



Wetlands Australia

THE NATIONAL WETLANDS NEWSLETTER

Ramsar comes to Australia



Ramsar
Convention
Brisbane
Australia
1 9 9 6

Between 19 March and 27 March 1996, approximately 1000 delegates representing about 100 countries will attend the 25th anniversary Conference of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) in Brisbane.

The Ramsar Convention is a global framework for encouraging international and domestic actions to protect the world's wetlands. The 1996 Conference in Brisbane is the first to be held in the southern hemisphere and takes the style of a United Nations congress. Given the venue, this Conference will be able to pay special attention to the unique wetlands of the Pacific Island Region and focus on *the wise use of coastal wetlands*, as one of the many themes.



Brisbane, host city for the 1996 Ramsar Conference.
Photo: QDEH

Member countries and interested observers will review progress in implementing the Convention since it last met in Japan in 1993. Delegates will develop new initiatives, set priorities for the following three years and debate a Strategic Plan, to guide the Convention's development until the year 2002.

As the first contracting party to the Convention, and as the host country for the 1996 Conference, Australia has been given the responsibility of providing a suitable venue and ensuring the Conference runs smoothly. There are also a number of expectations placed upon Australia by the international community. Foremost among these responsibilities is that Australia, as host country will showcase its wetland management practices, particularly at its Ramsar listed wetlands.

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Illustrations: Marjorie Crosby Fairall

Contributions from: Craig Garrett, Kate Langford and Alison Shepherd. MDBC contributions coordinated by Peter Terrill



A cooperative project between the Australian Nature Conservation Agency and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.



What are Coastal Wetlands?

In response to the ever-increasing pressure of human activities on coastal wetlands, one day of the 1996 Ramsar Convention has been dedicated to reviewing the wise use of coastal wetlands in the Oceania region. It is hoped that *Oceania Day* as it has been named, will attract representatives from many Pacific Island countries as well as countries from around the world with similar habitats. No Pacific Island nations are currently signatories to the Convention, and they are being encouraged by existing Contracting Parties to consider joining.

Coastal wetlands are found all around the Australian shoreline in many forms and under many names. They provide habitats for a large variety of plants and animals, including many rare or threatened species. Many are places of high diversity and biological productivity, and important in moderating water quality and quantity.

Coastal wetlands are extremely important to the recreation, culture and heritage of Australians, both indigenous and non-indigenous. Coastal wetlands are also economically important, especially for fisheries and tourism.

In Australia, our coastal wetlands are affected by coastal modifications, coastal dynamics and potentially by sea level changes. Pollutants such as crude oil, heavy metals and sewage, as well as ocean and beach litter, threaten wetlands and the species that depend on

them. Introduced species of seaweed, fish and invertebrates, and problems such as algal outbreaks greatly impact on our coastal wetlands.

This article looks at the main types of coastal wetlands and the major issues and threats affecting them.

Coastlines and shore communities

Australia's intertidal shores are where the sea meets the land. These shores include beaches, cliffs, bays, headlands, estuaries and tidal flats which are often high in salinity, being periodically covered by the sea and exposed to air.

Large numbers of aquatic plants and animals thrive on these shores where the food created by nutrients from the land run into the sea. Beaches are the most popular areas for recreation, and so large numbers of people also use Australia's shores.

Shore communities are threatened by habitat destruction, harvesting of molluscs, crustaceans and sea urchins for food and bait, trampling by fishers and other visitors, and pollutants carried by the sea. Around coastal cities and towns, significant areas of shore have been alienated by development for ports, industry, housing, tourism and recreational facilities.

Coastal Saltmarshes

Saltmarshes cover over 13,000 km in Australia and mostly comprise herbs and low shrubs. They provide vital habitats for many organisms, including some migratory animals and rare species.

These unique environments are threatened by the development of ports, marinas, canal estates, urban areas and industries. Many saltmarshes are also degraded by rubbish dumps, off-road vehicles, invasion by weeds, and drainage for mosquito and sandfly control.

Mangroves

Australia has the third largest area of mangroves in the world, comprising some of the most diverse communities. These tree and shrub species are adapted to the salty conditions of tidal areas. Mangrove forests provide habitats and nurseries for many fish and form a buffer for estuaries from sediments, and for coastlines from storm waves. They are critical habitats for many species.

Development around coastal cities and towns has contributed to the loss of mangroves, with only 8% of communities growing in protected areas. They are threatened by continued clearing and development, and catchment alterations.

Seagrass beds

Australia contains the largest areas of temperate seagrass in the world and one of the largest areas of tropical seagrass. It is critically important habitat for fish, turtles and dugongs. Seagrass also has the ability to trap and stabilise natural levels of sediments. It is seriously threatened by increased sedimentation and



Mangrove forests are of major ecological and economic importance





Saltmarshes are critical for many species
 Photo: P. Brown, NPWS

nutrient pollution from development activities including agriculture. Once lost, seagrasses do not readily recover.

Estuaries

Estuaries are found where fresh and salt waters meet. They are highly productive and important as fish habitat. Much of Australia's urban and industrial development has occurred around estuaries and sheltered bays.

Land clearing in Australia has caused high sediment and nutrient levels in estuaries which can smother seabed organisms and promote biological imbalances. Estuaries have also been affected by the damming of rivers, infilling of wetlands for urban/industrial development, irrigation and flood mitigation schemes. Altering the flows of many rivers has affected the hydrodynamics and flushing characteristics of estuaries.

Some estuaries have become periodically acidic from rivers that drain acidic soils. These may contain high levels of aluminium and iron which can form compounds very toxic to fish.

Temperate Reefs

Temperate reefs have a very high species diversity and a high proportion of endemic species. The southern coastline of Australia contains the world's highest diversity of red and brown algae, lace corals, crustaceans and sea squirts in the world. These reefs are important for recreational diving and commercial and recreational fisheries such as abalone, rock lobster and snapper. Few of Australia's temperate reefs are protected and the human impact on them is not well known.

Coral Reefs

Australia has the largest area of coral reefs of any nation. These ecosystems are among the most productive, diverse and complex in the world. Sadly, 70% of the world's coral reefs are degraded in some way.

Australia's coral reefs are affected by fishing, tourism, sediments and nutrients and are threatened by oil spills. The Great Barrier Reef is under threat from elevated

nutrients and outbreaks of the crown-of-thorns starfish. Ningaloo Reef in WA is threatened by tropical cyclones and outbreaks of coral eating snails.

Coral reefs are generally well protected in Australia, although their management can prove difficult due to their size and remoteness.

Australians are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of coastal wetlands. One quarter of the Australian population lives within three kilometres of the coast, 86% live in the coastal catchments and two-thirds reside in coastal towns and cities. The industries that the Australian coast supports are vital to our economy, and the coast is a popular place for tourism, recreation and education.

Unfortunately many of our coastal wetlands are not well understood, nor protected through parks or reserves. Many are threatened by human impacts such as increasing urbanisation, pollution and shipping.

It is hoped that Oceania Day at the 1996 Ramsar Conference will highlight the importance of coastal wetlands in the Oceania Region. The final session of the day will develop the text of a Conference Resolution on coastal wetlands management.

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Alison Shepherd, Assistant Director of the Wetlands Unit and Peter Bridgewater, CEO of ANCA receive a cheque from Stuart Connolly and Peter Zanker of the Commonwealth Bank. The money will assist with the organisation of the 1996 Ramsar Conference.

Continued from page 1

The Federal Government is keen to use the 1996 Ramsar Conference as an occasion to announce the nomination of several additional Wetlands of International Importance. Presently Australia has 42 sites listed, covering a total area of 4.6 million hectares. While this is significant, there are many unlisted Australian wetlands which would qualify as Wetlands of International Importance.

A trade exhibition will be held between 8.00am–8.00pm on Monday 25 March and Tuesday 26 March, 1996. The exhibition will be a practical way of informing delegates and others with an interest in wetlands conservation, of Australian technologies and wetland management methods.

Apart from being exposed to technical displays, wetland conservation discussions and new management techniques, those countries considering signing the Convention who attend the Brisbane Conference will see first hand how the Convention operates. A series of workshops will address issues including cooperation between Ramsar and other international treaties, indigenous people's involvement in wetland management, community based wetlands management, best practice in Environmental Impact Assessment, and development of National Wetland Policies.

Oceania Day is scheduled for Tuesday March 26 and is one of three Conference days that will focus on specific wetland management issues. In keeping with the goal of encouraging involvement from Pacific Island nations in the Ramsar Convention, the Oceania Day theme will be *Paradise under Pressure: Conservation and Wise Use of Coastal Wetlands*. Oceania Day is an opportunity to review issues affecting coastal wetland management in the Pacific Island Region. Additional technical workshops during the Conference will address topics such as management planning for wetlands, monitoring of ecological character of wetlands and the value of wetlands as fish habitat.

In addition to providing relevant information during technical workshops, Australia will also provide input into the policy considerations at the Conference. This

will allow Contracting Parties to address new challenges and define appropriate priorities for the Convention.

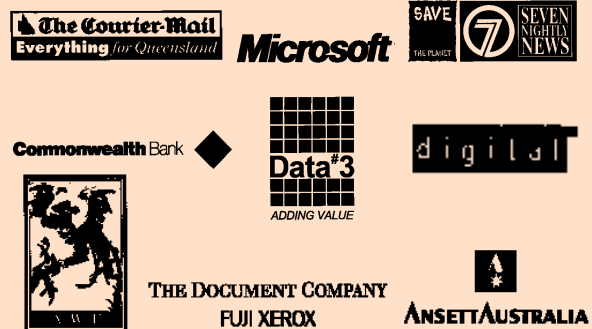
On Thursday 21 March 1996, the *Strategic Plan, 1997–2002* will be tabled for discussion. During the ensuing two days, technical sessions will allow all delegates to discuss recommendations for improvements to the plan, and then submit those improvements to the main forum. Through the Conference, all member countries and observer delegations will have the opportunity to influence the direction of the Ramsar Convention for the next six years.

To conclude the Conference, a farewell party with an Oceania theme will be held on the evening of Tuesday 26 March.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Australian organisers of the 1996 Ramsar International Wetlands Conference express their gratitude for the support provided by the following sponsors

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Who's Who at Ramsar?

Peter Bridgewater,

Chair of the 1996 Ramsar Conference:

Dr. Bridgewater has been appointed as the Conference Chair with the full support of the Convention's Standing Committee. He has been Director of the Australian Bureau of Flora and Fauna, Chief Scientist of the UK Nature Conservancy Council and since 1990 has been Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Nature Conservation Agency.

Dr. Bridgewater serves on a number of international committees, commissions and councils, which includes his current commitment to the Ramsar Conference. He has been Chair of the International Whaling Commission since 1994, is Chair of the Standing Committee for the Convention on Migratory Species and Chair of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Intergovernmental Coordinating Council.

Delmar Blasco,

Secretary General of the Ramsar Bureau:

Mr Blasco took up his duties as Secretary General of the Ramsar Bureau in 1995. Prior to this appointment he served as Executive Director of the Environment Liaison Centre International in Nairobi, Kenya, and as head of the Membership and External Relations Division of The World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Coming directly from the post of Executive Director of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies in Geneva, Mr. Blasco has had ample experience running large, international organisations. He sees his post on the Ramsar Bureau as an opportunity to make an even greater difference to international cooperation on environmental issues.

Louise Lakos,

Chairperson of the 1993–1996

Ramsar Standing Committee:

As Chairperson of the Ramsar Standing Committee, Ms. Lakos coordinates the interim activities between Ramsar Conferences; the review of documents for consideration at Ramsar Conferences; the supervision of policy implementation by the Ramsar Bureau and the review of applications for projects support by the Wetland Conservation Fund.

Peter Bridgewater, CEO of ANCA will Chair the 1996 Ramsar Conference



Ms. Lakos has a great deal of experience with intergovernmental organisations and convention secretariats. Along with her Ramsar commitments, Ms. Lakos is also Vice-Chair of the Council of Europe's Naturopa Centre and a member of the Steering Committee for the Protection and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats.

Representing Australia

With the appointment of Peter Bridgewater as Conference Chair, the Australian delegation to Ramsar will be led by Ms Alison Russell French, Executive Director of the Landscape Biodiversity Directorate of ANCA and Mr Howard Bamsey, Australia's Ambassador for the Environment. Dr Max Finlayson from the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist will be the Senior Adviser on technical matters.

Other Commonwealth Government representatives on the delegation include Ms Kristianne Hermann from the Department of Primary Industry and Energy, Mr Paul Flanagan from AusAID and Ms Lyn Tomlin from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Representing the Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council (ANZECC) will be Mr Jim Lane from the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management and Des Boyland from the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage.

Mr Jonathan Nadji, a Traditional Owner from Kakadu National Park, former Chair of its Board of Management and active in the Northern Land Council will provide advice on matters of interest to indigenous Australians. Ms Dianne Tarte, from the Australian Marine Conservation Society, will represent the Australian Wetlands Alliance and industry interests will be represented by Mr Duncan Leadbitter from the Australian Seafood Industry Council.

Macquarie Perch
(Macquaria australasica) is a secretive fish whose distribution has been greatly reduced. It remains only in the cooler upper reaches of the Murray-Darling Drainage in NSW.





North Keeling Island. Photo: John Hicks

Australia's 1996 Ramsar Nominations

As host of the Sixth Ramsar Conference, Australia will demonstrate its commitment to the Ramsar Convention by nominating at least five new wetlands for Ramsar Listing. These will include the Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area, Qld; Pulu Keeling National Park, Cocos (Keeling) Islands; Currawinya Lakes, Qld; Ginini Flats Wetland Complex, ACT; and wetland components of Kakadu National Park Stage III, NT.

Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area (Queensland):

Shoalwater Bay is a diverse embayment bounded by 330km of coastline. It contains around half the wetland-types found in central-east Queensland and a variety of relatively undisturbed ecosystems. The area is of high conservation value because it is the largest wilderness area within the Central Mackay Coast. Significant populations of rare and threatened species live at the Bay, and it supports 43% of all mangrove species recorded in Australia.

The Bay contains a high diversity of freshwater, marine and estuarine fish which contribute to important commercial fisheries. Evidence suggests the Bay is inhabited by local fish species that are either vulnerable, rare or endangered and that it sustains around one third of Australia's bird fauna species.

Nomination of this wetland area has been a cooperative effort involving the Department of Defence, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage and the Australian Nature Conservation Agency.

Kakadu National Park (Northern Territory):

Kakadu Stage I was designated a Ramsar Site in 1982. The Board of Management of the Park now considers it appropriate to extend the boundaries of this site to incorporate much of the upper catchment of the South



*Shoalwater Bay on the Central Mackay Coast, Qld
Photo: Sam Usback*



Alligator River. Such an expansion closes many gaps in the protection of wetlands in the Alligator River Region and includes northern floodplains that are outstanding examples of the monsoonal tropics, complemented by diverse mangrove forests. Of the 1,600 plant species identified in Kakadu National Park, 58 are considered rare or threatened.

Over two million waterbirds use these wetlands during the annual dry season, including 35 species of wader that migrate from the sub-arctic. One quarter of all known native freshwater fish species are found in Kakadu and it is noted for being important in the conservation of the vulnerable Green and Loggerhead Turtles. Many unique animal species such as the Northern Nail-tail Wallaby and the Rock Ring-tailed Possum are found in the Park, as are breeding populations of freshwater and saltwater crocodiles.

Pulu Keeling National Park:

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands comprise 27 coral islands that form two atolls. They support extensive stands of Ironwood, approximately 525 fish species and internationally recognised seabird colonies. Of the 19 bird species recorded there, 13 are listed on the bilateral migratory bird agreements Australia has with Japan and China.

North Keeling Island is owned, under trust, by the Cocos (Keeling) Island Shire Council. It's nomination for Ramsar listing has been proposed by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency with the full support of the Cocos (Keeling) Island Shire Council.

The Currawinya National Park (Queensland):

The Currawinya National Park consists of dunefields, lakes, claypans and saltpans. The 151,300 hectares were proclaimed Currawinya National Park in 1991, and because of its national and international significance, the Queensland Government is seeking its nomination as a Ramsar site.

The Park consists of numerous lakes, ranging from fresh water to salt water. The two major lakes, Lake Wyara and Lake Numalla, are separated by only



South Alligator Floodplains, Kakadu National Park, area recognised under the Ramsar Convention



*Ephemeral wetlands in Currawinya National Park, QLD
Photo: QDEH*

three kilometres of low sand deposits and are considered important because no other permanent wetlands in arid or southern Australia consistently supports such high numbers of waterbirds, wildlife and uncommon plant communities.

Ginini Flats Wetland Complex (Australian Capital Territory):

This site includes a series of interconnected flats known as Ginini Flats and Cheyenne Flats. Situated in Namadgi National Park, these wetlands represent one of the largest, deepest and least disturbed sub-alpine bogs in south-east Australia. Ginini Flats support a number of significant flora and fauna, most of which are at the northern limit of their habitat range. The complex has been recommended for Ramsar listing by the ACT Government.

Remaining relatively undisturbed, Ginini wetlands are particularly important for the conservation of the rare Corroboree Frog. The wetlands complex provides a number of suitable breeding sites and the population it holds is the largest known in Australia.

The Federal Government expects that as the Ramsar Conference draws nearer, more sites will be nominated for listing.

wet on the net

Congratulations to Joanne Krysinski, Michelle Bolle and the students at Avila College in Victoria for their project on wetlands. Through the internet, students contacted other school groups in Australia and the United States that were interested in exchanging information on wetlands and migratory birds. The students also produced a report based on their investigations into conservation issues relating to wetlands around Melbourne.



Wetlands of the Murray-Darling Basin

There are more than 30,000 wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin ranging from the fens and bogs of alpine watersheds to the backwaters, billabongs, cowals, marshes, swamps and lakes of the floodplains of our major rivers. Many upland wetlands and some in the arid interior, such as the hypersaline wetlands near Horsham in Victoria's Wimmera region, depend on relatively small local catchments or 'closed' catchments to sustain them. However, the greatest number and expanse of wetlands within the Basin are located on its river floodplains. The health of these Floodplain Wetlands depends very much on continued access to the flows and floods arising in upstream catchments. The wetlands themselves contribute to the health of downstream catchments. They may hold water permanently or dry out for part of the year, or for several consecutive years, filling again only when flood waters spread to them.

Ramsar wetlands

All eight wetlands listed on the Ramsar register of internationally important wetlands within the Basin are floodplain wetlands. They represent a broad range of types in terms of biological, climatic, hydrological and geomorphic characteristics. The following selection demonstrates this variety and looks at some of the issues impacting on these wetlands.

The Kerang Wetlands

The Kerang wetlands are made up of a series of permanent and seasonal lakes covering 9,172 hectares, most of which is classed as permanent, open freshwater marsh. It is a favoured breeding site for large numbers of waterbirds, but has been placed under significant pressure from surrounding landuse and recreation demands. The problem of salinity is having a particularly significant impact on this region, and protection programs for the wetlands have been given a high priority in salinity management plans.



A breeding colony of white and straw-necked ibis in the Kerang wetlands. Generally regarded as the most important ibis breeding area in Australia, the lakes of the wetland system regularly host tens of thousands of birds nesting on trampled platforms of lignum.
Photo: David Eastburn, MDBC

The Macquarie Marshes

The Macquarie Marshes cover about 200,000 hectares of the Macquarie River floodplain north of Warren in northwestern NSW. The wetlands consist of open water lagoons, mixed marsh and water couch communities, reed beds, red gum, coolibah and blackbox woodlands. They depend on floodwaters distributed by the complex of effluents and anabranches of the lower Macquarie River. Some 18,150 hectares of the area is reserved in the Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, a Ramsar listed site.

Upstream catchment activities and water diversions as well as local landuse have had a major impact on the health of the Macquarie Marshes. Damming of the river and regulation of water for irrigation has led to a reduction



Flood waters in the Northern Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve which is dominated by extensive reed beds bordered by red gum woodlands distributed along a braided channel system.
Photo: David Eastburn, MDBC



and magnitude of flooding. This has caused vast areas of the marsh to dry out and die, yet at the same time created impacts such as waterlogging and salinisation in areas adjacent to major permanently flowing channels. Despite this, the Macquarie Marshes still represent a unique example of inland reed swamp and floodplain woodland, and they provide a drought refuge when other wetlands in more arid areas are dry.

The Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes

The Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes site consists of a series of perennial and intermittent freshwater lakes that are mainly fed from the Murray River via Chalka Creek. The Lakes are within the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. In addition to the lakes' Ramsar listing, the park is a designated Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere program. Upstream regulation of the Murray River has caused a general reduction in the winter/spring flood peaks, inflow frequency and duration of flooding in the lakes.

Lake Albacutya

Unlike most wetlands in the Basin which depend on periodic flooding as rivers break their banks, Lake Albacutya in Victoria's Mallee, is a terminal wetland fed by flows from the Wimmera River and Outlet Creek.



Nevertheless, Lake Albacutya still faces the same problems and pressures as others in the Basin. Extensive diversions of water upstream in this system have resulted in prolonged drying out of the lake and there are only limited prospects of returning the lake to its natural filling and drying pattern.

Wetlands Management

Wetlands throughout the Murray-Darling Basin are recognised as integral components of a healthy and biologically diverse river system. Their conservation and wise management are essential if



The Hattah-Kulkyne Ramsar site on the Murray floodplain in Victoria's far northwest.
Photo: K. Patterson, DCNR

values, such as wildlife habitat and drought refuge, flood mitigation, water quality control, agriculture as well as research, education and recreational assets, are to be maintained and enhanced.

Many of these values have been degraded through impacts such as changed river and floodplain hydrology, changed water quality, unsustainable land-uses within wetlands and their upstream catchments, introduction of exotic plants and animals, rising saline water tables as well as filling and draining.

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission is developing a *Floodplain Wetlands Management Strategy* aimed at helping to reverse the degradation of our wetlands. The goal of the strategy is:

'to maintain and, where possible, enhance floodplain wetland ecosystems in the Murray-Darling Basin for the benefit of present and future generations'

Through its Natural Resources Management Strategy (NRMS) the Commission has already funded many wetland research projects and community wetland management initiatives, many of which centre around Ramsar sites. The Floodplain Wetlands Management Strategy provides a focus for further investment in targeted research, development of databases, management guidelines, educational resources and other projects which will provide the knowledge, tools and community involvement necessary to make significant progress towards the above goal.

Ramsar listed Wetlands

- 1 The Corong & Lakes (140 500ha) Alexandrina & Albert
- 2 "Riverland" including the Chowilla Wetlands complex (36 600ha)
- 3 Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes (1 018ha)
- 4 Lake Albacutya (10 700ha)
- 5 Kerang Wetlands (9 172ha)
- 6 Gunbower Forest (19 450ha)
- 7 Barmah Forest (28 500ha)
- 8 Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve (18 200ha) within the Macquarie Marshes (190 000ha)

Other important wetlands

- 9 Great Cumbung Swamp
- 10 Lowbidgee Wetlands
- 11 Edward-Wakool anabranch system
- 12 Millewa Forest
- 13 Narran Lakes
- 14 Booligal Wetlands
- 15 Gwydir Wetlands
- 16 Lake Cowal
- 17 Darling Anabranch Lakes
- 18 Paroo River Wetlands
- 19 Talyawalka Creek Lakes
- 20 River Murray Floodplain Wetlands – more than 7 000 Wetlands from Hume Dam to the Murray Mouth



A dry Lake Albacutya in Victoria's mallee. The Lake last filled in the mid 70's and has been generally dry since 1983.
Photo: L.H Smith, DCNR



conferences

Shorebird Conference

Two days prior to Ramsar, on 16 and 17 March, the Australasian Wader Studies Group will host an International Conference at the Queensland Museum in Brisbane.

Entitled *Shorebird Conservation in the Asia-Pacific Region* the Conference will attract representatives from most countries in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. A flyway describes a geographic region over which shorebirds migrate. There are three major flyways around the world.

The Conference will conduct discussions about the threats to migratory shorebirds and will develop a comprehensive plan outlining conservation actions.

A program of workshops, overviews, case studies and presentations from experts will outline options for improving shorebird conservation. The Conference will provide the opportunity for feedback on the proposed Asia-Pacific Shorebird Action Plan and the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network: a cooperative international program for the conservation of shorebirds and their habitat. All recommendations arising from these discussions will be passed on to Ramsar Conference delegates.

For more information, contact Phil Straw on (02) 290 1810

International Wetland Conference for Scientists

Wetlands for the Future is the title given to the International Association of Ecology (INTECOL) international wetlands conference to be held in Perth from 22–28 September this year.

Since 1980, these international wetland meetings have been held every four years in cities throughout the world. They provide a major forum for wetland scientists to exchange ideas, information and enthusiasm.

The main focus of the 1996 INTECOL Conference will be on understanding wetlands now, the importance of conservation and management, and the role of technology in maintaining wetlands in the future.

Delegates will have a chance to get their feet wet with a number of field excursions planned for before, during and after the Conference. There will also be an exhibition/display and plenty of social events, some with a very distinctive Australian flavour.

The Australian Nature Conservation Agency and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission are sponsoring this Conference. To obtain more information, telephone the Conference Secretariat on (09) 380 2433 or (09) 380 3181.

Expedition to Study Migratory Shorebirds

This year will be the sixteenth time scientists, bird experts and other keen hands have travelled to Roebuck Bay, 80 Mile Beach and Port Headland Saltworks, in north-western Australia, to investigate the habits of migratory shorebirds. This region is one of the foremost in the world for waders, with up to three quarters of a million individuals from 50 species visiting these three locations during annual migrations.

The expedition is to last for seven weeks and will involve around 60 participants from 13 different countries. Participants will collect information on the shorebirds as they gather in the north-west just before migration through Asia to their breeding grounds. This research will help determine the physiology of migration, migratory routes, and the success of last year's breeding season.



Sharp-tailed Sandpipers occur on freshwater wetlands and in coastal areas around Australia

Shorebirds have been recaptured from as far away as Shanghai, China, in as little as seven days after banding in north-west Australia.

For information on the north-west expedition, contact Clive Minton on (03) 9589 4901.

coming events

- * 16–17 March 1996
Shorebird Conservation in the Asia Pacific Region
Australasian Wader Studies Group,
Brisbane, Queensland
- * 19–27 March 1996
Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Conference
Brisbane, Queensland
- * 17 May 1996
Monitoring Birds and the Environment over the Next Decade
RAOU Office, Melbourne, Victoria
- * 14 June 1996
Australian Wetlands - post Ramsar 1996
RAOU Office, Melbourne, Victoria
- * 22–28 September 1996
Wetlands for the Future, Intecol's V International Wetlands Conference
Perth, Western Australia



A Wetlands Policy for the Commonwealth Government

Over the past 25 years, Australia has been a strong and active supporter of global efforts to acknowledge the importance of wetlands and to modify human practices so that these areas are retained for future generations. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) 1971, to which Australia is a signatory, encourages Contracting Parties to develop policies that ensure wetlands within their jurisdiction are managed in accordance with the 'wise use' guidelines the Convention provides. In response to this obligation, in 1995, the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, Senator the Hon John Faulkner, asked the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) to coordinate the preparation of a Wetlands Policy for the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

The Wetlands Policy and the strategies it will entail, will ensure that the activities of the Commonwealth Government serve to promote the protection of wetlands and where possible, enhance them. In addition, it aims to act as a catalyst, stimulating and enabling all Australian's to participate in wetland conservation.

In July 1995, the National Wetlands Advisory Committee was established by Senator Faulkner to ensure that a range of community views were taken into account during the development of the Wetlands Policy. It includes representatives from a broad cross-section of the community, including Government and non-Government groups.

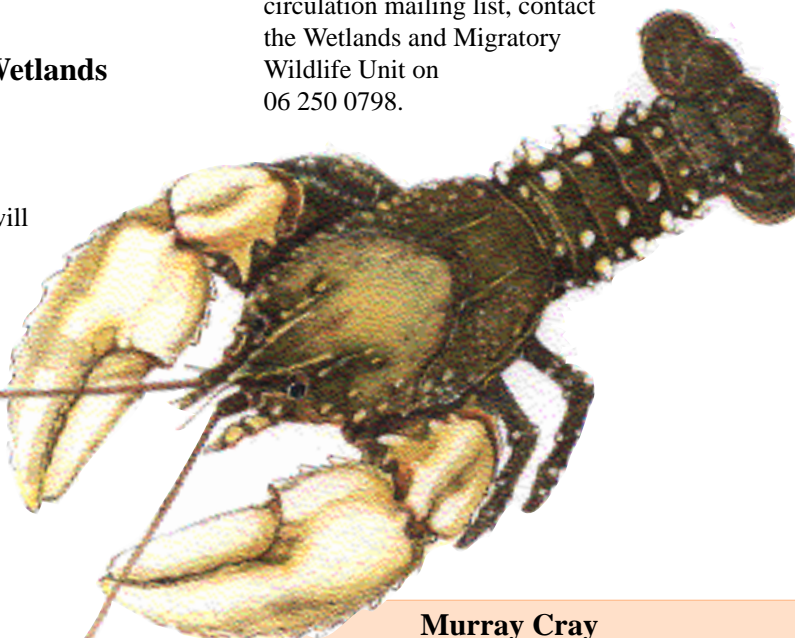


Discussions on the Commonwealth's Wetlands Policy in the Senate Chamber of Old Parliament House

ANCA is also consulting with a wide range of stakeholders. A national workshop was staged by ANCA in December 1995, to obtain input from key interest groups from both Government and non-government organisations and individuals. Also, the formation of an Interdepartmental Committee is ensuring adequate consultation and coordination between key Federal Government Departments.

The goal of the Wetlands Policy, as stated in the draft version, will be to 'conserve, rehabilitate and manage wetlands wisely'. Working primarily through existing programs and decision making mechanisms, the Policy is designed to advance wetland conservation as an integral part of efficient and environmentally responsible delivery of Commonwealth services.

For more information on the Policy or to have your organisation added to the Policy circulation mailing list, contact the Wetlands and Migratory Wildlife Unit on 06 250 0798.



Murray Cray

(*Euastacus armatus*) is the second largest freshwater crayfish in the world, and can grow up to 45cm in length. It occurs in the upper reaches of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers and their tributaries.



Meet the Wetlands People

ANCA's Wetland and Migratory Wildlife Unit:
fax: (06) 250 0384

Director: Dr Bill Phillips

Waterwatch Program

Kate Gowland (06) 250 0797

Wetlands Program

Alison Shepherd (Asst Director) (06) 250 0798
 Russel James (06) 250 0289
 Samantha Usback (06) 250 0714
 Kira Schlusser (06) 250 0393
 Jocelyn Bowden (06) 250 0791
 Melinda Maher (06) 250 0792

Conference Team

Barry Baker (06) 250 0796
 Christine Samuel (06) 250 0385
 John Frey (06) 250 0344
 Kate Langford (06) 250 0784
 Janet Musker (06) 250 0795
 Sean Morton (06) 250 0794

Migratory Wildlife Program

Karen Weaver (06) 250 0352
 Stefanie Pidcock (06) 250 0783

Wetlands International

Oceania Program

Roger Jaensch (06) 250 0779
 Doug Watkins (06) 250 0780

Murray-Darling Basin Commission

ph (06) 279 0100
fax (06) 248 8053

Wetlands management

Peter Terrill (06) 279 0133

Communication and Education

David Eastburn (06) 279 0107



Participants at the 'Wise Use of Wetlands' Workshop gather on the steps of Old Parliament House

Please send contributions to the September issue of 'Wetlands Australia' by 15 August 1996 (address below)

Wetlands and Migratory Wildlife Unit
 Australian Nature Conservation Agency
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 CANBERRA ACT 2601

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