



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities

## NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE IN ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER

The Ramsar Convention is an international intergovernmental treaty which aims to halt and, where possible, reverse, the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve those that remain through wise use and management. As a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, Australia is expected to promote the conservation of listed sites and as far as possible, the wise use of all wetlands in its territory.

Australia is required to monitor and report to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, through notification under Article 3.2 of the Ramsar Convention, if the ecological character of any Australian Ramsar wetland has changed, is changing or is likely to change since the time of listing, due to technological developments, pollution or other human interference<sup>1</sup>.

Ecological character is the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time<sup>2</sup>.

Change in ecological character is the human-induced adverse alteration of any ecosystem component, process, and/or ecosystem benefit/service.

Australian Governments have an agreed approach for making Article 3.2 notifications. The assessment and notification of change in ecological must be evidence based and be undertaken in accordance with the

*National guidance on notifying change in ecological character of Australia's Ramsar Wetlands (Article 3.2).*

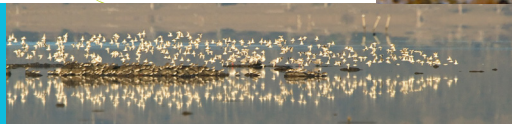
The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities is the Administrative Authority responsible for oversight of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Australia.

### Positive versus negative change

Change in ecological character may be positive (improvements) or adverse (degradation), however, notifications to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat are only required for adverse changes.

### Human-induced versus natural change

Notifications to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat are only made about human-induced adverse changes in ecological character. However, changes at a site will typically arise from a combination of both



natural factors and human activities or as a result of direct and indirect activities. These issues need to be taken into account in the assessment of change of ecological character.

### Character not criteria

Notifications concern changes in ecological character and not the criteria for which the site was listed. A site can experience a change in its ecological character without necessarily experiencing a change in its international importance (i.e. despite a change in ecological character, the site still meets the criteria for which it was listed).

### Assessment of change

The Australian Government requires possible changes in ecological character to Ramsar sites to be assessed on the basis of evidence, including quantitative data and the best available science, before notifying any changes in ecological character to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat. Qualitative information is used to complement assessments.

**Initial assessment:** The Administrative Authority may be advised of a potential change at a site by the site managers, the site owner, through reporting mechanisms or by notifications from third parties. An initial assessment will be undertaken to determine if the potential change warrants further assessment.

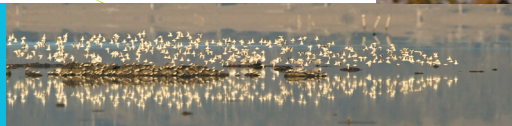
**Formal assessment:** If further investigation is warranted, an assessment of the change will be undertaken in collaboration with the

site owners and managers. The assessment will determine if the change results from human-induced adverse alteration; if it can be substantiated based on best-available science; and if the change has occurred in a critical component, process or service. The formal assessment will make recommendations about whether or not the change is sufficient to make a notification. The final decision to make a notification rests with the Administrative Authority. If a change has occurred, a Statement of Reasons for the notification will be posted on the Department's website.

### The notification process

**Notification:** If the Administrative Authority accepts the case for change, a formal Article 3.2 notification will be made to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat. This will include a summary of the nature of the change that has been identified, the cause(s) of the change, the critical ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that have been adversely affected, and the key actions underway or planned to address the change. Formal notifications can only be made by the Administrative Authority. Once a notification has been made to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, it is included on the agenda of relevant Convention Committees for discussion.

**Response strategy:** Following the notification, a response strategy will be prepared that identifies steps to address the change in ecological character, and informs management actions for the site.



The Response Strategy will be prepared by the Administrative Authority, site owners and managers.

*Reporting:* Regular update reports on the notification will be provided to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

*Rescind the notification:* Once the objectives identified in the Response Strategy have been achieved, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat will be advised of the outcome.

### More Information

More detailed information on the Australian notification process can be found in the *National guidance on notifying change in ecological character of Australia's Ramsar Wetlands (Article 3.2)*.

### Common Questions

*Who should I contact if I think the ecological character of a Ramsar site has changed or is likely to change?*

In the first instance, contact the relevant government management agency responsible for wetland management in your jurisdiction. These agencies will discuss the issues with the site manager and notify the Australian Government if there is a potential change in ecological character.

*What is a third party notification?*

A third party notification is where an interested third party (e.g. member of the public, non-government organisation, community group) makes a notification to the Ramsar

Convention Secretariat about a change in ecological character at a site. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat will contact the relevant Administrative Authority to seek clarification about the notification. The Administrative Authority will then provide advice to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

*Does making a notification that the ecological character of a Ramsar site has changed or is likely to change mean the site will be removed from the Ramsar List?*

No. A site can experience a change in its ecological character without necessarily experiencing a change in its international importance. However, if the ecological character of a wetland has changed, the international importance of the site should be reassessed to ensure it still meets the requirements for Ramsar listing.

*Will the Australian Government list sites on the Ramsar Convention's Montreux Record?*

Sites which have been subject to Article 3.2 notifications may be entered on a register called the Montreux Record, which is a register of Ramsar sites requiring priority conservation attention. The Ramsar Secretariat may organise a technical mission to seek solutions and provide advice to the relevant authorities.

This is a voluntary step, and the Australian Government will consider the merits of including sites on the Montreux Record on a case-by-case basis. The Montreux Record would only be used by Australia if international assistance was required to address the change in character.

- 1 Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 3.2 and Article 8.2. Ramsar CoP10 (2008) Resolution X.13
- 2 at the time of designation as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance (Resolution VI.1 Annex Para 2.1)

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