



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities

PICCANINNIE PONDS KARST WETLANDS

On 21 December 2012, Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands in South Australia was listed as a Ramsar site under the *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat*. It is the 65th Australian Ramsar site, with other listed sites including Kakadu National Park, the Macquarie Marshes, Eighty-mile Beach and Moreton Bay.

Where are the Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands?

The Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands Ramsar Site is located 32 kilometres south-east of Mount Gambier and comprises the 862 hectare Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park. The site is bordered by Victoria to the east and the Southern Ocean to the south.

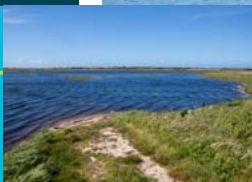
Why are the Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands important?

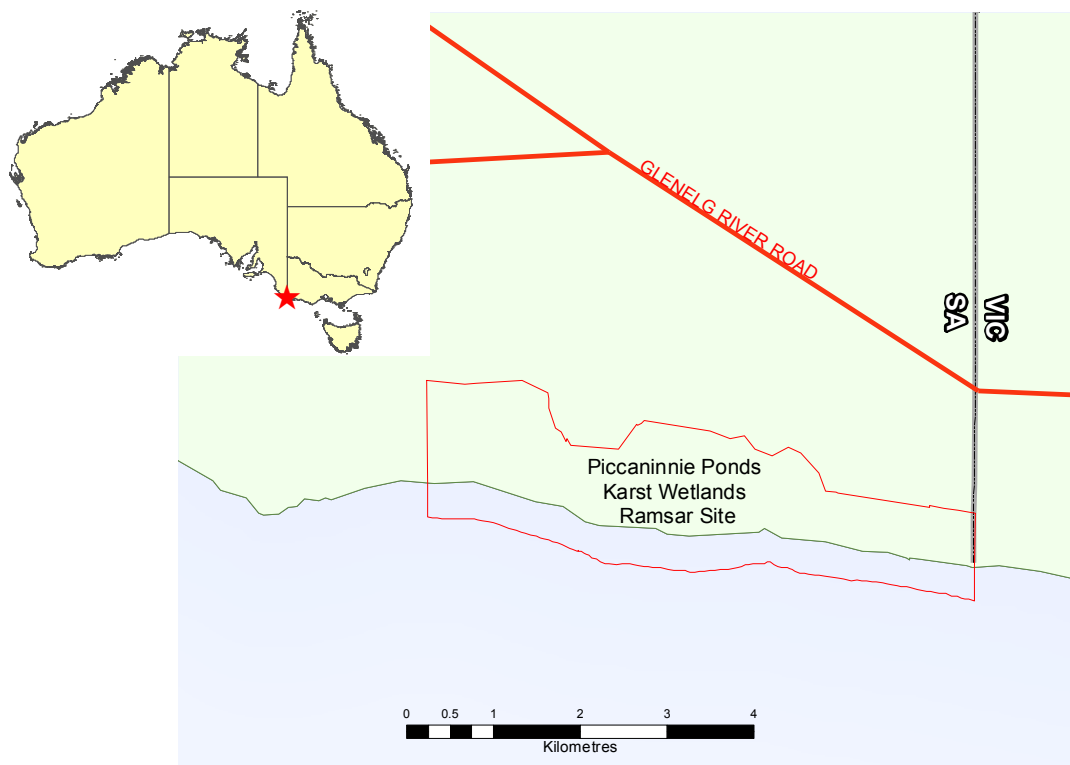
The site has extraordinary natural features and meets five of the nine Ramsar Convention listing criteria. It is an exceptional example of karst and coastal fen wetlands, with groundwater springs reaching more than 110 metres in depth. The pools are renowned for their water clarity and support aquatic vegetation up to 15 metres below the surface. It is one of the few remaining permanent freshwater wetlands in the lower south-east of South Australia.

The wetlands support a number of nationally threatened species, including the orange-bellied parrot and the Australasian bittern. They also provide breeding and spawning habitat for native fish species such as the Yarra pygmy perch and dwarf galaxias.



Photo credit: R. Harris





What is a karst wetland?

Karst and other underground hydrological systems are rare worldwide but are a notable wetland type of the south-east of South Australia. Karst wetlands are created by limestone rocks being dissolved over thousands of years. The water is discharged from a groundwater aquifer and is fresh, clear and cool – almost always between 14 and 15°C. Karst pools are usually permanent and can be very deep.

The wetlands are also culturally important. The Traditional Owners of the land, the Bunganditj (Boandik) people, and local Indigenous people of the South East have a strong connection with the site, recognising the importance of groundwater discharge and connections between culture and wetland health. The site traditionally provided food and other resources to the Bunganditj people, with middens and other evidence of occupation remaining today.

What difference does Ramsar-listing make?

The Convention was signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971 and aims to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and conserve those that remain, through wise use and management. As a member country, Australia is encouraged to add sites to the Ramsar List that contain representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity.

The Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands site is now recognised as internationally



important and Australia has committed to its conservation and wise use. The site is also protected under the national *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) as a 'matter of national environmental significance'. The EPBC Act regulates actions that may have a significant impact on the ecological character of Ramsar sites.

Australia has an obligation to notify the Ramsar Convention Secretariat if the ecological character of a listed Ramsar site has changed, is changing, or is likely to change due to technological developments, pollution or other human-induced interference.

Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands is Crown Land managed by the South Australian Government as a conservation park under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*. A management plan for the Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands Ramsar site has been prepared by the South Australian Government which takes into account the Australian Ramsar Management Principles (*EPBC Regulations 2000*). The overarching vision of the plan is to ensure that the Piccaninnie Ponds wetlands retain their ecological, cultural and social values.

Why visit Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands?

Each year around 20,000 people visit Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands. One of the main attractions is cave diving in the crystal clear deep water. Visitors can snorkel or dive down into the underwater caverns to explore the majestic white walls of sculptured limestone. A permit is required to snorkel or dive and bookings are essential. For more information call (08) 8735 1177 or visit www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/home.

Other activities at the site include bushwalking, bird watching, education, nature observation, and recreational fishing on the nearby beaches. Visitors can walk along the beach areas or follow a trail through coastal wattle and bearded heath to the pond's outlet. There are inland boardwalks to a lookout which provides views over the wetlands. Educational tours can be organised by the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.

Access to the site is via the Piccaninnie Ponds Road and it is open to visitors all year round.

More information

Australia's Ramsar wetlands:
www.environment.gov.au/wetlands

The EPBC Act:
www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html

The Ramsar Convention:
www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-home/main/ramsar/1_4000_0__

Contact

This factsheet was prepared by the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC) in consultation with the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR).

For enquiries about Australia's Ramsar wetlands and the EPBC Act contact DSEWPaC on 1800 803 772 or by emailing ciu@environment.gov.au

For enquiries about the management of Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands or information on visiting the site, contact DEWNR on (08) 8204 1910 or by emailing DEWNR.CustomerServiceCentre@sa.gov.au

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