



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities

WETLANDS IN AUSTRALIA – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Many different types of organisations and people look after wetlands, from the Australian Government to individual landowners. There are specific roles and responsibilities outlined in the Ramsar Convention, as well as national and state legislation, regarding how Ramsar and other wetlands are managed.

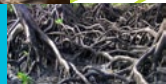
Landowner and site managers

The site manager is generally the landowner or legal manager of the land within the Ramsar site or other wetland. This may be the Australian or state/ territory government, an individual, a community entity, trust, Traditional Owners, a company or other organisation. Private site managers may be supported by the relevant state or territory government in implementing their site responsibilities and fulfilling their Ramsar obligations.

The site manager/landowner is required under the EPBC Act to seek approval prior to undertaking an action within or outside a declared Ramsar wetland if the action has, will have or is likely to have a significant impact on the ecological character of the Ramsar wetland. The action could be a project, a development, an undertaking, an activity or series of activities, or an alteration to any of these things¹.

Site managers/landowners are encouraged to consider the Australian Ramsar management principles² when developing management arrangements, including to:

- manage the Ramsar site(s) to maintain ecological character through applying the principles of wise use and sustainable resource management. This may be through the development and implementation of a management plan or system for the site
- have procedures and monitoring in place to detect if any threatening processes are likely to, or have altered the site's ecological character. This will help to identify if there are any actual or likely changes to ecological character of the site
- take action to manage or remediate Ramsar sites that have undergone an actual or likely change in ecological character.



Site managers/landowners are also encouraged to:

- report any actual or likely changes in ecological character to the Australian Government
- undertake required site level updates and reporting as required (e.g. Ramsar Information Sheet updates)
- seek guidance and assistance about managing and representing the needs of wetlands, if required
- inform the Australian and relevant state governments of any intention to transfer ownership or otherwise sell land on which the wetland is situated
- notify future land managers of the property's Ramsar status, should the property be sold or otherwise change ownership.

State and territory governments

All state and territory governments have enacted comprehensive legislative and policy instruments to protect the environment and conserve natural resources. These frameworks generally apply to all wetlands, both Ramsar listed and non-Ramsar wetlands, within the respective jurisdictions. State and territory wetland management is broadly addressed in legislation covering environment protection, land use planning, protected areas, water and vegetation management. In addition, many state and territory governments have statutory reporting requirements, such as State of Environment and State of the Parks reporting, which include wetland resources.

Many state and territory governments have also developed specific wetland policies as a primary means of implementing the Ramsar Convention and use a combination of regulatory and planning frameworks to protect wetlands and manage impacts.

Key responsibilities of state and territory governments include:

- primary legislative and policy responsibility for wetland management within the respective state/territory
- promoting the conservation of Ramsar sites and wise use of all wetlands
- reviewing the condition of Ramsar sites
- reporting on the status of wetlands in their jurisdiction, including coordinating and updating information (e.g. Ramsar National Report, updates to Ramsar Information Sheets and reporting any changes in ecological character)
- leading the development of proposed Ramsar site nominations within the jurisdiction including consultation and liaison with the Australian Government.

The Australian Government

Key responsibilities of the Australian Government include:

- designating Australian sites for addition to the *List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar List)
- leading the development of national guidance and approaches on implementing the Ramsar Convention in Australia



- participating in partnerships and implementing agreements that seek to protect migratory species and their flyways
- working with state and territory governments to promote the conservation of Ramsar sites and wise use of all wetlands, and review Ramsar wetland site condition
- representing Australia at the triennial Conference of Parties, and collating the National Report for these meetings
- coordinating other reporting to the Ramsar Convention, including updates of Ramsar Information Sheets, reporting any changes to the ecological character of Australia's listed wetlands³ and responding to inquiries from the Secretariat about reports from third parties
- supporting collaboration between the Convention's Oceania member countries
- working with the Ramsar Secretariat on implementation of the Convention and approaches to achieve the wise use of wetlands, both in Australia and internationally
- implementing the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) including regulating actions that may significantly impact on the ecological character of Australia's Ramsar sites, developing management plans for Commonwealth sites and using best endeavours to see plans developed for other Ramsar sites

- implementing the *Water Act 2007*, including the making of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- providing advice on the Ramsar Convention, and any agreed assistance, to wetland managers

The Australian Government also plays a key coordination role in raising awareness about Australia's Ramsar estate and collating national information.

In addition to the above, the Australian Government is the site manager and/or landowner for all or part of a number of Commonwealth sites and has the same management responsibilities as outlined in the site manager section above. These sites include Hosnie's Spring (Christmas Island), Pulu Keeling National Park (North Keeling Island), Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area, Ashmore Reef National Nature Reserve, Coral Sea Reserves (Coringa-Herald and Lihou Reefs and Cays), Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve, The Dales, Christmas Island, Kakadu National Park, and the Riverland Ramsar site (Calperum Station part only).

1 EPBC ACT1999, Chapter 2, Part 3, Division 1, Subdivision B, s16)

2 EPBC Act 1999, Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2,

Subdivision F and EPBC Regulations 2000, Schedule 6

3 Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 3.2

