

The Ramsar Convention

How can I help?

TO HELP SAVE WETLANDS and the many benefits they bring, an international treaty – the **Convention on Wetlands** (also known as the Ramsar Convention) – was signed on 2 February 1971 in the Iranian town of Ramsar. Australia was the first Contracting Party to the Convention which now has over 120 such parties worldwide. Each Contracting Party has an obligation to nominate wetlands to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Once a Contracting

Party designates a Ramsar Site, it is obliged to maintain the ecological character of that wetland. At present there are 56 declared Ramsar sites in Australia.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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WETLANDS

LET'S GET WISE

Their future is in our hands

WHILE MOST AUSTRALIANS know something about wetlands and what they look like, many of us are unaware of their immense value to our environment and our lifestyle. Even more importantly, most of us may not know that many of our wetlands are in danger.

WETLANDS OCCUR IN many different forms. On the coast they can exist as seagrass meadows, coral reefs and mangrove forests while inland they may be billabongs, overflows, ephemeral lakes or alpine glacial lakes. Each has its own unique ecosystem of plants and animals that depend on the wetland for food, water and habitat.

IN AN ARID COUNTRY like Australia, wetlands are vital ecosystems. Often they are the life support for communities. They provide habitat for wildlife which in turn can help control insect pests on farms. They can also be breeding grounds for recreational and commercial fish species.

THE HEALTH OF THE CATCHMENT is reflected in the health of the wetland. Water flowing through the catchment gathers contaminants such as fertilisers, pesticides and industrial chemicals which can end up in wetlands. Although many wetlands can break down sediments and nutrients, there is a limit to what and how much they can process before being seriously damaged.

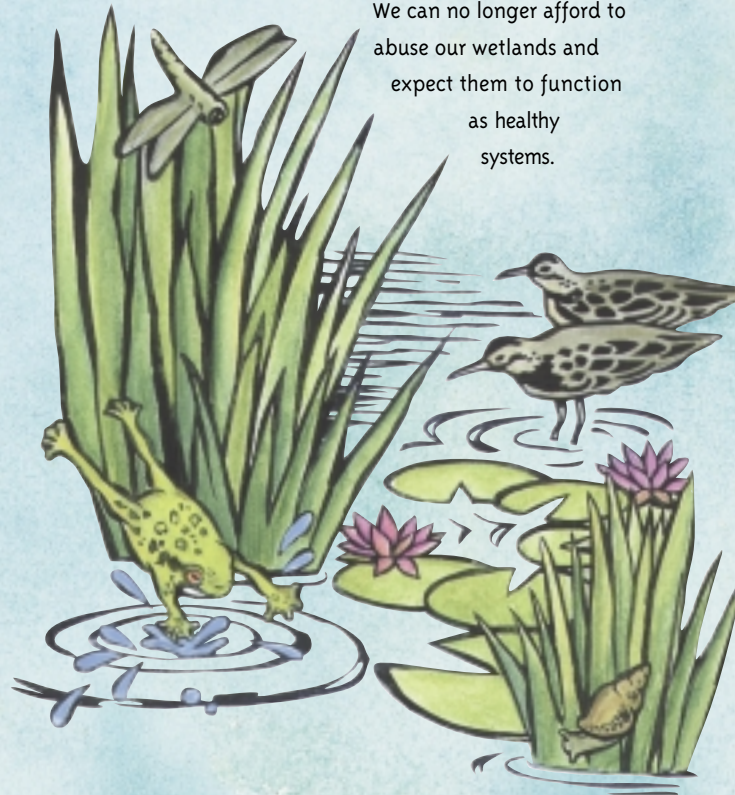
WETLANDS ARE OFTEN areas of great natural beauty where people enjoy the scenery and gather for recreation. In all their forms, they are indeed very special places.



BUT WETLANDS ARE under threat. Since European settlement, more than 50 per

cent of Australian wetlands have been exploited for other uses such as urban development and agriculture. Of those remaining, many are becoming badly degraded due to land clearing, stock grazing, dumping of refuse and mining. Surface water containing fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and industrial waste is changing the natural makeup of wetlands.

We can no longer afford to abuse our wetlands and expect them to function as healthy systems.



TO HELP PROTECT and rehabilitate wetlands, we need to understand them and learn how to manage them wisely.

LOTS OF WORK is already being done to conserve and manage wetlands in Australia. The National Wetlands Program, funded through the Natural Heritage Trust, promotes the conservation, repair and wise use of wetlands through regular surveys, management planning, research, training and education.

TO FIND OUT what wetlands are out there and to identify their special characteristics, *A Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia* is periodically updated with the support of the National Wetlands Program. This is a cooperative project involving Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. You can access the directory at: <http://www.ea.gov.au/water/wetlands>

THE WETLANDS POLICY of the *Commonwealth Government of Australia*, adopted in February 1997, has been formulated to lead the way in wise wetland management. In effect, it aims to ensure that all spheres of government are working in partnership to promote wetland conservation across the nation.

