



## 13. External Territories

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### Introduction

THE SECOND EDITION OF *A DIRECTORY OF IMPORTANT WETLANDS IN AUSTRALIA* IN 1996 CONTAINED INFORMATION ON SIX WETLANDS in Australia's External Territories (Usback 1996). Information on these wetlands has been updated for this edition, including the bioregional classification used. In the intervening period the majority of wetlands on land owned or managed by the Commonwealth have been examined in detail, many for the first time. A significant number of these sites meet the Criteria for inclusion and have been included in the Directory (refer Table 1.1).

Three new wetlands in the External Territories have been added in this edition: Mermaid Reef, "The Dales" on Christmas Island, and Heard and McDonald Islands. The location of each of the listed sites is illustrated in Figure 11.

The External Territories wetlands occur across a wide range of Biospheres, located as they are in the Indian, Pacific and Southern Oceans, and are subject to different climatic and oceanic influences that have shaped the characteristics of the wetlands present. The islands or reefs themselves originate from oceanic, continental and coralline influences. The wetlands therefore contain a diversity of wetland types and associated physical, hydrological and ecological values.

The variety of the wetlands in the External Territories is well illustrated by comparing Heard Island in the south and Ashmore Reef in the tropics. Heard Island contains the only active volcano on Australian soil, is 80% covered by ice and is actively shaped by glaciers, whereas Ashmore Reef has a monsoonal climate and has close biological affinities with Indonesia in the coral fauna it supports.

One of the wetland types least well represented in the Directory, A3—Coral reefs, is well represented in the Commonwealth wetlands of the External Territories.

Most of the External Territories areas were originally proclaimed and protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975*, in recognition of their high conservation value. All of these are now protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and some sites, such as Heard and McDonald Islands, have specific legislation that also applies. All of the sites in the External Territories are managed for the Commonwealth by the Department of the Environment and Heritage.

The Department of the Environment and Heritage is required to prepare management plans for these wetlands or the protected areas that contain them. The plans identify and outline strategies for dealing with both current and potential threats that would adversely affect their values, including the ecological character of the wetlands.

## Summary analysis

The Directory describes 9 nationally important wetlands in the External Territories. The distribution of nationally important wetlands in the External Territories (including Ramsar wetlands) is shown in Figure 11. A list compiling data on bioregion, site area, wetland type and criteria for inclusion for each wetland is provided at the end of this chapter.

The bioregional information for nationally important wetlands in the External Territories has been updated since the second edition of the Directory. The bioregional framework introduced by the Interim Marine and Coastal Regionalisation for Australia (IMCRA) version 3.3, has been used to replace bioregional information previously derived from the IUCN regional classification (Kelleher *et al.* 1995). Further information on IMCRA version 3.3 is available in the ANZECC report Interim Marine and Coastal Regionalisation for Australia (Thackway and Cresswell 1998). The number and area of nationally important wetlands occurring in IMCRA regions is detailed in Table 13.1.

**Table 13.1** Number and area of nationally important wetlands in the External Territories occurring in IMCRA Regions

IMCRA Region	IMCRA code	No. of Sites	Area (ha)
Oceanic Shoals	OSS	2	112,284
Norfolk Province	NorfP	1	188,000
Sunda Province	SunP	3	22,123
Kerguelen Province	KergP	1	1,860
Group 16	Group 16	2	844,160
<b>Total</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>1,168,427</b>

Fourteen of the 40 wetland types are found in the External Territories, with the majority of these being Marine and Coastal Zone wetland types (refer to Table 13.2). The most commonly represented types are A3—Coral reefs (n=6) and A6—Estuarine waters (n=6). Only five of the Inland wetland types and no Human-made wetlands are represented. The Wetland classification system and Criteria for inclusion in the Directory are explained in Chapter 2.

**Table 13.2** Number of External Territories sites in each Wetland type

**A—Marine and Coastal Zone wetlands**

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12
<b>Total</b>	1	3	6	2	6	0	2	0	1	1	1	0

**B—Inland wetlands**

	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	B12	B13	B14	B15	B16	B17	B18	B19
<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	0

**C—Human-made wetlands**

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9
<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The most common reason for inclusion in the Directory is because these wetlands are good examples of their types within their biogeographic region (Criterion 1, n=8) (refer to Table 13.3).

**Table 13.3** Number of External Territories sites included under each Criterion

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Total</b>	8	5	6	6	7	3

## List of nationally important wetlands in the External Territories

Wetland name	Old Reference No.	New Reference No.	IMCRA Region	Area (ha)	Wetland type(s)	Criteria for inclusion
Ashmore Reef	XT001CO	EXT001	OSS	58300	A2, A3, A4, A5, A7	1, 3, 4, 5
Coringa Islet, Herald and Magdelaine Cays	XT002CO	EXT002	Group 16	160	A3, A5	2, 3, 4, 5
Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs	XT003CO	EXT003	Norf P(b)	188000	A3	1, 4, 5, 6
Hosnie's Spring, Christmas Island	XT004CO	EXT004	SunP(b)	1	A9, B14, B17	1, 2, 5, 6
Lihou Reef	XT005CO	EXT005	Group 16	844000	A3, A5	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Pulu Keeling National Park	XT006CO	EXT006	SunP(a)	122	A2, A3, A4, A5	1, 3, 5, 6
Mermaid Reef		EXT007	OSS	53984	A1, A2, A3, A5, A7	1, 2, 3
"The Dales", Christmas Island		EXT008	SunP(b)	22000	B17	1, 4
Heard and McDonald Islands		EXT009	KergP	1860	A5, A10, A11, B6, B15, B16	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

*Note: area figures for the above tables are approximate only.*