

# **National Report for Australia**

**prepared for the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of Contracting  
Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention, Iran,  
1971)**

**San José, Costa Rica 10-18 May 1999**



## AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL REPORT

### 7TH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS San José, Costa Rica, 10-18 May 1999

**Contracting Party:** Australia

**Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority:** Environment Australia, Biodiversity Group

**Name and title of the head of the institution:** Mr Stephen Hunter  
Deputy Secretary

**Mailing address for the head of the institution:** Environment Australia, Biodiversity Group  
GPO Box 636  
ACT 2601 AUSTRALIA

**Telephone:** 61 02 6250 0200  
**Facsimile:** 61 02 6250 0384  
**Email:** stephen.hunter@ea.gov.au

**Name & title (if different to the designated contact officer for Ramsar Convention matters):**

Mr Brendan Edgar  
Director, Wetlands Unit  
Environment Australia, Biodiversity Group  
GPO Box 636  
ACT 2601 AUSTRALIA

**Telephone:** 61 2 6250 0777  
**Facsimile:** 61 2 6250 0384  
**Email:** brendan.edgar@ea.gov.au

## CONTENTS

<b>General Objective 1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>General Objective 2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>General Objective 3</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>General Objective 4</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>General Objective 5</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>General Objective 6</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>General Objective 7</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>General Objective 8</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Optional Section NGO participation</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Final Comments</b>	<b>36</b>

## Appendices

- Appendix 1 List of projects funded under the National Wetlands Program 1996-1998
- Appendix 2 List of publications which promote the wise use of wetlands
- Appendix 3 Management Planning at Ramsar sites
- Appendix 4 Change in ecological character (q 5.3) and further information on management planning at Ramsar sites
- Appendix 5 Comments from the Australian Wetlands Alliance

## List of Tables

- Table 1 Status of State and Territory Wetlands Policies
- Table 2 Details of State/Territory efforts to address the integration of wetlands into planning and management processes
- Table 3 State/Territory actions taken to remedy and to prevent pollution impacts affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands
- Table 4 Key mechanisms relating to Environmental Impact Assessment
- Table 5 Involvement of community groups in the conservation and wise use of wetlands
- Table 6 Involvement of the private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands

## List of Boxes

- Box 1 The Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia
- Box 2 The Natural Heritage Trust
- Box 3 Waterwatch Australia
- Box 4 Salinity Action Plan for Western Australia
- Box 5 Tri-national Wetlands Cooperative Program
- Box 6 Shorebird Action Plan

## Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Wetlands Unit of the Biodiversity Group, Environment Australia with information provided by each of the State and Territory Governments and from non-government organisations with an interest in wetlands.

### **Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 1** **To progress towards universal membership of the Convention**

#### **1.1 Describe any actions your government has taken (such as hosting regional or subregional meetings/consultations, working cooperatively with neighbouring countries on transfrontier wetland sites) to encourage others to join the Convention.**

Australia, in partnership with Wetlands International- Oceania, has provided information and training to a number of Pacific Island countries to promote the implementation of, and encourage their accession to, the Ramsar Convention. This partnership is facilitated through an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding between Environment Australia and Wetlands International - Oceania whereby the Oceania office of Wetlands International is co-located with the Wetlands Unit.

Key achievements of this partnership include;

- assistance has been given to Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia (a territory of France) to raise awareness of the benefits and obligations of accession, to identify candidate Ramsar sites and where possible prepare draft nominations. The political/administrative process for accession is at different stages in each country/territory.
- projects that demonstrate the benefits of international cooperation on wetlands conservation have been developed or implemented in several countries, in regard to inventory, training and capacity building, wise use and awareness raising, with an emphasis on mangroves and freshwater lakes. Assistance with preparing funding proposals for new initiatives has been provided.
- input to a brochure on the benefits of Small Island Developing States joining the Ramsar Convention was provided to the Ramsar Bureau.
- assistance with convening a Regional Meeting to assist Oceania countries to prepare a coordinated regional approach for the 7th Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention in 1999. The meeting will take place in New Zealand in early December 1998.

## Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 2

To achieve the wise use of wetlands by implementing and further developing the Ramsar Wise use Guidelines.

- 2.1 Has a National Wetland Policy/Strategy/Action Plan been developed, or is one being developed or planned for the near future? If so:
  - a. What are/will be its main features?
  - b. Was it, or is it, intended that the Policy/Strategy/Action Plan be adopted by the whole of Government, the Minister responsible for Ramsar matters or through some other process. Please describe.
  - c. How does it relate/will it relate to other national environmental/ conservation planning initiatives (eg., National Environmental Action Plans, National Biodiversity Action Plans, National Conservation Strategies)?
- 2.2 If a policy is in place, how much progress has been made in its implementation, and what are the major difficulties being encountered in doing so?
- 2.3 If a Policy/Strategy/Action Plan is in place is the responsibility for implementing it with:
  - a. a single Government Ministry,
  - b. a committee drawn from several Ministries, or
  - c. a cross-sectoral committee? Please provide details.
- 2.4 For countries with Federal systems of Government, are there Wetland Policies/Strategies/Plans in place, being developed or planned for the provincial/state or regional levels of Government?

### Box 1. The Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia

The *Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia* was launched on the inaugural World Wetlands Day, 2 February 1997. The goal of the policy is to *promote the conservation, repair and wise use of wetlands* as an official acknowledgment that Australia recognises the many values of wetlands, and is prepared to build their conservation and wise use into the daily business of Government. The policy's six major strategies set out a range of actions designed to address the management of Commonwealth wetlands through Commonwealth legislation and programs and to act as a catalyst, stimulating and enabling Australians, including all spheres of Government, to participate in a collective effort towards the wise use of wetlands. The six major strategies address:

- managing wetlands on Commonwealth land and waters
- implementing Commonwealth policies and legislation and delivering Commonwealth programs
- involving the Australian people in wetlands management
- working in partnership with State/Territory and local Governments
- ensuring a sound scientific basis for policy and management, and
- international actions.

The Commonwealth Wetlands Policy represents a significant first step towards development of a national approach to wetlands management.

The Policy was developed in consultation with representatives of Commonwealth agencies with wetland management responsibilities and the National Wetlands Advisory Committee (see response to 4.1). A stakeholder workshop and a public comment period provided the community with an opportunity to input to the development of the Policy. The Policy was approved by Cabinet and launched by the Commonwealth Environment Minister.

Additional national policy instruments with implications for wetlands include:

*National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development* (ESD Strategy),

*National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity* (Biodiversity Strategy)

*Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment*

*Greenhouse 21C Strategy*

*National Weeds Strategy*

*National Forest Policy Statement*

*Towards a Sustainable Future - the ESD Policy for Australia's Development Cooperation Program*

*Council of Australian Governments Water Reform Framework*

*ARMCANZ/ANZECC National Principles for the Provision of Water for Ecosystems*

*Oceans Policy* (under development)

The Commonwealth's Wetlands Policy has been developed with full recognition of the need to harmonise it with existing policy instruments and, as appropriate, to amplify the goals, objectives and strategies of these policies. Working primarily through existing programs and decision making mechanisms, the Wetlands Policy is designed to advance wetland conservation as an integral part of efficient and environmentally responsible delivery of Commonwealth services.

### **Implementation of the Commonwealth Government's Wetlands Policy**

In Australia, primary responsibility for nature conservation, land and water management including legislation, management of wetlands and conservation of associated flora and fauna, is vested with the Australian Federal, State and Territory Governments in their respective areas of jurisdiction. The Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council (ANZECC), comprising relevant New Zealand, Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministers, provides a forum for the discussion and formulation of coordinated policy and programs throughout Australia and New Zealand.

A Wetlands and Migratory Shorebirds Taskforce of ANZECC, comprising officers from each Australian State and Territory ANZECC agency has been established to advise on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Australia. Environment Australia, as the principal adviser to the Australian Federal Government on nature conservation, is the Convenor of the Taskforce and coordinates implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Australia including the forwarding of Australian nominations of wetlands for listing, and the preparation of the Australian National Report.

The majority of initiatives outlined in the Commonwealth Wetlands Policy are already being implemented with funding from the National Wetlands Program under the Natural Heritage Trust initiative. A formal implementation plan for the Policy has been agreed by all Commonwealth Departments with responsibilities for wetland management. The plan identifies specific actions, timeframes, Departmental responsibilities and performance indicators against each of the six strategies of the Policy. The implementation plan was released for comment in October 1998.

#### **Box 2. The Natural Heritage Trust**

During the past triennium the Commonwealth Government has established the Natural Heritage Trust, which is a major capital investment of AUD\$1.25 billion aimed at conserving and managing Australia's biodiversity, land, water, vegetation and sea on an ecologically sustainable basis. In partnership with the community and state agencies, the Commonwealth contributes funding through the Natural Heritage Trust to a number of programs designed to protect and restore the environment. Both the National Wetlands Program and Waterwatch Australia are funded through the Trust.

Conservation of wetlands, wetland biota and habitats is a priority under the National Wetlands Program but is also possible under most other Natural Heritage Trust programs, particularly Murray-Darling 2001, Rivercare, Coasts and Clean Seas and the National Vegetation Initiative (Bushcare). One of the outcomes sought for the Trust, including the National Wetlands Program, is the development of a strategic and holistic approach to environmental and natural resource management issues which are best addressed at a regional scale. As a funding mechanism, the Trust is encouraging integrated outcomes for land, water, native vegetation and biodiversity.

The Commonwealth has specifically allocated more than \$14m to the National Wetlands Program over the first five years of the Natural Heritage Trust (1997/98-2000/01). Areas funded under this Program include Waterwatch, research and development, training, community education, management planning, inventory work, new Ramsar site nominations and onground wetland activities.

A list of projects funded under the National Wetlands Program since 1996 to assist the conservation and wise use of wetlands is at Appendix 1.

The Commonwealth Wetlands Policy is complemented by wetland policies now in place in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, and those being developed by Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania.

**Table 1 Status of State and Territory Wetlands Policies**

State/Territory	
Western Australia	A Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia (Government of Western Australia 1997) was launched on 23 August 1997 by Hon Cheryl Edwardes, MLA (Minister for the Environment) and Hon Kim Hames MLA (Minister for Water Resources). The Policy has 5 principal objectives and a strategy for implementation that includes 62 actions. The State Government agencies with primary responsibility for these actions are identified. A "Wetlands Coordinating Committee" has been established to coordinate implementation of the Policy and a Program of Action is being developed. It is recognised that successful implementation will require a partnership of government, private enterprise, landholders and the community at large.
New South Wales	The Wetlands Management Policy was released in 1996 and is being implemented within the Total Catchment Management Framework, overseen by the State Catchment Management Coordination Committee. The aim of the policy is 'the ecologically sustainable use, management and conservation of wetlands in New South Wales for the benefit of present and future generations'. A subcommittee, the Wetland Action Group, has been formed to prepare and annually review a Wetland Action Plan which will detail priority areas for wetland work including community based projects and Government activities such as wetland research, monitoring, management and planning. The first Wetlands Action Plan (1998/99) was released in June 1998.
Victoria	The Victorian Biodiversity Strategy was released in December 1997. It includes a statement of the Victorian Government's wetlands policy under the section <i>Victoria's Biodiversity. Directions in Management, Part II, Wetlands.</i>
Northern Territory	The Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory commissioned a report into the conservation status of wetlands in the Northern Territory (Storrs, M.J. & Finlayson, M., 1997. <i>Overview of the conservation status of wetlands of the Northern Territory.</i> Supervising Scientist Report 116, Commonwealth of Australia). The draft <i>Strategy for Conservation of the Biological Diversity of Wetlands in the Northern Territory of Australia</i> has been developed from recommendations contained in this report. It will be made available for public comment during 1998/99.
Queensland	The State Government has adopted the <i>Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Queensland's Wetlands</i> . The Strategy sets out a definition, values and functions of wetlands, states objectives for conservation and management, and provides a series of initiatives for implementing each objective. A whole of government approach was taken in the development of the Strategy.
South Australia	The development of a South Australian Wetlands Policy is being funded by the National Wetlands Program under the Natural Heritage Trust. A draft is programmed for release by July 1999.
Tasmania	The development of a Tasmanian Wetlands Policy is being funded by the National Wetlands Program under the Natural Heritage Trust with a draft expected by mid 1999.
Australian Capital Territory	No strategy in place or currently proposed.

**2.5 Has a review of legislation and practices which impact on wetlands been carried out, and if so, has this resulted in any changes which assist with implementation of the Ramsar Convention? Please describe these.**

**Commonwealth**

Towards the end of 1997, the Commonwealth Government commenced a process for reform of Commonwealth environment legislation with a view to replacing a range of different pieces of legislation, which deal with environment protection, with new legislation. This would bring all existing legislation together as well as provide the Commonwealth with the capacity to adequately discharge its international environmental responsibilities in matters of national environmental significance. In addition, a clearer process for environmental impact assessment is intended. It is proposed that the new legislation will include specific provisions on Australia's obligations under the Ramsar Convention, particularly on Ramsar sites. Provisions on migratory species covered by the Bonn Convention and the Japan-Australia and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreements are also envisaged. Bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and the State and Territory Governments are also envisaged in the new legislation and these are likely to cover matters relating to the Ramsar Convention.



A consultation paper on the proposed legislative reforms was released for public comment in early 1998. The Bill has been introduced into the Federal Parliament and is currently under consideration by the Senate Environment, Communication and the Arts Legislation Committee, who will be reporting back to the Senate later this year. The Bill is then expected to be finalised.

### **Western Australia**

An important legislative change in Western Australia has been restructuring of the administration of management of water resources. A result of this has been the establishment, in 1996, of the Water and Rivers Commission with responsibilities that include:

- to investigate, measure and assess the State's water resources;
- to allocate water resources between competing interests and to ensure sustainable use and conservation;
- to protect water quality; and
- to conserve and manage the State's rivers and waterways through maintaining or enhancing their public amenity.

In 1997 the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* was amended to establish a Marine Parks and Reserves Authority. It has a key role in developing policies on conservation and management of marine fauna and flora and marine and estuarine environments, overseeing the development of marine reserve management plans, and monitoring the implementation of management plans and the management of marine conservation reserves by the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management.

### **2.6 Describe the efforts made in your country to have wetlands considered in integrated land/water and coastal zone planning and management processes at the following levels: a. national, b. provincial , c. local**

All States and Territories are pursuing an integrated catchment approach to the management of natural resources, with New South Wales (1989), Victoria (1994) and South Australia (1995) each enacting catchment management legislation to ensure the appropriate level of consideration is given to catchment management. There are a range of other mechanisms in each State/Territory which also assist in the integration of land, water and coastal conservation issues in the planning process.

A number of Natural Heritage Trust (See Box 2) projects will also assist in the development of an integrated approach to wetlands management.

**Table 2 State/Territory efforts to address the integration of wetlands into planning and management processes.**

State/Territory	
Australian Capital Territory	The <i>Nature Conservation Act 1980</i> provides the main statutory basis for conservation in the Territory although it makes no specific reference to wetlands
New South Wales	<p>The <i>Wetlands Management Policy</i> is implemented within the Total Catchment Management Framework, overseen by the State Catchment Management Coordination Committee. This framework is outlined in the <i>Catchment Management Act 1989</i>. Catchment Management Committees provide a key mechanism for planning with Regional or Local Committees, developing specific management goals for their wetlands, based on the State strategy.</p> <p>Other initiatives include a major water reform program to ensure the long term sustainability of the state's waterways. For the first time major water decisions are made by CEOs of six agencies, environment Protection Authority, Department of Land and Water Conservation, National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Fisheries, Department of agriculture and Department of Urban Affairs and planning. This has resulted in considerable more ecological emphasis on policy and management of water which benefits wetlands. The reform program includes the development of environmental objectives for all waterways and the establishment of a Healthy Rivers Commission to conduct independent public inquiries in designated catchments. A further process, involving extensive community consultation and the formation of locally based River Management Committees, has been established to develop and implement river management plans. These plans will address water quality and the management of river flows to ensure that environmental objectives are met. A policy on groundwater protection for dependent ecosystems is being prepared and will address the needs of groundwater dependent wetlands.</p> <p>The NSW Government also released its Coastal Policy in 1997. This included an extensive process of review and community consultation and is based on the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Specific planning mechanisms include State Environmental Planning Policy 14 - Coastal Wetlands, which provides for thorough environmental assessment of designated developments which may impact on identified coastal wetlands, as well as for restoration orders to ensure the rehabilitation of these wetlands where appropriate.</p> <p>A State Environmental Planning Policy for Land and Water Management Plans is currently in preparation. This will define the environmental assessment procedures for works proposed under government agreed Natural Resource Management Contracts, including Land and Water Management Plans. Guidelines to ensure the integration of biodiversity, natural and Aboriginal cultural heritage values into Land and Water Management Plans for irrigated areas are also being developed.</p>
Northern Territory	<p>The Northern Territory Government's draft <i>Strategy for Conservation of the Biological Diversity of Wetlands</i> has amongst its objectives to integrate wetland management into regional land and resource management strategies and practice.</p> <p>The <i>Northern Territory Parks Masterplan</i> lists wetlands amongst its "essential habitats", and sets out a vision for the protection of their natural values and biodiversity.</p> <p>The <i>Mary River Integrated Catchment Management Plan</i> addresses a number of strategic issues in the catchment including saltwater intrusion, aquatic habitat, weeds, fire, grazing, pastures, nature conservation, clearing, water quality, erosion, the visitor experience and feral pests. This plan will be underpinned by the development of <i>Land Use Objectives</i> which will be undertaken in consultation with the community under the <i>Planning Act</i> and will enshrine the primary framework for land management in the catchment. As foreshadowed in the <i>Mary River Integrated Catchment Management Plan</i>, a Catchment Advisory Committee will be established under the <i>Water Act</i> whose role will be to advise Government on any matters relating to water resource management, including any broader catchment management issues.</p>

Queensland	<p>The Queensland Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resource Management Strategy includes as essential and highly desirable strategies, encouraging and promoting coordinated development and implementation of community and government-endorsed floodplain and natural wetland management plans, and development of effective techniques and "best-practice" guidelines for conservation, rehabilitation and management of in-stream and riparian habitats, wetlands and floodplains. Other catchment management plans are either investigating, or contain, similar provisions. The draft Queensland wetlands strategy encourages such provisions, both at the catchment and individual property level.</p> <p>Water Allocation and Management Plans (WAMP), and Water Management Plans (WMP), developed under the <i>Water Resources Act 1989</i>, for key catchments in Queensland integrate the environmental requirements for in-stream and riverine wetlands with broad water resource planning and allocation. The Healthy Waterways initiative, launched in May 1998, aims to integrate whole catchment planning and rehabilitation of the rivers, to protect the Moreton Bay wetlands downstream.</p> <p>Under the <i>Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995</i> a State Coastal Management Plan and Regional Coastal Management Plans (subordinate legislation) are being prepared. These allow for coastal tidal, brackish and contiguous freshwater wetlands to be included in "control districts" which will have negotiated protection and management regimes. A specific policy within the State Plan is devoted to wetlands.</p>
South Australia	<p>The <i>Catchment Management Act 1995</i> and <i>Water Resources Act 1997</i> require integrated management for key water catchments across South Australia. At present, catchment water management boards have been established in the Torrens, Onkaparinga, Sturt, Northern Adelaide/ Barossa, River Murray and South East catchments with the aim of integrating surface water and groundwater management with other land management activities within the respective catchments. Wetland management is being integrated more broadly into land use planning in SA (regionally and locally) through the incorporation and recognition of their priority environmental values in revegetation and biodiversity strategies and in local government supplementary development plans eg. wetlands are the top priority environmental ecosystem in the recently released <i>Upper South East Regional Revegetation Strategy</i> and will be in the forthcoming <i>Upper South East Biodiversity Strategy</i>. Wetland Care Australia is working with Local Action Planning Committees on the River Murray through funding provided by the NHT. Seven wetland management plans are being prepared for Paringa Paddock, Gurra Gurra wetlands complex, Wachtels Lagoon, Reedy Creek, Blanchetown East wetlands complex, Morgans lagoons, Scotts Creek and Brenda Park wetlands complex.</p>
Tasmania	<p>Tasmania is currently preparing a draft State Policy on Integrated Catchment Management and has in place a State Coastal Policy. Both these give consideration to wetlands.</p> <p>A draft Model Planning Scheme is also in preparation that will set a standard format and content for municipal planning schemes. This scheme will include a Wetlands and Waterways schedule to guide Local Government authorities when dealing with wetland issues within their municipalities.</p> <p>Other relevant actions are the State of the Environment report that monitors ecological condition and extent of waterways and the planned new Water Act that will determine and allocate environmental flows.</p>

Victoria	<p>The <i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i> provides an integrated catchment management framework, facilitating the wise use of wetlands in a whole of catchment framework. As required by the Act, regional catchment strategies were prepared for the ten regional catchments in Victoria in 1996 by Catchment and Land Protection Boards.</p> <p>The <i>Water Act 1989</i> sets down a legislative framework for the allocation of environmental flows in rivers in Victoria. The legislation formally takes account of environmental requirements through mechanisms such as the granting of bulk entitlements for environmental purposes and ensuring that new developments in water management take account of environmental needs. The process of allocating environmental flows in Victorian rivers where diversions exist is about 75% complete.</p> <p>The <i>Victorian Coastal Strategy</i> was released in 1997. The strategy sets out principles and strategies for sustaining marine environments, protecting significant natural and cultural features, including wetlands, providing direction for the future use of the coast and identifying suitable development areas and opportunities.</p> <p>The Victoria Planning Provisions were introduced as part of a planning reform process in 1996 to simplify and standardise the planning process. The State Planning Policy Framework makes reference to the Ramsar Convention. The planning provisions provide for standard zones and overlays in local planning schemes, including an 'environmental significance overlay'. These instruments provide a mechanism for local government to make planning provisions for the protection of wetlands on private land and are recognised as an important planning tool for Ramsar sites with private land such as Corner Inlet and Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar site.</p> <p>The <i>Heritage Rivers Act 1992</i> provides for the protection and management of nominated heritage rivers in line with approved recommendations of the Victorian Land Conservation Council. There are eighteen heritage rivers in Victoria. The Lake Albacutya Ramsar site is included in the Wimmera Heritage River. In 1997, draft management plans were published for each of the heritage rivers. The plans will be finalised in 1998.</p> <p>The <i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988</i> provides a legislative framework for the conservation of biodiversity in Victoria. It provides for the listing of threatened species and communities and the preparation of action statements for these species and communities. It also allows for the listing of potentially threatening processes. Several wetland species and communities and threatening processes relating to wetland habitats are listed under the <i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act</i>. Action statements have been prepared and are being implemented for 15 threatened species and one threatening process occurring in wetlands. Action statements are currently being prepared for two additional threatened wetland species.</p> <p>A Coastal Action Plan is being prepared for the Gippsland Lakes which will review the existing Gippsland Lakes Strategy (1990) addressing issues such as water quality integrated catchment management. A Coastal Action Plan is planned for Western Port which will review the existing Western Port Bay Strategy (1992).</p> <p>The State Environment Protection Policy (SEPP): Waters of Victoria provides the basis for protecting water quality in all surface waters in Victoria. Schedules to the SEPP provide additional direction for specific areas. A review of the SEPP: Waters of Victoria is planned for 1998/99.</p>
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Western Australia	<p>Government agencies have developed a number of policy initiatives aimed at increasing the consideration given to wetlands in planning and management processes. These policy tools have been supported by inter-agency and community consultation processes. Examples of these are:</p> <p><i>Water and Rivers Commission</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines (Whelans et al. 1993)</li> <li>• Waterways Management Authorities (eg. Swan River, Peel Inlet, Leschenault Inlet)</li> <li>• Water Allocation and Water Use Plans</li> </ul> <p><i>Department of Environmental Protection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Protection Policies addressing wetland needs (Swan Coastal Plain Lakes, Peel Inlet-Harvey Estuary, Swan and Canning Rivers, South West Agricultural Zone Wetlands)</li> <li>• Policies are at present being developed for protection of Western Swamp Tortoise habitat, State marine waters and State groundwater</li> <li>• "Guidelines for Environmental Planning" which assist local and State government planning agencies to understand the environmental approval process, wherein wetlands are identified as one of the key points of environmental interest</li> </ul> <p><i>Ministry for Planning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Local Government planning schemes (with benefits for wetlands) that require referrals to the Environmental Protection Authority</li> <li>• A foreshore development policy is being developed</li> <li>• Perth's Bushplan (with benefits for wetlands) - integrated planning being coordinated by the Ministry for Planning with the involvement of the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Department of Environmental Protection and the Water and Rivers Commission</li> <li>• Livable Neighbourhood - (Draft) Urban Design Code - a statutory planning policy to guide development (with benefits for wetlands)</li> </ul> <p>A number of assessments have been and are being conducted to identify and quantify wetland resources. These provide data for input to integrated planning and management of wetlands. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perth Wetlands Resource Book - (Arnold 1990)</li> <li>• A Representative Marine Reserve System for Western Australia (Marine Parks and Reserves Selection Working Group 1994)</li> <li>• Important Wetlands of Western Australia (Lane et al. 1996)</li> <li>• Wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain Volume 2A Wetland Mapping, Classification and Evaluation (Hill et al. 1996)</li> <li>• A Systematic Overview of Environmental Values of the Wetlands, Rivers and Estuaries of the Busselton-Walpole Region (Pen 1997)</li> <li>• Biodiversity (including wetlands) survey of the South West Wheatbelt Region under the Salinity Action Plan (Department of Conservation and Land Management current)</li> </ul>
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**2.7 Have there been any publications produced, or practices documented, which could assist other countries to promote and improve the application of the Ramsar Wise Use of Wetlands Guidelines? If Yes, please provide details and copies.**

**Commonwealth**

The key Commonwealth publication has been the release of *The Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia* (see Box 1) .

The Commonwealth published the proceedings from the workshop *Wetlands in a Dry Land: Understanding for Management* (1998). This workshop, funded by the National Wetlands Research and Development Program, was aimed at promoting dialogue between the public and private sector wetlands managers and wetland researchers to translate wetland research into better on-ground management of wetlands.

The Commonwealth has also produced a range of leaflets, posters and brochures to promote awareness of Australian wetlands. Environment Australia and Wetlands International - Oceania worked collaboratively on the

development and distribution of a poster depicting shorebird migration in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The poster was printed in 4 languages, including English, and was widely distributed within the Flyway.

A quarterly publication *Wetlands Australia*, provides articles on wetland issues and examples of best practice in wetlands management across Australia, Oceania and Asia Pacific regions and is distributed nationally to a wide range of state and community organisations with an interest in wetlands. *Wetlands Australia* is a joint production between Environment Australia and the Murray Darling Basin Commission. Waterwatch Australia is producing a *Waterwatch Australia Technical Manual*, a national guide to community waterway monitoring. This publication will provide communities with a valuable tool to build up a picture of the health of the wetlands and waterways within their local catchments. A successful publication that the Commonwealth has produced, in the context of wise use, is the *Wetlands Health Check*, a simple rating test for your local wetland or waterway. The *Wetlands Health Check* was primarily designed for upper primary and lower secondary students but is being used increasingly by the broader community.

Many of these publications will be available on the Wetlands web site, the Commonwealth's Internet site for all Ramsar and other wetlands information of national significance. The purpose of the website is to provide relevant information and support to everyone involved in wetlands management in Australia.

A number of specific studies on wetlands, conservation issues and flora and fauna have been done by the states and territories (see list of relevant publications at Appendix 2).

**2.8 Noting COP6 Recommendation 6.14 relating to toxic chemicals and pollution, please advise of the actions taken since then "to remedy and to prevent pollution impacts affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands" (Operative paragraph 9).**

The responsibility for remedying and preventing pollution problems at individual Ramsar sites generally lies with the relevant State or Territory. There are three main Commonwealth funded programs which support the maintenance of high quality water flows. These are the National Rivercare Program, the National River Health Program and the Coasts and Cleans Seas Program. Waterwatch Australia, funded by the Commonwealth, also provides for the monitoring of local waterways by community groups (see Box 3).

The National Rivercare Program aims to ensure progress towards the sustainable management, rehabilitation and conservation of rivers outside the Murray-Darling Basin and to improve the health of these rivers. In 1997/98, the first full year of funding for the Program, there was a strong response from the community with a range of quality projects proposed. The Commonwealth provided \$6.3 million for projects, including on-ground actions by community groups to improve water quality in local rivers and projects focussing on improving stormwater management as part of the water cycle.

The National River Health Program is central to the Commonwealth's efforts to progress implementation of the environmental aspects of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Water Reform framework. Totalling \$413.6 million to the year 2000-01, the program will allocate a significant portion towards environmental flow management. The goals of the National River Health Program for the monitoring and assessment of Australian rivers also apply to wetlands. A project funded under the research and development component of the National Wetlands Program seeks to determine the usefulness of applying methods recently developed as part of the Monitoring River Health Initiative to the monitoring and assessment of Australian wetlands. This project is due to finish in January 1999.

**Box 3: Waterwatch Australia**

Waterwatch Australia is the national program which coordinates and supports the monitoring of our waterways by the community to facilitate action to address water quality issues. Waterwatch equips local communities with the skills and knowledge to take an active role in managing their land and water. Waterwatch Australia provides funding through the Natural Heritage Trust (see Box 2) for community groups, state governments and other organisations to support community monitoring programs. There is a Waterwatch Facilitator in every State and Territory who coordinates Waterwatch activities and provides training and resources to support activities which identify and monitor the particular traits of their local waterways and to build up a picture of the health of the catchment. A network of regional coordinators assist groups to interpret their results and plan to take action to remediate damage. Waterwatch has proved that committed, well trained communities can dramatically improve the health of their waterways.

Waterwatch Australia plays a role in the monitoring of chemicals and pollution in local waterways and wetlands. Information collected through Waterwatch monitoring can lead to action that will prevent pollution impacts. In particular, Waterwatch monitoring is valuable as an early warning of potential pollution impacts on Ramsar sites. There are 4000 Waterwatch sites across Australia being regularly monitored for chemicals and pollutants. Nearly one third of Australia's Ramsar sites and/or their catchments are monitored by over 200 Waterwatch groups at approximately 600 sites. Approximately 120 Waterwatch sites within Ramsar site boundaries are monitored by over 50 Waterwatch groups. Over 150 Waterwatch groups monitor within Ramsar catchments.

**Table 3 State/Territory actions taken to remedy and to prevent pollution impacts affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands.**

State/Territory	
Australian Capital Territory	The <i>Nature Conservation Act 1980</i> is the primary legislative instrument for the protection of biological diversity and the management of reserved areas in the Australian Capital Territory. The <i>A.C.T. Nature Conservation Strategy</i> seeks to manage urban and industrial pollution so that biodiversity values of freshwater aquatic systems remain within natural limits. Key actions under the Strategy include: monitoring sources of pollution and effectiveness of water treatment; and ensuring pollution management and water treatment programs are undertaken to ensure biodiversity values are maintained.
New South Wales	The current water reforms program includes the establishment of water quality objectives for the state's waterways and the development of river management plans to achieve those objectives. A groundwater quality policy has also been prepared. The NSW government released a Waterways Package in 1997 which includes a commitment to require local councils to produce urban stormwater management plans. A guide to the preparation of these plans was also released ( <i>Managing Urban Stormwater: Council Handbook. NSW Environment Protection Authority 1997</i> ) Recent amendments to the Environment Operations Act have increased the power of the Environment Protection Authority to regulate pollution discharges into waterways.
Northern Territory	The <i>Mary River Integrated Catchment Management Plan</i> has been formulated and will be implemented by a local community-based group with Government support. In the Arafura Swamp, on Croker Island, and in the catchments of the Daly, Finniss, Liverpool/Tompkinson, Fitzmaurice and Moyle Rivers, indigenous peoples will be the primary determinants of management prescriptions, also with Government support.  The Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist has also commenced documentation of a demonstration stream monitoring program for possible adoption by private enterprises and government regulatory agencies. This will include documentation of all planning and implementation procedures.
Queensland	The Moreton Bay Ramsar site is the Queensland site at most actual or potential risk from pollution. Recently studies have been published detailing the condition of, and issues affecting, the Bay. A Waterways Management Plan for the waterways emptying into Moreton Bay was launched as part of the "Healthy Waterways" initiative in June 1998. At the same time, the State and local governments committed to, among other initiatives, \$300 million over the next 20 years for sewerage treatment works upgrades, \$100 million for stormwater treatment and management, and up to \$1 billion for wastewater reuse projects, in an effort to improve water quality in the waterways and western areas of Moreton Bay. Coral extraction has ceased.  Watching briefs are being maintained on Queensland's other three sites, and management planning is progressing, which will take pollution and other issues into account. Point source pollution and discharge is regulated under the <i>Environmental Protection Act 1994</i> and water quality is regulated through subordinate legislation ( <i>Environmental Protection (Water) Policy 1997</i> ).
South Australia	The <i>Environmental Protection Act 1993</i> is the key legislative instrument for ensuring the wetland resources of the State are not effected by pollution. Further, the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 provide management frameworks to regulate and control polluting activities that impinge upon biological and water resources.  In regard to South Australian Ramsar sites, issues of water quality and environmental flows are dealt within site management plans. At Coongie, these issues are partially being dealt with through the Draft Water Management Plan for Cooper Creek. In the Coorong, the draft Coorong and Lower Lakes Ramsar Management Plan proposes strategies to mitigate and utilise flows from the River Murray and through drainage works arising from the Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Plan.



Tasmania	<p>The Commonwealth is providing \$3.5m in 1998/99 for the Tasmanian Regional Environment Remediation Programme which focuses on improving water quality and amenity in key rivers within Tasmania by reducing and removing sources of pollution. Funding has been provided for capital works at Orielton Lagoon, a Ramsar site in Tasmania, for remediation works to improve flushing and to divert sewage away from the site.</p> <p>The State Policy on Water Quality Management came into force in 1997. It will set pollution limits in relation to the environmental values of water bodies.</p>
Victoria	<p>The State Environment Protection Policy: Waters of Victoria sets environmental objectives that aim to prevent toxicity in wetlands. The process of issuing discharge licences by the Environmental Protection Authority ensures compliance with the policy.</p>
Western Australia	<p>Potential contamination of inland and marine waters is recognised as an important environmental issue in Western Australia. Using the OECD "pressure-state-response" model, objectives and indicators have recently been established for reporting on contamination (State of the Environment Reference Group 1998).</p> <p>Discharge of waste by large industrial plants is regulated by the Department of Environmental Protection under a licence system backed by punitive action for breaches of the requirements. Problems have been recognised with the historical contamination of groundwater from chemical plants and tailings ponds.</p> <p>Liquid waste discharge is permitted only into sewerage systems (meeting water quality standards) or at Industrial and Biological Waste Treatment sites. An additional "Best Practice Environmental Licence" system is being considered that provides an incentive to industry to adopt environmental responsibility and improve environmental performance. A number of special licensing systems and "codes of practice" have recently been put in place to regulate waste products from small industries and businesses.</p>

## 2.9 Describe what steps have been taken to incorporate wetland economic valuation techniques into natural resource planning and assessment actions.

The Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia (see Box 1) includes a strategy to document and promote a range of economic, voluntary, educational and other measures to encourage wetland conservation by the private sector. In addition, it aims to document the economic importance of the Australian commercial and recreational fishing industries and their reliance on wetland habitats and establish a range of measures for the protection, rehabilitation and restoration of these areas.

The implementation of this part of the Policy is primarily through projects funded under the National Wetlands R&D Program. Private (commercial) values are often in conflict with social (recreation, conservation etc) values and as a consequence, the area and quality of wetland on private property in Australia is in decline. A project currently being funded is examining the trade-offs apparent between private and social values of wetlands. This project is due for completion in June 2000. A case study of this project involves research into the economic value of wetlands in agricultural landscapes in the South East of South Australia.

In 1997, Environment Australia and the NSW Dept of Land and Water Conservation jointly funded a project titled 'Multi-criteria Analysis: A research case study of the Macquarie Marshes'. The project examined the usefulness of multi-criteria analysis in assessing wetland problems where both environmental and economic objectives were concerned.

The NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation also supported, in conjunction with the NSW Farmers Association and affiliated organisations, the preparation of a report titled *A Valuation of Private and Public Coastal Wetland Property Rights* which considered the community's willingness to pay for property rights, the impacts on landholders, foregone capital and government enforcement costs and valuations associated with coastal wetland conservation.

## 2.10 Is Environmental Impact Assessment for actions potentially impacting on wetlands required under legislation in your country?

## Commonwealth

There is no Commonwealth legislation requiring environmental impact assessments to be carried out for actions specifically affecting Ramsar sites although new environment legislation addressing this is proposed (see response to 2.5). However, the Commonwealth retains constitutional power to protect sites on the Ramsar list by, where necessary, enacting protective legislation to ensure Australia does not breach its obligations under the Convention. In addition the object of the Commonwealth *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974* is to ensure to the greatest extent practicable, that matters affecting the environment, including wetlands, to a significant extent are fully examined and taken into account in Commonwealth decision making.

The *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975* is also relevant for any wetland sites listed in the Register of the National Estate. The Act requires the Commonwealth to ensure that any actions it undertakes do not adversely affect places in the Register unless there are no feasible and prudent alternatives.

The *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992* provides the legislative basis for Commonwealth responsibilities with regard to the conservation of endangered species and communities and the amelioration of the processes that threaten them. In addition, the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975* can provide a basis for making regulations to give effect to an Agreement specified in the Schedule, which includes the Ramsar Convention (Also refer response under 2.5).

The individual States and territories are responsible for enacting legislation relating to wetlands within their jurisdiction. However, this does not diminish the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government to ensure Ramsar Convention obligations are upheld. All States and Territories have nature conservation legislation which affords protection generally to some wetland dependant species of flora and fauna.

**Table 4 Key mechanisms relating to Environmental Impact Assessment**

Australian Capital Territory	<p>The A.C.T. has two categories of land: National Land (Commonwealth owned and managed) and Territory Land (managed by the A.C.T. Government).</p> <p>Proposals with potential to impact on National Land or Designated Areas must be referred to the National Capital Authority (NCA) for a process of works approval. If the proposal is likely to have a significant impact, the NCA has a responsibility to refer the proposal to Environment Australia under the <i>Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974</i> (see 'Commonwealth' above).</p> <p>On Territory Land any proposal that calls for: a variation to the Territory Plan (ie change in land use); the granting or variation of a lease over Territory Land; a controlled activity (such as an encroachment on public land; or any design and siting proposal) is subject under the A.C.T. <i>Land Act</i> to consideration by the Planning Minister. If a proposal is approved, controls can be placed on the development (eg lease and development conditions, or design and siting requirements).</p>
New South Wales	<p>The preparation of an environmental impact statement is mandatory for designated development and activities that are likely to significantly affect the environment are required under the <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>. Other relevant mechanisms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Environmental Planning Policy No.14 Coastal Wetlands, which provides for thorough environmental assessment of designated developments which may impact on identified coastal wetlands, as well as for restoration orders to ensure the rehabilitation of these wetlands where appropriate.</li> <li>• <i>Threatened Species Conservation Act</i>, which includes in its aims to ensure that the impact of any action affecting threatened species, populations and ecological communities is properly assessed.</li> <li>• <i>Native Vegetation Conservation Act</i>, which aims to provide for the conservation and protection of native vegetation, including wetland vegetation, on a regional basis.</li> </ul>
Queensland	<p>Environmental impact assessment is required for developments potentially impacting on wetlands, under the <i>Integrated Planning Act 1997</i>, but the definition of wetlands was interpreted narrowly under previous legislation. Guidelines and principles are currently being developed for this new legislation (which came into force in April 1998).</p>

South Australia	The preparation of environmental impact statements is required pursuant to the <i>Development Act 1993</i> for all major developments including those which impact upon wetland environments. Other legislation requires proponents to ensure that environmental impacts can be managed but the detail required in the assessment process is dependent upon the significance of the potential environmental impact. Other relevant mechanisms are the <i>Native Vegetation Act 1991</i> , <i>Soil Conservation and Land Care Act 1989</i> , <i>Water Resources Act 1997</i> and the <i>Environmental Protection Act 1993</i> .
Tasmania	<p>There are three pieces of legislation relating to impact assessment in Tasmania. Which Act applies depends largely on the type of proposal and the potential for 'environmental harm'.</p> <p>The <i>Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993</i> refers to activities which may cause environmental harm and which require a permit. Proposals are assessed by local municipal councils.</p> <p>The <i>Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994</i> differentiates between 'serious' and 'material' environmental harm and is focussed on polluting activities. Proposals are assessed by a Board which conducts an environmental assessment while the Council assesses planning issues. The Board can direct Councils to refuse or grant a permit (with or without conditions).</p> <p>Activities which are of State significance are addressed under the <i>State Policies and Projects Act 1993</i>. Projects are assessed under a special form of integrated assessment taking the place of all other government approvals processes.</p>
Victoria	<p>Victoria has a process for environmental impact assessment which operates at three levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planning provisions and approvals under the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i></li> <li>• Environmental Protection Authority works approvals under the <i>Environment Protection Act 1970</i></li> <li>• Environmental effects statements for certain proposed works under the <i>Environmental Effects Act 1978</i></li> </ul>
Western Australia	Development proposals in Western Australia require environmental impact assessment to ensure that environmental impacts can be managed. The detail required in the assessment process is dependent on the significance of the potential environmental impacts. In reviewing a proposal the assessment specifically examines if there will be any adverse impact on the integrity, function and environmental values of wetlands. Public involvement is considered to be fundamental to the assessment process. Guidelines to the assessment process are available for developers and the community. A position paper on "wetland protection" is being drafted.

## 2.11 Is wetland restoration and rehabilitation considered a priority in your country?

**If Yes, describe the actions that have been taken to identify wetlands in need of these actions and to mobilise resources for restoration or rehabilitation.**

The Commonwealth Wetlands Policy (see Box 1) seeks to have all Commonwealth wetland areas, where rehabilitation will be ecologically advantageous and feasible, identified and to have such works factored into management plans for these areas. One project which will assist this commitment is the *Register of Wetland Restoration Projects in Australia and New Zealand*. The review of wetland restoration efforts has been undertaken as part of an international register of restoration projects and expertise being organised by Wetlands International's Specialist Group on Wetland Restoration. The second stage report for the Register is in preparation and due for completion in late 1998.

### Northern Territory

The Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (eriss) undertook a vulnerability assessment of wetlands in the Alligator Rivers region to climate change and sea level rise. This includes Kakadu National Park and adjacent important floodplain wetlands. The results are presented in the report *Vulnerability assessment of predicted climate change and sea level rise in the Alligator Rivers Region, Northern Territory, Australia* (Bayliss *et al.* 1998). The report identified areas at risk from such global change events and recommended superior

monitoring and data management approaches. As a consequence, eriss received funding for one year to establish a coastal monitoring node and to involve stakeholders from the region.

## **Western Australia**

### **Box 4 Salinity Action Plan for Western Australia**

Increasing salinity in the south-west of Western Australia is considered to be one of the State's most critical environmental problems. The problem has been caused by the replacement of most of the native vegetation with agricultural crops and pastures. In 1996 the Western Australian Government completed a Salinity Action Plan (Agriculture Western Australia et al. 1996). One of the four aims of this plan is to "protect and restore key water resources and high value wetlands.

As part of the Salinity Action Plan a Wetlands and Natural Diversity Recovery Program is being established that will target a minimum of six key catchments over the next ten years to ensure that "critical and regionally significant natural areas, particularly wetlands are protected". Key activities being undertaken by the Department of Conservation and Land Management as part of the program are: implementation of a recovery plan for Lake Toolibin Ramsar site, and preparation and implementation of recovery plans for Lake Muir-Unicup and the Lake Warden Ramsar site.

Wetland creation and restoration are recognised in the principal objectives of the Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia (Government of Western Australia 1997).

Wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain that would benefit from rehabilitation have been identified as part of an assessment of management options (Hill et al. 1993). This has encouraged developers to integrate wetland restoration into development proposals. A comprehensive guide to wetland rehabilitation has been produced by a community group with funding from a major mining company (Godfrey et al. 1992).

The creation of wetlands has been integrated into the rehabilitation of clay extraction pits and sand mines in the south-west of Western Australia. Leading examples are; the RGC wetlands project at Capel involving the sand mining company and Birds Australia, and the rehabilitation of Alcoa's clay extraction pits at Baldivis.

The Commonwealth is also supporting a number of community based wetland rehabilitation projects through the National Wetlands Program's community grants component (see Appendix 1).

## **New South Wales**

Rehabilitation of degraded wetlands, their habitats and processes is one of the key principles of the NSW Wetlands Management Policy. With funding from the National Wetlands Program and the Department of Land and Water Conservation, NSW Fisheries, other state agencies and community groups have prepared a Review of Wetland Rehabilitation Issues in NSW. The review included considerable community and scientific input and has developed recommendations on issues such as funding, communication, site prioritisation and other project management needs.

Major wetland rehabilitation efforts are underway at the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project, Yarrahapinni Wetland Rehabilitation Project, Tuckean Swamp project, Clarence Floodplain Project and Hexham Swamp Rehabilitation Project. Most of these areas affected by past flood mitigation activities were significant estuarine fish habitats.

The Water Reform program in NSW represents a major policy change focussed on rehabilitation of rivers and their dependent ecosystems. It aims to rehabilitate wetlands dependent on flows as well as protecting remaining wetlands by ensuring their flows remain.

## **South Australia**

Significant wetland rehabilitation has occurred, often through simple modification of existing structures or installation of new structures, at the following wetlands: Loveday wetland Complex, Pilby Creek, Akuna Station, Banrock Station, Tolderol Wetland Reserve and Lake Merreti.

### **2.12 Describe what actions have been taken to "encourage active and informed participation of local communities, including indigenous people, and in particular women, in the conservation and wise use of wetlands." (refer to Actions 2.7.1-4 in the Strategic Plan).**

*The Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia* (see Box 1) includes a number of specific actions which support this process, including encouraging the adoption of management practices that use and demonstrate the traditional wetlands management knowledge of indigenous Australians and encouraging rural and urban Australians to be involved in wetlands activities.

The National Wetlands Program provides funding for a range of projects which are specifically intended to empower indigenous people to actively participate in management and conservation of wetlands. For example, the *Top End Indigenous People's Wetlands Program*, which commenced in 1996, aims to consult with traditional aboriginal custodians to assist communities to prepare wetlands management plans. In addition, the Program is supporting other projects in the Northern Territory which focus on facilitating community consultations on wetland planning.

The Waterwatch program (see Box 3) also provides funding for community groups, state governments and other organisations to become actively involved in the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Through waterway monitoring, Waterwatch groups develop knowledge and skills that enable them to make an effective contribution to the management of wetlands.

**Table 5 Involvement of community groups in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.**

State/Territory	
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New South Wales	<p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service have prepared a draft <i>Strategy for the Nomination of Ramsar sites on Private Land in NSW</i>. The document outlines four strategies for promoting the listing of Ramsar sites on private land in NSW and lists actions for each of these strategies. Management options are identified and a sample of questions and answers on the Ramsar Convention and implications of Ramsar listing for landholders is included.</p> <p>The State Wetlands Action Group (SWAG) includes participation of local communities through Catchment Management Committee representatives. SWAG also administers a Wetlands Action Fund which provides funding for local communities to implement wetlands conservation and rehabilitation projects which are in accordance with the NSW Wetlands Management Policy and SWAG guidelines.</p> <p>The NSW water reform program has included extensive community consultation and participation in the development of interim environmental objectives for water quality and environmental flows provision. Part of the consultation program was developed with, and targeted, indigenous communities. All River Management Committees established under the water reform program aim to have participants from local communities including indigenous communities.</p> <p>Management plans for national parks, nature reserves, Ramsar sites and river valleys all have a public consultation component.</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service is preparing a CD rom wetland database for rivers and wetlands which will include a bibliography of information for management of wetlands and rivers. This will assist local communities including Catchment and River Management Committees, as well as students, agencies and landholders to access information relevant to management. The first catchment to be developed is the Macquarie, which includes the Macquarie Marshes Ramsar site. As funding allows, the database will be developed for other catchments throughout the State.</p> <p>A scientific workshop, organised by the Paroo River Association and the National Parks and Wildlife Service was held in July 1997 at Hungerford (on the QLD/NSW border). The Association is comprised largely of local landholders who convened the workshop as a way of bringing together the expertise of scientists and landholders and acknowledge the significance of the wetlands of the Paroo. The proceedings will be published as a book and deal with ecological, social and economic issues as water resource development is considered for this highly significant river system.</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service, in co-operation with the World Wide Fund for Nature Australia, liaising with landholders in the Gwydir region to develop a Memorandum of Understanding for the management of the wetlands.</p>
Northern Territory	<p>The <i>Mary River Integrated Catchment Management Plan</i> has been formulated and will be implemented by a local community-based group with Government support. Support is provided to the Lower Mary River Landcare Group as requested.</p> <p>The Northern Land Council (NLC) and other agencies are actively assisting local aboriginal communities to develop management prescriptions for their wetlands and have provided training at the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (eriss). NLC and eriss have also drafted an information document for wetland management planning for one Aboriginal association.</p> <p>NLC and eriss also assisted the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation to prepare a paper for the IUCN/Ramsar project on developing guidelines for involving local communities in wetland management. The paper was presented at a meeting in Japan organised by the Kushiro International Wetland Centre.</p> <p>For the past two years the Northern Territory University and eriss have held a two week wetland management training module as part of a MSc course. This course includes general wetland ecology and management issues, and involves ten to fifteen students at a time.</p>

Queensland	Local communities have been actively involved in the management planning process for Ramsar sites where such plans are being developed. Local communities have been consulted regarding the proposal to list the Great Sandy Strait as a Ramsar site. Community involvement is also facilitated through Catchment Coordinating Committees (Integrated Catchment Management), Waterwatch and in public consultation and Community Advisory Committees in the development of Water Management Plans.
South Australia	Local communities have been empowered to contribute to wetland management through Landcare initiatives and the local action planning process. These processes have universally recognised the value of wetlands and made financial resources available to actively manage and rehabilitate wetlands. The South Australian Government has a policy to encourage joint management of reserves with indigenous communities. As part of the Ramsar management planning processes at Coongie Lakes and the Coorong local indigenous communities have been consulted, briefed and included in formulating plans for management. Final release of these plans will confirm the government's commitment to the joint management policy.
Victoria	<p>A current management planning process for all ten Ramsar sites in Victoria includes opportunities for public consultation and comment on draft plans. Management plans prepared for other wetlands in the conservation reserve network and for wetland forests covered by the forest management planning process similarly provide opportunities for public consultation and comment.</p> <p>Public involvement in wetlands management is also facilitated through membership on Catchment Management Authorities, Coastal Boards and public consultation in the preparation of strategies, business and action plans. Various stakeholder groups such as the Victorian Wetlands Trust, Birds Australia, the Victorian Field and Game Association and friends groups for local wetlands continue to take an active interest in wetland conservation and management.</p>
Western Australia	<p>The largest-scale involvement of local communities has been in the "landcare" movement in agricultural regions of the south-west of Western Australia. This has involved the self empowerment of land owners and community members to address land and water conservation issues in their local catchments. The key concern has been the rise of saline ground water resulting in declining agricultural productivity, damage to infrastructure and death of lowland, including wetland, vegetation.</p> <p>Four of the nine Ramsar listed wetlands in Western Australia have management advisory committees and each of these has local community representatives.</p> <p>The State's Wetlands Coordinating Committee has two members from non-government, community-based organisations.</p> <p>The major estuarine waterways in the south-west have formal management authorities which include local community representatives.</p> <p>The largest community based wetland monitoring project is Ribbons of Blue, the Western Australian Waterwatch Program. The program involves 106 groups monitoring 267 wetlands (many of which are rivers or streams). It is supported by 11 part time coordinators. Other community based monitoring projects focus on frogs and waterbirds.</p>

**2.13 Describe what actions have been taken to "encourage involvement of the private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands" (refer to Actions 2.8.1-4 in the Strategic Plan). Has this included a review of fiscal measures (taxation arrangements, etc.) to identify and remove disincentives and introduce incentives for wetlands conservation and wise use?**

Refer also to response to 2.12

The Commonwealth Wetlands Policy (see Box 1) includes a strategy to document and promote a range of economic, voluntary, educational and other measures to encourage wetland conservation activities by the private sector. In addition, the Policy is undertaking a broader review of economic policy instruments for biodiversity conservation outside protected areas to ensure that, where feasible and where consistent with national taxation

and fiscal policy, there are incentives and, conversely, no disincentives for wetland conservation activities by private landowners.

Australia has provided a commitment to the use of incentive measures through a range of initiatives following the establishment of the Natural Heritage Trust (See Box 2). The Bushcare program, for example, will provide incentives for land users to conserve remnant vegetation outside the reserve system. This will involve support for innovative combinations of rate relief (working through local government), management agreements and covenants, direct subsidies for fencing and technical support to extend best practice management of bushland remnants. These incentives will be put in place through the Natural Heritage Trust Bushcare community grants program, a number of targeted initiatives and through strategic alliances with industry, local government and non-government organisations.

A Working Group on Nature Conservation on Private Land, which reports to the ANZECC Standing Committee on Conservation, has been addressing best practice initiatives for nature conservation on private land, including wetlands, to determine the critical factors for success.

**Table 6 Involvement of the private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands**

State/Territory	
New South Wales	<p>Over the past 2 years, Environment Australia has supported the National Parks and Wildlife Service to prepare a Strategy for the Nomination of Ramsar Sites on Private Land in NSW. A Draft Strategy is complete and it provides a range of strategies to promote and assist with the voluntary nomination of Ramsar sites on private land, together with a series of questions and answers to clarify what Ramsar listing means for private landholders.</p> <p>The Strategic Plan Action 2.8.1 <i>'Encourage the private sector to give increased recognition to wetland attributes, functions and values when carrying out projects affecting wetlands'</i> is addressed through the planning mechanisms described in the responses to questions 2.5 and 2.6.</p> <p>Action 2.8.2 <i>'Encourage the private sector to apply the Wise Use Guidelines when executing development projects affecting wetlands'</i> is being addressed through the preparation of the NSW Wetlands Management Policy - Management Guidelines by the Department of Land and Water Conservation and through the planning mechanisms described in responses to questions 2.5 and 2.6.</p> <p>Actions 2.8.3 <i>'Encourage the private sector to work in partnership with site managers to monitor the ecological character of wetlands'</i> and 2.8.4 <i>'Involve the private sector in the management of wetlands through participation in wetland management committees'</i> have not been addressed at a State wide scale but there are examples of these actions being implemented at regional/local level.</p> <p>There has not been a specific review of fiscal measures affecting wetlands conservation in NSW. There has however been an amendment to the Local Government Act that has removed areas subject to Voluntary Conservation Agreements under the National Parks and Wildlife Act from the ratings base (ie made these areas exempt from Local Government rates). A current project funded under the Natural Heritage Trust is reviewing incentives and disincentives for wetland rehabilitation and will report during 1998.</p> <p>An example of private sector involvement in wetland rehabilitation include over \$700,000 of corporate sponsorship of the Kooragang Wetland rehabilitation Project by Port Waratah Coal Services, Transgrid, Brambles Industrial Services, BHP, Metromix Steelstone and Koppers.</p>
Northern Territory	<p>The Territory encourages and supports the sustainable harvest of estuarine crocodile (<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>) eggs and adults. Training of aboriginal landowners and other commercial operators is provided, and landowners receive payment on each individual egg or animal harvested. This is designed to provide an incentive for the good management of wetlands.</p>



Queensland	Through Land and Water Management Plans and Property Management Plans, the private sector is encouraged to provide for the conservation and management of wetlands within the overall planning for their business. Nature Refuges and other voluntary conservation agreements, declared under the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1994</i> , are promoted to provide protection for areas of high conservation value on privately owned land. A "Land for Wildlife" voluntary scheme is currently being trialled. Incentive schemes are being actively explored in collaboration with the Commonwealth. Community based catchment planning and management through regional plans, ICM and Landcare takes wetlands conservation into account.
South Australia	Private sector management of wetland ecosystems is encouraged and supported to achieve positive environmental. The Heritage Agreement Grant Scheme provides assistance with planning and on-ground works for areas of remnant vegetation and Landcare groups in South Australia work with private landholders to resolve issues of wetland rehabilitation and biodiversity conservation. The Wetlands and Wildlife Trust and BRL Hardy manage significant private wetland areas with assistance from NGOs (Wetland Care Australia) and government.
Victoria	<p>Land for Wildlife is a voluntary program that assists private landholders in conserving biodiversity (including wetlands) by providing advice and a forum for education and information sharing through newsletters, field days, technical notes and extension activities.</p> <p>Trust for Nature (Victoria) is a statutory corporation that has a responsibility to protect significant vegetation, and some wetlands, on private land. It achieves this by negotiating the placement of voluntary protective covenants on private land, purchasing and managing properties including covenanting and on-selling.</p> <p>There are about 700 Landcare groups in Victoria. Landcare groups work together to resolve issues on private land such as land protection, pest plant and animal problems, environmental restoration and biodiversity conservation.</p>
Western Australia	<p>In Western Australia the private sector has been encouraged to give increased recognition to wetland attributes, functions and values in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based catchment planning and management by rural landholders (e.g. Salinity Action Plan, Natural Heritage Trust, Landcare, Bushcare, Demonstration Catchments in the Avon Valley) has been given recognition and support by the State Government. Though mainly focused on maintaining farm productivity, increasingly this is giving attention to regional hydrology and rehabilitation of wetlands</li> <li>• Establishment of "catchment management centres" (e.g. Pinjarra) to assist the development of local land management solutions to environmental degradation (Bradby 1997)</li> <li>• Preparation and distribution of booklets on planning for wetlands (guidelines for environmental planning, water sensitive designs for urban developments)</li> <li>• Development of guidelines to assist the mining industry in the construction and management of tailings ponds to minimise ground and surface water contamination and impacts on wildlife</li> </ul> <p>Examples of private sector involvement in wetlands in Western Australia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcoa of Australia: funding for "Rivers, Wetlands and Habitats" partnerships for community-based wetland rehabilitation and management on the Swan Coastal Plain, which have involved local communities, landholders and Local and State Government agencies</li> <li>• Alcoa of Australia: support for the "Chain of Diamonds" project, conducted by Greening Western Australia, which involves conducting workshops on wetland management and rehabilitation to community groups in the Perth area</li> <li>• Bunnings: support for wetland education and monitoring activities (Ribbons of Blue) in the Blackwood River catchment</li> <li>• Bank West Landscape Conservation Visa Card Trust Account: Funding from the Trust Account has been used to support fencing of Pumpkin Springs</li> </ul>

**3.1 Is there a government-run national programme for Education and Public Awareness in your country which focuses on, or includes, wetlands? Yes/No? if yes, what are the priority actions under this programme and who are the target groups? (Refer also to question 9.4)**

The Waterwatch Australia program (see Box 3) fulfils a key role in promoting education and public awareness of wetlands. The priority actions for the program are to foster ownership and responsibility for the health of waterways throughout the community, to facilitate effective partnerships between all sectors of the community for healthy waterways and to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of healthy waterways in the general community. Waterwatch targets local governments, regional organisations, industry, community groups and individuals.

The National Wetlands Program funds a range of education and awareness raising activities (see Box 2).

**3.2 Describe the steps taken to have wetlands issues and Ramsar's Wise Use principles included as part of the curricula of educational institutions. Has this been at all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary and adult)? Please give details.**

The development and implementation of a targeted national community awareness and education program is a specific goal of the Commonwealth Wetlands Policy. In response, Waterwatch Australia (see Box 3), a community based water quality and aquatic biodiversity monitoring and education program, has developed a curriculum project which is designed to encourage schools throughout Australia to adopt an action planning approach to caring for catchments using the resources and framework provided by Waterwatch Australia.

A number of projects funded under the National Wetlands Program have been designed to encourage teachers to incorporate wetland messages including; the value of wetlands, wetlands and waterways as important habitat and the concept of the wise use of wetlands, into their teaching programs. Three of these projects include the *Wetlands Health Check*, a guide to rating your local wetland or waterway, the *Wetlands Challenge* an internet game designed for upper primary and *Murder Under the Microscope* an internet game for upper primary and senior secondary. *Wetlands Health Check* was an insert in *The Double Helix*, a CSIRO publication that has a circulation of 40,000 students in Australia and New Zealand. *Wetlands Challenge* was delivered on the internet and heavily promoted to all schools in the Murray-Darling Basin. *Murder Under the Microscope* is a high profile, multidisciplinary activity, teaching students about catchment management and waterway health issues. In 1998 the theme for *Murder Under the Microscope* was wetlands. Through education network broadcasts, internet and videos, *Murder* reached 600 schools across Australia.

#### **Northern Territory**

A *Centre for Tropical Wetlands Management* was established in 1997 at the Northern Territory University to assist in the coordination of wetland research in the Northern Territory and establish partnerships with external agencies involved in the research and management of wetland environments. The Centre includes federal and Territory agencies as well as members of the university science faculty.

#### **Western Australia**

Recent revisions to the primary and secondary school curricula have enabled schools to more readily use wetland educational products developed externally, e.g. by government agencies. The Water Corporation of Western Australia and the Water and Rivers Commission have been particularly active in developing these products.

#### **Queensland**

Primary and secondary school curricula include wetlands modules in their environmental awareness and geography areas. The Education Department runs several Environmental Education Centres, and some of these specialise in wetlands (mainly tidal) education programs. Three Queensland universities have within their environmental studies faculties research centres and education programs specialising in tropical freshwater, freshwater and instream research and marine biology (including tidal wetlands).

#### **New South Wales**

A State Wetlands Action Group was established under the NSW Wetlands Management Policy to develop annual Action Plans for implementation of the Policy. The Group is chaired by a representative from a scientific institution and includes representatives from government agencies (Department of Land and Water Conservation, Environment Protection Authority, National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Fisheries, Department of Urban

Affairs and Planning, State Forests, Royal Botanic Gardens), and non-government organisations (2 from Catchment Management Committees, 1 from Nature Conservation Council, 2 from user/landholder representatives, 1 indigenous representative, 1 local government).

Establishment of a group of natural resource agencies to overview major policy issues relevant to water and its management has meant that the issue of wetland conservation has a much higher focus than in the past. Chief Executive Officers regularly meet to determine issues relevant to management and protection of river flows and improvement of water quality in New South Wales.

The Shortland Wetlands Centre Education program, supported by the NSW Department of Education and Training, delivers, throughout the year, wetland education programs to 9000 students and distributes information to 500 teachers and 50 secondary schools. The Awabakal Field Studies Centre based at the Wetlands Centre runs several education initiatives throughout the year.

#### **Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 4**

**To reinforce the capacity of institutions in each Contracting Party to achieve conservation and wise use of wetlands.**

- 4.1 Describe the mechanisms in place, or being introduced, to increase cooperation between the various institutions responsible for actions which can have an impact on the conservation and wise use of wetlands. If one of the mechanisms is a National Ramsar/Wetlands Committee, please describe its composition, functions and modus operandi.**

Refer to responses to General Objective 1 and 2.

#### **Commonwealth-State/Territories Interaction**

A National Wetlands Advisory Committee was established in 1995 to ensure the broad range of community views was taken into account in the development of the Commonwealth Wetlands Policy (see Box 1). The Committee's members were drawn from a broad spectrum of community, conservation, industry and fishing interest groups. The relevant components of the Commonwealth Government's Wetlands Policy are now being implemented through Natural Heritage Trust Partnership Agreements.

The Natural Heritage Trust Partnership Agreements, between the Commonwealth and the States, are agreed at Prime Minister and Premier level and encompass all relevant government agencies in each State with environmental management responsibilities. The lead agency for implementing the partnership agreements in each State are responsible for ensuring a close level of cooperation between government institutions responsible for wetland management.

At a more fundamental level, the ANZECC Wetlands and Migratory Shorebirds Taskforce has an agreed work program, based on the partnership agreements, and the ANZECC agencies in each State/Territory are responsible for liaising as necessary with other institutions to ensure coordinated effort on wetlands.

#### **Western Australia**

A Wetlands Coordinating Committee has been established under the Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia. The committee is chaired by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and includes representatives from: scientific institutions (1), non-government conservation organisations (2), Local Government (1), Water and Rivers Commission (1), Agriculture WA (1), Department of Environmental Protection (1), Ministry for Planning (1) and an additional member from the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

#### **4.2 Of the following, indicate which have been undertaken:**

- a. a review to identify the training needs of institutions and individuals concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands ?**  
If yes, please indicate the major findings of the review. See comments below
- b. a review to identify training opportunities for these people both within your country and in other countries?** See comments below
- c. the development of training modules or a training programme specifically for wetland managers. If yes, please give details.** See comments below
- d. people from your country have gained wetland-related training either within or outside the country?** See comments below

Refer to response to General Objective 1

Refer to response to 3.2

#### **Tri-national Wetlands Co-operative Program**

Australia is involved in the development of an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Republic of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia to enhance cooperation under the Tri-national Program (see Box 5). The development of the MOU, which is being facilitated by World Wide Fund for Nature, will assist in the conservation of wetlands in the Wasur National Park of Indonesia, Tonda Wildlife Management Area of Papua New Guinea and Kakadu National Park of Australia. The MOU will facilitate the co-ordination of training and increase understanding of management issues shared by the three areas.

**Box 5 Tri-national Wetlands Cooperative Program**

Under the Tri-national Wetlands Cooperative Program, Australia is funding the World Wide Fund for Nature to provide practical training for on-ground wetland managers in Kakadu National Park in Australia, Wasur National Park in Indonesia and Tonda Wildlife Management Area in Papua New Guinea. The training will assist wetland managers to address issues common to the three sites such as fire management, tourism, controlling feral animals and introduced pest species. The initial phase of the project has seen the development of a training program, which was formulated with input from on-ground wetland managers of the three areas. The second phase of the project, which will commence in September 1998 with continuing support from Environment Australia, has two key aims: to implement the training program between the three parks for wetlands managers and formulate a co-operative management arrangement to facilitate staff training and exchange of expertise, particularly in wetlands research and management. A three way agreement between Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea is being considered which would formalise the cooperative arrangements initiated under the project. The Training Program has been prepared based on a series of field workshops conducted in each of the three countries with on-ground wetland managers and local people.

Wetlands International Oceania, through its partnership with Environment Australia, produced a shorebird training manual which has been distributed mainly throughout China within the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. This Manual which includes several separate learning modules is designed to raise the level of understanding and awareness of conservation issues relating to shorebirds and information on the identification and study of shorebirds.

A wetlands training programme will be run out of the Northern Territory University and will concentrate on Tropical Wetlands management issues. The training programme will build on the current module on tropical wetland management, ensuring that Australia continues to advance its expertise in the protection, conservation and understanding of tropical wetlands. The program will facilitate access by wetland management officials from the Asia-Pacific Region, with courses to be offered to participants in 1999.

Another training innovation is the development of the Virtual Ramsar Site. This project, jointly funded through the Natural Heritage Trust, contributions from the Ramsar Bureau and the Bicentennial Trust in Sydney, is envisaged to be an Internet based education facility which will focus on the wetlands of Bicentennial Park and their management. The increasing use of the internet medium both in Australia and internationally would make this a useful tool for raising awareness of wetlands and their management. The focus on Bicentennial Park adjacent to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games also increases the profile of this site. The primary target groups are students, teachers, community groups and Park visitors.

## Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 5

To ensure the conservation of all sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List).

**5.1 Of the Ramsar sites in your country, how many have formal management plans:**

a. being prepared? 28

b. fully prepared?

c. being implemented? 13

Please indicate in the attached table of Ramsar sites which sites these are and what category they fall into.

Refer to Appendix 3.

**5.2 Of the management plans referred to above, which ones have included a monitoring scheme or programme to allow changes in ecological character to be detected? Please indicate this in the attached table of Ramsar sites also.**

Refer to Appendix 3.

**5.3 Has there been a change in the ecological character (either positive or negative) at any of your Ramsar sites or is this likely to occur in the near future? If Yes, please give details.**  
**Commonwealth wetlands**

Refer to Appendix 4.

**5.4 In the case of Montreux Record Ramsar sites where the Management Guidance Procedure has been applied, what is the status of the implementation of the MGP report recommendations? What is the expected time-frame for removing the site from the Montreux Record?**

Australia has no sites listed on the Montreux Record.

In relation to the Ramsar Convention's Montreux Record, the Commonwealth and the State/Territory Governments have agreed, under the Natural Heritage Trust Partnership Agreements, that the preparation of management plans for all Australian Ramsar sites is a major priority. The preparation and implementation of management plans is considered to be a more appropriate action than Montreux listing of sites.

**5.5 For those countries referred to in COP6 Recommendations 6.17.1-4, "Ramsar sites in the Territories of Specific Contracting Parties", please provide advice on the actions that have been taken in response to the issues raised at that time.**

Recommendation 6.17.4 read....

*All Australian governments should demonstrate significant progress towards achievement of the obligations undertaken in Ramsar Convention Recommendation 6.17.4 by the meeting of the contracting parties to the Convention in May 1999. They should implement comprehensive, coordinated strategies to:*

- restore environmental flows;
- reverse the threat of rising saline groundwater;
- prevent the introduction of exotic species by instituting public environmental impact assessments;
- ensure the long term conservation of peat wetlands and nominate Ramsar sites whose sustainability is threatened to the Montreux Record watch list of internationally threatened wetlands.

Refer also to response to 6.4

### Environmental Flows

The Commonwealth is committed to the conservation and protection of inland waterways, aquatic ecosystems, wetlands and water supplies. At the National level, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to a range of reforms designed to arrest the widespread degradation of Australia's water resources which are to be fully implemented by 2001 and which are tied to the National Competition Policy Agreement. Under this Agreement, implementation and continued observance of COAG water reforms will be a requirement for States and Territories to receive Competition Payments.

Critical environmental water issues identified in the Water Reform Framework include: the establishment of environmental flow requirements; strategies for reducing withdrawals in over allocated systems; support for integrated catchment management approaches; sustainability of new water resource developments; improvement in approaches to town water and sewage disposal to sensitive environments; and investigation of the ramifications of greater reuse of wastewater and stormwater.

The Government recognises that high quality river health outcomes can only be achieved by all stakeholders at all levels working together. As part of the Natural Heritage Trust, the Government has put in place a range of mechanisms to address river health, environmental flows and salinity at catchment, regional, and river basin scales.

The Macquarie Marshes Water Management Plan (1996) has since been adopted and, together with river flow rules adopted in 1998 on all regulated river systems in NSW, should ensure better provision of water for the maintenance of associated wetlands systems.

### **Conservation of Peatlands**

In support of peat conservation, *The Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia* directs Commonwealth agencies to consider alternatives to peat harvesting and to “determine the impacts of the peat harvesting industry in Australia and recommend appropriate steps... such as the use of artificial plant propagation media in all Commonwealth-run and funded activities and projects”..

Environment Australia sponsored the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service to prepare a document entitled *Sphagnum Moss - Sustainable Use and Management* which provides background information on *Sphagnum* populations in Australia and includes a code of practice for its sustainable harvesting. A National Reserve System Program project, funded under the Natural Heritage Trust, is reviewing the conservation and reservation status of sphagnum peatlands in south-eastern Australia.

Consistent with Recommendation 6.17.4, Australia listed Ginini Flats in the Australian Capital Territory, as a Ramsar site in 1996. Ginini Flats includes well developed peat soils up to two metres deep beneath areas of wet heath and bog. More recently, through the National Wetlands Program, Environment Australia provided initial funding to the Tasmanian Government to survey and prepare an inventory of peatlands in the State's northwest. Environment Australia is supporting efforts to conserve Wingecarribee Swamp in New South Wales and provided input to the State's Inquiry which recommended the cessation of peat mining, and the designation of the area as a nature reserve.

## Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 6

To designate for the Ramsar List those wetlands which meet the Convention's criteria, especially wetland types still under-represented in the List and transfrontier wetlands.

- 6.1 Has a national inventory of wetlands been prepared for your country? No**  
**Are there plans for this to be done? Yes**

The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments have agreed, under the Natural Heritage Trust Partnership Agreements, to the development of a national wetland inventory. The inventory will be assembled from complementary State/Territory/Commonwealth wetland databases. The ANZECC Wetlands and Migratory Shorebirds Taskforce is aiming to have a national wetlands inventory substantially completed by the year 2000.

**Where a national inventory exists please provide details of when it was finalised, where it is kept and what information it contains.**

The development of a National Inventory is supported by a contract under the National Wetland Program with the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (eriss). This contract is aimed at developing protocols for national approaches for wetland inventory and monitoring. This project will provide five reports covering:

1. Review of the extent of wetland data held by each state/territory.
2. Review of the technological options for wetland inventory.
3. Review of early and rapid warning systems for monitoring wetlands.
4. Draft protocols for undertaking a national wetland inventory.
5. Draft protocols for storing wetland inventory and monitoring information.

- 6.2 Does there exist a list or directory of "important" wetlands for your country or region? If yes, please provide details of when it was finalised, where it is kept, what criteria for "important" were used, and the types of information it contains.**

Australia has produced two editions of *A Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia*. The *Directory* provides summary information on the ecology and management related issues affecting Australia's most significant wetlands. The *Directory* was the result of a cooperative project between the Commonwealth and each of the State/Territory Governments.

Nearly 800 wetlands sites are included in the *Directory*, covering almost 25 million hectares. A wide range of wetland types are featured, including coral reefs, seagrass meadows, karst systems and peat bogs. The *Directory* uses criteria for determining nationally important wetlands which have been approved by the ANZECC Standing Committee on Conservation.

Australian Wetlands may be considered 'nationally important' when they meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. It is a good example of a wetland type occurring within a biogeographic region of Australia
2. It is a wetland which plays an important ecological or hydrological role in the natural functioning of a major wetland system/complex.
3. It is a wetland which is important as the habitat for animal taxa at a vulnerable stage in their life cycles, or provides a refuge when adverse conditions such as drought, prevail.
4. The wetland supports 1% or more of the national population of any native plant or animal taxa.
5. The wetland supports native plant or animal taxa or communities which are considered endangered or vulnerable at the national level.
6. The wetland is of outstanding historical or cultural significance.

For each site listed in the *Directory* the following information is provided: location, area, elevation, wetland type (based on Ramsar Convention types), site description, site significance, land tenure, current land use, disturbances or threats, conservation measures taken, management authority and jurisdiction.

The *Directory* is widely used by wetland managers, governments, industry and the community in the conservation and wise use management of wetlands in Australia. The *Directory* has previously only been



available in hard copy, with the second edition being almost 1000 pages in length. Australia is now working on a third edition of the Directory that will include many additional sites. The third edition will be available in a digital database form, as well as being accessible through the internet. Importantly the map-based referencing of each wetland will be significantly improved.

**6.3 If it is known, please provide an estimate of the area of wetlands in your country at present and any information on rates of loss or conversion to other activities. If this information is available, please indicate what definition of "wetland" was used.**

The total area of wetlands listed in *A Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia* is almost 25 million hectares or 250,000 square kilometres. There is not yet a national wetlands inventory from which to determine the total area of wetlands in Australia.

The definition of wetlands currently being used in Australia is consistent with that used for the Ramsar Convention.

**Queensland**

- Permanently inundated freshwater wetlands cover 1,183,309 ha,
- Intertidal wetlands (mangroves, salt flats and foreshore flats, but not including seagrass beds below LWM) cover 1,027,030 ha
- Land subject to inundation (ie floodplains, ephemeral lakes etc.) covers 4,900,615 ha

Total nearly 71,000sq km. (Note: these statistics are derived from AUSLIG Geodata @1:250,000 scale, which may not be recent; therefore are indicative only.) This equates to approximately 4.1% of Queensland (but only 0.7% or about 12,000sq km, is permanently inundated).

No rate of loss or conversion is readily available as no comprehensive studies have been funded. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least 80% of wetlands in discrete areas affected by intensive agricultural activity and urbanisation have been degraded. (This is mainly confined to southeastern Queensland, coastal floodplains and some inland intensive agriculture areas, for example, the Darling Downs and near Emerald in central Queensland -5-10% of the State). The most widespread activity in Queensland, extensive grazing, may have caused, directly or indirectly, a degree of disturbance or degradation of wetlands in many other areas. In many cases an appropriate grazing regime is considered a useful management tool to maintain intermittent wetlands in a condition useful to waterbirds, due to the introduction and uncontrolled spread of exotic, water tolerant, pasture grasses.

**New South Wales**

It has been estimated that there are around 4.5 million hectares of wetlands in NSW, which is about 6% of the State's geographical area (NSW Wetlands Management Policy, 1996).

There has as yet been no systematic mapping of all NSW wetlands completed although there are projects currently underway to improve the State inventory and provide more reliable indicators of rates of change. A project to be completed by April 1999 will provide a wetland GIS for all wetland areas in the Murray-Darling Basin, an area that covers 60% of NSW and parts of Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. Maps of wetland areas are currently under review. Earlier regional or local studies provide some indication of changes which have occurred: Goodrick (1970) estimated that 60% of the most valuable waterfowl habitat in coastal wetlands had been degraded or lost; Stricker (1995) estimated that in the Sydney Region about 50% of the area of pre-European freshwater wetlands and 80% of the saltmarsh area had been lost in the preceding 200 years; Pressey (1986) reported that over 45% of the area of NSW Murray River wetlands had been degraded by the regulation of river flows; the extensive Macquarie Marshes wetland system is believed to have contracted by as much as 40 - 50% because of water diversions and the development of irrigated agriculture.

**Northern Territory**

The Northern Territory does not have an accurate measure of the total area of its wetlands. However, there is a total of 53,720 km<sup>2</sup> of vegetation communities associated with wetlands, made up of:

Melaleuca forest and woodlands	13,236 km <sup>2</sup>
Floodplain vegetation	10,333 km <sup>2</sup>
Littoral vegetation	11,090 km <sup>2</sup>
Chenopod shrublands	19,061 km <sup>2</sup>

**South Australia**

There has not been a comprehensive assessment of the area of wetlands in South Australia, however there is a surprising array of wetlands in spite of the State being by far the driest of all Australian States. There are freshwater swamps, channels, lakes, floodplains, coastal sea lakes, freshwater ponds, peat fens, marshes, coastal embayments, mangrove/samphire and estuarine mud flats, mound springs and seasonally inundated brackish swamps.

No recent estimates have been made on rates of loss or conversion of wetlands, however, the South Eastern Wetlands Committee (1984) reported that permanent wetlands in the South East had been reduced to less than 7% of the original area by 1981.

## **Western Australia**

There has not been a comprehensive assessment of the area of wetlands in Western Australia. Estimates are available for wetland resources on the Swan Coastal Plain (Hill et al. 1993) and the Busselton-Walpole Region (Pen 1997).

In the mid 1960's it was estimated that 75% of the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain had been filled or drained (Riggert 1974). No recent estimates have been made on rates of loss or conversion of wetlands. A contemporary assessment is proposed for the Swan Coastal Plain as part of the review of the Swan Coastal Plain Lakes Environmental Protection Policy.

Degradation of wetlands is a major concern in Western Australia with eight of the 22 current priority environmental issues (State of the Environment Reference Group 1998) involving marine and inland wetlands. These issues include: salinisation, loss of fringing vegetation, eutrophication, sedimentation, contamination and invasion of exotic species.

## **Victoria**

<b>Wetland Category</b>	<b>Pre-European Area (ha)</b>	<b>% of area remaining</b>
Deep freshwater marsh	154,800	30
Freshwater meadow	172,700	57
Permanent open freshwater	79,100	94
Permanent saline	142,200	98
Semi-permanent saline	61,300	93
Shallow freshwater marsh	15,800	40

- 6.4 Have any actions been taken in response to the COP6 Resolutions and Recommendations that Contracting Parties should give priority to listing Wetlands of International Importance which:**
- meet the criteria for fish habitat (Resolution VI.2),**
  - meet the 1% criterion for waterbird populations using data provided by the International Waterfowl Census (Resolution VI.4),**
  - are subterranean karst or cave wetland systems (Resolution VI.5),**
  - are peatland ecosystems (Recommendation 6.1)**
  - are coral reefs and associated systems (Recommendation 6.7)**
  - are under-represented wetland types (which apart from d. and e. above include mangroves and sea grass beds) (Strategic Plan Action 6.2.3) Yes/No? If yes, please describe these actions.**

Refer also to response to 6.5

The Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management is currently assessing potential candidate sites for listing under the Ramsar Convention (nine sites were listed in 1992). The priorities identified at CoP6 are to be addressed in this assessment.

A project is underway in Victoria to identify important karst wetlands and two inland wetland categories not assessed to date: permanent rivers and streams and seasonal and irregular rivers and streams. Particular attention will be paid to using existing statewide distributional data on threatened fish and invertebrate species to identify important wetlands in these and other wetland categories.

A project currently underway in NSW to update the Directory of Important Wetlands will provide additional information on which priorities for further listings of Wetlands of International Importance, particularly in those categories which are currently not represented, can be based.

**6.5 If your government indicated at COP6 that it would be proceeding to list further specific sites, please advise of the status of this action.**

Australia is actively pursuing further nominations and expects to add sites to the List of Wetlands on International Importance by CoP7.

**6.6 Please advise which of the sites included in the Ramsar List from your country are transfrontier wetlands (Refer also to 7.1).**

Not applicable.

**6.7 Describe any plans, or actions being taken for further transfrontier sites to be listed (Refer also to 7.1).**

Not applicable.

## **Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 7**

**To mobilise international cooperation and financial assistance for wetland conservation and wise use in collaboration with other conventions and agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.**

### **7.1 Briefly describe any bilateral or multilateral activities that have been taken, are under way, or are planned for the management of transfrontier wetlands or their watersheds/catchments (Refer also to 6.6 and 6.7).**

Refer to response to General Objective 1.

Refer to response to General Objective 4.

#### **Box 6 Shorebird Action Plan**

At an international meeting at Kushiro, Japan in December 1994 it was agreed that there was an urgent need for multilateral cooperation for the conservation of migratory waterbirds. The meeting recognised that there was not a suitable international legal framework to develop conservation plans and called on Governments and non-government organisations to work in partnership to develop a regional conservation strategy. In response an *Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 1996-2000* (the *Strategy*), for the period 1996-2000 was drafted. *The Strategy* encourages countries to "promote and participate in the development and conclusion of a multilateral agreement for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the Asia-Pacific region...". Implementation of the *Strategy* is being coordinated by Wetlands International with core funding from Environment Australia and the Environment Agency of Japan. An *Action Plan for the Conservation of Migratory Shorebirds in Asia Pacific: 1996-2000* has been prepared by Wetlands International to provide guidance on the priority actions that need to be undertaken for the conservation of migratory shorebirds by Government agencies, site managers, researchers and non-government organisations.

### **7.2 Do you have Ramsar sites that are "twinning" with others, either nationally or internationally? If yes, please give details.**

The Kooragang Nature Reserve and the Kushiro Wetlands in Japan were the subject of Australia's first twinning of Ramsar sites. The arrangement continues to be supported through exchanges of students and staff between Kushiro High School and Jesmond University High School in Newcastle, NSW, with the most recent visit in September 1998. Signatories to the twinning included the Mayors of Newcastle and Port Stephens and seven Mayors from the townships surrounding the Kushiro wetlands.

The Boondall Wetlands in Moreton Bay, Queensland, Australia, and the Yatsu Tideland in Japan, are the subject of a site twinning arrangement which was entered into by the Brisbane City Council and the Narashino City in February 1998. These sites are both Ramsar listed and both also included in the East Asian Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network. Under the arrangement the two Lord Mayors have agreed to support research, exchange of personnel and development of domestic and international education projects in recognition of the importance of protecting these wetlands and the migratory shorebirds dependent upon them.

### **7.3 Where your country is also a signatory of any of the following Conventions, describe what mechanism(s) exist to assist regular dialogue and cooperative actions between the personnel responsible for their implementation and the Ramsar Administrative Authority:**

- a. Convention on Biological Diversity
- b. Framework Convention on Climate Change
- c. Convention to Combat Desertification
- d. Convention on Migratory Species
- e. World Heritage Convention

Australia is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Migratory Species and the World Heritage Convention. Australia has signed but not yet ratified, the Convention to Combat Desertification. Environment Australia is the management authority in Australia for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of all these Conventions in cooperation with the State and Territory governments.

**7.4 Is your country cooperating as part of any bilateral or multilateral activities directed at the conservation of migratory wetland species? If yes, please provide details.**

Refer also to Box 6 Shorebird Action Plan

Australia has bilateral migratory bird conservation agreements with Japan (JAMBA) and China (CAMBA). These agreements are important mechanisms for the exchange of information, support for training activities and cooperation on research activities. Biennial consultative meetings for JAMBA, CAMBA and the Japan-China Migratory Birds Agreement (JCMBA) are now all consecutive, effectively creating a tripartite forum. Australia is also a signatory to the *Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals* (the Bonn Convention).

In 1996, Australia and Japan co-sponsored Recommendation 6.4 (The Brisbane Initiative) which saw the launch of the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network. The Network aims to highlight the importance of wetland areas for migratory shorebirds and promote activities to conserve these areas. Environment Australia is helping to develop the Network in association with Wetlands International. Some actions include:

- ongoing activities within the Network to ensure the protection of important wetland habitats for migratory shorebirds;
- development of a Colour Marking Protocol for shorebird species which migrate throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway to assist countries to coordinate bird banding and monitoring work;
- adoption of a Shorebird Action Plan to provide the strategic framework for an Asia Pacific approach to migratory shorebird conservation, and establishment of a Shorebird Working Group tasked with overseeing implementation of the Plan and the ongoing development of the Network; and
- training in wetland management techniques for Chinese wetland managers at two Shorebird Reserve Network sites using volunteer trainers from Australian non-government groups, a collaborative project funded under the International Environmental Commitments Program.

Australia is investigating the development of a Multilateral shorebird agreement within the Asia Pacific region to follow on from the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 1996-2000. This agreement would build on principles established under existing mechanisms such as the Bonn, Ramsar and Biological Diversity Conventions and would seek a coordinated approach to migratory waterbird conservation in the region.

**7.5 Are there multilateral and/or bilateral donors supporting projects which contribute to implementation of the Ramsar Convention in your country?**

While Australia co-operates with other countries in the Asia Pacific and Oceania regions on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention, Australia does not receive resources from other country donors for activities within Australia.

**7.6 Does your government make an annual budgetary allocation to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands within your country? If yes, is this a specific allocation to a wetlands programme or as part of a larger environment or natural resource management budget?**

Refer to Box 2 Natural Heritage Trust

Under the NSW Wetlands Management Policy, the State Wetlands Action Group administers a fund which is specifically directed to community projects which are consistent with the Policy. Other funds are directed to wetlands as part of the larger natural resource management budget.

**7.7 If your country has a development assistance programme, does it include funds earmarked for wetland conservation and wise use in other countries? Yes/No. If yes, please give details.**

Environment Australia operates the International Conservation Program, the objectives of which are to conserve and protect the natural environment focussing on the Asia Pacific region and to advance Australian international, regional and bilateral priorities on the conservation of the environment. The Program does not have a specific allocation for wetlands but has, during 1997 and 1998, supported a number of wetlands projects in the Asia Pacific region. The Program draws from AusAID's country strategies and experience in aid programs and projects and liaises regularly with AusAID to ensure there is no duplication or overlap with activities being

undertaken. In 1996/97 AusAID funded projects to promote the wise use of wetlands worth approximately \$20 million. AusAID continues to provide a significant amount of aid for wetlands projects within the Asia Pacific region.

- 7.8 Is there a formal process in place for consultation between the Ramsar Administrative Authority and the development assistance programme in your country, where one exists? Yes/No. If yes, what is that process.**

No

<b>Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 8</b> <b>To provide the Convention with the required institutional mechanisms and resources.</b>
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- 8.1 Has your government made voluntary financial contributions, other than the invoiced contributions or to the Small Grants Fund, to further the work of the Convention globally? If yes, please provide details.**

No

- 8.2 If your country is in arrears with the payment of its annual contributions to the Ramsar Convention, please indicate the reasons for this situation and the prospects for paying these arrears in the near future.**

Not applicable

**Optional section - Participation of non-government organisations in the implementation of the Convention.**

These are optional questions relating to cooperation with and involvement of non-government organisations in the implementation of the Convention. At COP6, some 42 NGOs made the "Brisbane NGO pledge of support for the Ramsar Convention". The Standing Committee agreed that for COP7 there should be an effort made to gauge the level and type of cooperation which is occurring between government Administrative Authorities and the national and international NGOs with an interest in wetlands issues. In this optional section of the National Report, you are asked to describe the nature of the cooperation and relationship with any other international, regional, national and provincial NGOs operating within your country.

**9.1 Approximately how many NGOs have wetlands as part of their regular "business" in your country? Please break this down between international, regional and national/provincial organisations.**

The following 33 member NGOs of the Australian Wetlands Alliance have wetlands as part of their regular business in Australia.

International NGOs

**3**

Wetlands International - Oceania  
World Wide Fund for Nature - Australia  
Friends of the Earth Australia (Wetlands Campaign)

National NGOs

**6**

Australasian Wader Studies Group  
Australian Conservation Foundation  
Australian Marine Conservation Society  
Australian Society for Limnology  
Bird Observers Club of Australia  
Birds Australia

Provincial and Local NGOs

**24**

Blundell's Swamp Co-operative  
Coast and Wetlands Society  
Conservation Council of South Australia  
Conservation Council of Western Australia  
Cumberland Bird Observers Club  
Friends of Forrestdale  
National Parks Association of ACT  
National Parks Association of NSW  
National Parks Association of QLD  
Nature Conservation Council of NSW  
New South Wales Field Ornithologists Club  
New South Wales Wader Study Group  
Port Phillip Conservation Council  
Queensland Conservation Council  
Queensland Ornithological Society  
(includes Queensland Wader Study Group)  
Shorebird Study Group of BOAT  
Shortland Wetland Centre  
Tasmanian Conservation Trust  
The Environment Centre of NT  
Tuggerah Biodiversity Committee  
Victorian Wetlands Trust  
Wetlands Conservation Society  
Wetlands Foundation of Victoria  
Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council

In addition, several other NGOs are involved in wetlands as witnessed in the list of signatories to the NGO Pledge at CoP6, Brisbane, 1996.

Other NGOs active in wetland issues include;

- Wetland Care Australia
- Victorian Field and Game Association
- Friends of the Brolga
- Broome Bird Observatory (Birds Australia)
- Peel Preservation Society
- Friends of Yellagonga
- Canning River Volunteer Guides
- Seaham Swamp Landcare Group
- Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Group
- Hunter Bird Observers Club

**9.2 Is there a regular forum or mechanism through which these NGOs express their views on wetland conservation and Ramsar implementation:**

**a. to each other?      b. to the government? If yes in either case, please give details.**

Refer to response 2.12

**a. to each other**

The Australian Wetlands Alliance is an umbrella “networking” group for NGOs active in regard to wetlands in Australia. It is not a legal entity but is governed by an elected committee (Reference Group) of five member NGOs representative of the types and interests of the members. The above mentioned (see 9.1) NGOs as members of the Australian Wetlands Alliance meet from time to time as need and funding permits. In addition, information is exchanged through occasional newsletters and communiques on specific issues. More regular and intensive activity is associated with the lead up to and immediate follow-up from Ramsar CoPs.

The Commonwealth, through the National Wetlands Program, is providing financial support to the Australian Wetlands Alliance so they can coordinate the input of NGOs into the preparation of this report and to the preparation of policy positions Australia may adopt for the 7th Ramsar CoP in 1999.

**b. to the government.**

The National Environment Consultative Forum is convened regularly wherein non government groups express their views on a range of environmental issues, including wetlands, directly with the Commonwealth Environment Minister.

Non government representatives are included on the majority of Ramsar site management plan steering committees to ensure that their views are taken into account. There are also forums where NGOs are represented on committees to advise State Governments on matters concerning Ramsar and other wetland sites.

**9.3 Does your government include one or more NGO representatives on its official delegation to Ramsar COPs? Yes/No**

Non government conservation groups, through the Australian Wetlands Alliance, have nominated Michelle Handley of World Wide Fund for Nature - Australia to represent the Alliance on the Australian delegation to the 7th Ramsar COP. Ms Di Tarte represented NGOs on the Australian delegation to the 6th Ramsar COP in 1996.

**9.4 Do any of the NGOs run programmes aimed at Education and Public Awareness about wetlands in your country? Yes/No. If yes, please give details (Refer also to question 3.1).**

Many of the member NGOs of the Australian Wetlands Alliance conduct Education and Public Awareness activities as core business and most others undertake such activities from time to time. Activities undertaken include::

- conducting special events on World Wetlands Day;
- supporting school groups in wetland studies and site visits;
- disseminating information on wetlands through newsletters and electronic media;
- building and maintaining networks for communication and action on coastal wetlands;



- producing publications on management of wetlands and/or conservation of wetland species, and brochures and other materials promoting wetland conservation;
- raising community and government awareness of important wetland sites and issues affecting them, such as lobbying for environmental flows for inland rivers;
- providing facilities (centres, observatories) where the community can experience wetlands and access educational displays and other media;
- conducting management activities at sites which attract media attention to the sites and to important issues.

**9.5 Where they exist, do Ramsar site management advisory committees include NGO representatives? If yes, please give details**

Refer to response 9.2 and 9.6

The arrangements for advisory management committees for Ramsar sites will vary from State to State and include a range of formal and informal mechanisms.

An example of a formal mechanism is the arrangement for the Lake Toolibin Ramsar site (WA) which has a formal Recovery Plan, the implementation of which is overseen by a Recovery Team that includes community representatives. In addition, many of the management actions are implemented by community-based catchment and sub-catchment groups.

An example of informal involvement is the exchange of information between the Moreton Bay Alliance and State Government over the zoning plan affecting Moreton Bay Ramsar site (QLD).

**9.6 Describe the themes of the Convention (refer to General Objectives 1-8 of the Strategic Plan) where you perceive the national/provincial NGOs to be most active.**

The main areas of interest of NGOs in the Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan, as perceived by Environment Australia, are 2.1 (National Wetlands Policy), 2.5 (legislation), 2.10 (EIAs), 4.1 (institutional cooperation), 5 (Ramsar listed wetlands) and 6 (Wetland inventories)

The following list, which is not exhaustive, illustrates NGO activity in Australia in regard to the General Objectives of the Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan, as perceived by the Australian Wetlands Alliance:

**Universal membership.**

Some NGOs are active in promoting the Convention and its Strategic Plan in the Pacific Islands region.

**Wise use.**

Several NGOs represent NGO/community views on conservation policy issues, including wetland issues, through regular dialogue with the Commonwealth. NGOs are also active in lobbying for implementation of wetland policy and on prominent issues such as water allocations. A number of local wetlands are being restored with input from wetland NGOs. Some NGOs are involved in wetland projects implemented by indigenous landowners.

**Awareness.**

See 9.4 Shortland Wetlands Centre is an example of an NGO which has as its core business education programs and interpretation services to raise awareness of wetland values and functions.

**Capacity of institutions.**

Several Australia-based NGOs are involved in building agency capacity and training of wetland managers (including species specialists) in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region.

**Conservation of Ramsar sites.**

Input of NGOs to management plans occurs extensively: community consultation is usually a requirement of the planning process. Some NGOs are planning to undertake, or are already involved with, pilot studies on community-based monitoring of Ramsar sites. Additional data on listed sites are obtained from time to time by NGOs especially those that employ technical staff. Assessments of the effectiveness of implementation of the Convention in Australia, especially at Ramsar sites, are produced prior to CoPs by the NGO community.

**Designate new sites.**

The substantial contribution of community volunteers is harnessed by several NGOs in collection of data that will be available to guide designation of new Ramsar sites in Australia. Surveys of wetlands that are suspected to be internationally important are being undertaken by NGOs, especially those that employ technical staff. Some NGOs actively lobby for nomination of particular wetland sites that meet the Ramsar criteria.

#### **International cooperation.**

Several NGOs are active in collaborative projects in and with other countries in the Asia Pacific region, including work on trans-border wetlands and migratory species.

#### **Institutional mechanisms.** Not applicable.

Whereas some of the activities are undertaken by NGOs that have substantial resources and support base, many significant actions - including actions at Ramsar sites - are undertaken by smaller NGOs especially at the local level.

*[Note: Some respondents - and EA - have cited different numbering for the Operational Objectives to that shown in the hard copy and latest Website version of the Strategic Plan. To avoid this confusion the above more general approach has been used.]*

#### **Final comments:**

##### **10.1 General comments on implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan.**

Australia considers the Ramsar Strategic Plan to be one of the most important documents guiding the direction of the Convention and the work of the Bureau. We have utilised the Strategic Plan in our national planning and policy development. It has also been useful in setting priorities and gaining commitment and resources from Australian Governments. Planning for a new strategic plan beyond 2002 should be a very high priority, and should be scheduled to commence after the 7th Conference of the Parties in Costa Rica, for endorsement at the following conference.

##### **10.2 Observations concerning the functioning of, relations with, and services provided by:**

###### **a. The Ramsar Standing Committee**

At the appointment of a new Standing Committee we suggest a profile of each delegate be prepared, including their priorities for the Convention. A short statement from the appointed members could appear in the newsletter and Web page, with the broader contact group being alerted to this through the list server. In this manner some of the anonymity of the Standing Committee would be removed. Changes to the delegates during the triennium could also be accompanied by updated releases of profiles.

###### **b. The Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel**

The STRP is forming a valuable technical analysis role with a number of recommendations coming forth to the Standing Committee and Contracting Parties. The development of guidelines for a wetland risk assessment framework and early warning monitoring is an area that Australia has been keen to assist.

We suggest that consideration should be given to furthering contact between the STRP and the Contracting Parties between Conferences with more material circulated on the Ramsar discussion list and placement on the Web page. Examples of the former would include a summary of key issues considered by the STRP with requests for comments and further advice. Individual STRP members could be given specific carriage of technical issues and asked to explore these with Contracting Parties and other subscribers to the list server and to present a summary of responses.

We would also encourage the STRP and the Bureau to undertake much greater contact with other Convention Bureau and expert groups and present short and specific reports through the list server and Web page (eg. CBD, IPCC, ICRI).

###### **c. The Ramsar Bureau**

The Web Page has greatly improved and increased awareness of activities undertaken by the Bureau. A staff profile with photographs and bibliographic information could be added. This would be most beneficial for new appointments and interns, but for newcomers to the Convention an entire staff profile would be beneficial.

###### **d. The Ramsar NGO partners**

This is an area that could be greatly enhanced. Whilst these partners have their own newsletters and meetings we feel that a bi-annual or even quarterly report on major activities would be beneficial. This could again occur via the list server with copies maintained on the Web page for longer term record and access.

### **10.3 Any other general observations and/or recommendations for the future.**

#### **National Reports**

##### *Protected areas*

A valuable addition to the National Report would be a review of the establishment of wetland protected areas during the previous three years. This had been included in earlier reports. (Article 4 paragraph 1 of the Text of the Ramsar Convention states that Parties "shall promote the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing nature reserves on wetlands, whether they are included in the List or not...".)

##### *Monitoring at Ramsar sites*

There is an opportunity for future National Reports to the Ramsar Convention to enhance reporting of the performance of Contracting Parties in meeting their Ramsar obligations. The current structure of National Report Appendices 3 & 4 do not convey the extent and quality of monitoring undertaken at sites for which a monitoring program exists nor do they allow for reporting of threats to the integrity of Ramsar sites before they result in changes to ecological character.

Specifically Appendix 3 could provide more detail regarding the level of monitoring conducted at each site. Reference should be made to what is being monitored, how frequently, and whether the monitoring covers part or all of the Ramsar site. Similarly, Appendix 4 should be expanded to serve more as a "State of the Environment Report on all Ramsar sites", addressing the following issues:

- Have there been changes in ecological character?
- Have there been changes in management status?
- Have there been changes in management resources?
- Have there been changes in threatening processes?
- Have there been changes in boundaries of sites? Has this influenced management of the site?
- Have there been changes in the level of community involvement?

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