60 referrals and assessments under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, on actions that may impact on Ramsar sites. During the triennium, one additional ECD was prepared (Shoalwater and Corio Bays – 2017) with 4 ECD addenda published (Corner Inlet, Edithvale-Seaford, Kerang and Western Port). Draft RIS updates were prepared for 8 sites (Shoalwater and Corio Bays, Paroo River Wetlands, Lake Pinaroo, Corner Inlet, Edithvale-Seaford, Kerang, Ord River Floodplain and Ginini Flats Wetland Complex) and one of these is available on the public RSIS (Ord River Floodplain). Updated

Management Plans were prepared for 11 sites (Gippsland Lakes, Coongie Lakes, Peel-Yalgorup^[kw1], Vasse-Wonnrup, Eighty Mile Beach, Lake Warden, Lake Gore, Roebuck Bay, Ginini Flats Wetland Complex, Western Port and Kakadu National Park). Management plans for 3 offshore Ramsar sites are being reviewed as part of the establishment of new Commonwealth Marine Reserves. New or updated management Plans for a number of sites are in preparation (including Port Phillip Bay, Kerang Wetlands, East Cape Barren Island Lagoons). Contributes to Aichi Targets 11 (protected areas) and 12 (conservation of threatened species).

Section 5: Optional annex to allow any Contracting Party that so wishes to provide additional information regarding any of all of its designated Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites)

Peel-Yalgorup system (482)

5.7 Has a cross-sectoral site management committee been established for the site?

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

D=Planned

5.9 If an assessment of the effectiveness of Ramsar Site management has been made please indicate the year of assessment, which assessment tool did you use (e.g. METT, Resolution XII.15), the result (score) of the assessment and the source of the information in the box for additional information.

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

D=Planned

11.1 Has an assessment been made of the ecosystem benefits/services provided by the Ramsar Site?

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

C=Partially

D=Planned

11.3 Have socio-economic values of wetlands been included in the management planning for the Ramsar Site?

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

C=Partially

Z=No Management Plan

11.4 Have cultural values of wetlands been included in the management planning for the Ramsar Site?

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

C=Partially

Z=No Management Plan

16.3a Is stakeholder participation in decision-making promoted, especially with local stakeholder involvement in the management of the Ramsar Site?

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

D=Planned

16.6a Have communication mechanisms been established to share information between the Ramsar Administrative Authority and the Ramsar Site manager(s)?

Please select only one option

A=Yes

B=No

D=Planned

Any additional comments/information about the site

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