



Ramsar working in  
Australia:  
Non-governmental  
organisations and  
Australia's role in the  
international scene

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Paper presented at Australian  
Wetland Forum 3,  
Banrock Station, 13 June 2003

CM Finlayson

June 2003



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## **Powerpoint slides**

### **Ramsar working in Australia: non-governmental organisations & Australia's role in the international scene**

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#### **Talk outline**

##### **Pre-talk comments**

- 1. Conclusion**
- 2. Expected outcomes – AWF3**
- 3. NGO involvement in Ramsar**
- 4. Key features of Ramsar**
- 5. Australia & Ramsar**

## **Pre-talk comments – the 7 wonders of the Justine bus trip dialogue**

**Things to consider and solve starting next week!**

- **realistic indicators of change**
- **working within fragmentation**
- **disconnection – agency/science/NGOs**
- **leadership – practical/intellectual**
- **recognition/adoption of our excellence**
- **taking time for effective involvement**
- **integrity of representativeness / participation**

## **1. Conclusion**

- **Many practical tools for wise use of wetlands and for maintaining ecological character**
- **Effective use of Ramsar depends upon us – not Ramsar – getting the information out**
- **Am not convinced that use of Ramsar within Australia has been effective or consistent**
- **NGOs could bridge major gap – linking with local people – need consistency**
- **Emphases could shift to wise use backed by effective monitoring & information exchange**

## **2. Expected outcomes from AWF3**

- **Practical feedback from Ramsar meeting, Spain 2002**
- **Implications of Ramsar for local wetland managers**
- **Tools and actions for transfer of Ramsar information to target groups**

## **3. NGOs and Ramsar**

**Key role – started it and kept it moving / non-UN convention / formal role recognised**

**IOPs – 1971 – 1987 – 1999/2002**

**Other NGOs**

## **International Organisation Partners**

- **Birdlife International – International Council  
for Bird Protection (ICBP)**
  - **World Conservation Union – IUCN –  
International Union for Conservation & Nature**
  - **Wetlands International – IWRB –  
International Waterfowl Research Bureau**
  - **World Wide Fund for Nature - WWF**

## **International Organisation Partners**

**1971**

**Ramsar, Iran**

**Started the whole thing – set the scene for  
the governments – Australia not present  
– most opposed to the waterfowl label –  
introduced concepts of wise use and  
ecological character**



## **International Organisation Partners**

**1987**

**Regina, Canada**

**Formalised the whole thing – IUCN/IWRB  
hosted a Bureau - Australia present –  
tried to make wise use the central plank –  
opposed and emphasis placed on  
waterfowl and listing of sites of  
international importance**

## **International Organisation Partners**

**1999-2002**

**San Jose, Costa Rica / Valencia, Spain**

**– formalisation of role of IOPs – formal role in  
Convention Standing Committee & STRP –  
raised ire of some parties and other NGOs –  
large influence on policy & direction**

## **Other NGOs**

**Involved - uneven – controversial – beneficial –  
ineffective – negative – innovative**

**Opportunities missed and messed**

**Confronting to Governments?**

**On-ground opportunities exist for NGOs – use  
Ramsar concepts – people and wetlands – lead  
and support the (disconnected) bureaucrats –  
connect to local interests**

## **4. Key features of Ramsar**

**Wise use**

**Maintenance of ecological character**

**Reporting**

**List of important sites**

**Management planning**

**Monitoring**

**Communication, education, public awareness**

**Capacity building**

**Involving local people**

## **Wise use**

**The wise use of wetlands is their sustainable utilisation for the benefit of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem.**

**Akin to sustainable development – recognises that people use wetlands in many ways – conservation not only mechanism available for management**

## **Ecological character**

**The sum of the individual biological, chemical and physical components of the ecosystem and their interactions that maintain the wetland and its products, functions and attributes (goods and services derived from the ecosystem).**

**Description of ecological character lacking, especially in relation to how sites are used**

# **Reporting**

**Based on Ramsar Strategic Plan**

**Sets targets for parties to achieve – can we deliver on our commitments?**

**Complex reporting format – detailed, repetitious, disconnected & little feedback to ground level**

# **List of important sites**

**Key concept – large emphasis**

**Australia has 64 Ramsar sites covering approx. 7.3 million ha**

**Globally there are 1288 (5%) Ramsar sites totalling 108.9 (7%) million hectares**

**Criteria based on biodiversity features, not ecosystems services or value to people**

**Iconic process – emphasised at expense of wise use and involvement of local people?**

## **Monitoring**

**Systematic effort to assess condition of sites  
and report on change**

**Linked to Montreux Record of sites  
undergoing change – voluntary**

**Required to ensure that (wise) use does not  
degrade ecological character**

**Much past effort has been ineffective – not  
systematic or well targeted**

## **Management planning**

**Guidance available**

**Agreed that all listed sites should have  
management plans – most do not**

**Effort within Australia to obtain formal  
plans for all sites – funding and  
attitudinal issues**

## **Communication, education, public awareness**

**Identified need to get the information to  
those who need it and make decisions**  
**Often not linked to main technical issues or  
individuals**  
**Information is available – getting it out to  
right people is the issue**

## **Capacity building**

**Assistance to ensure we have the expertise  
to implement the Convention**  
**Transfer of on-ground management  
knowledge and tools**  
**Providing assistance at local level**  
**Often talked about – what evidence?**

## **Involving local people**

**The key**

**Multiple interactions and relationships needed -  
not one way**

**Centralised structures tend to disempower local  
people**

**Science top-down, focussed on large institutions,  
not seen to address on-ground needs**

**NGOs could form bridges links**

**NGO science base weak or inconsistent?**

## **5. Australia & Ramsar**

**First signatory – 1974 – Cobourg Peninsular, NT**

**Regina - 1987 – led the revolt of the ‘silent  
minority’ against emphasis on wise use**

**Montreux – 1990 – reticent responses – Montreux**

**Record – Small Grants Fund**

**Wise use guidelines / case studies - participated**

**Kushiro – 1993 – supported STRP concept**

## **Australia & Ramsar**

**Brisbane – 1996 – hosted conference; raised objection to Yugoslav presence; rejected inclusion of values and benefits in ecological character**

**San Jose – 1999 – spectacle of boundary changes; promoted issue of invasive species; inactive on risk assessment; accepted definition of ecological character**

**Valencia – 2002 – seen as opposing climate change, inavives, cultural values & agriculture and wetlands; reaffirmed support for waterbird issues & private listings**

## **Perceptions of Australia's international role**

**NGOs / IOPs – supportive, perplexed to negative**

**Mannerisms**

**Tolerance**

**Innovative**



## **Australia & Ramsar – what is needed?**

**Increased and decentralised knowledge**  
**Nationally agreed policies – wise use**  
**Forum for linking across governments to**  
**local action – NGO mediated?**  
**Nationally consistent information collection –**  
**condition, responses, scenarios**  
**Incentives for local involvement**  
**NGO role – collaborative, consistency and**  
**engagement with agency, science, local**

## **Conclusion**

- **Many practical tools for wise use of wetlands and for maintaining ecological character**
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