



AUSTRALIAN RAMSAR SITE NOMINATION GUIDELINES

Module 4 of the National Guidelines for Ramsar Wetlands—
Implementing the Ramsar Convention in Australia



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CoP	The Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
DSEWPac	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
ECD	Ecological Character Description
EPBC Act	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>
NGO	Non government organisation
RIS	Ramsar Information Sheet
VCA	Voluntary Conservation Agreement

Executive summary

The *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat* (Ramsar (Iran), 2 February 1971, the Ramsar Convention) encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity to the *List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar List). These sites are commonly known as Ramsar sites.

The Ramsar Convention is seen by the international community as the primary means for conserving wetlands of international significance. Designation as a Ramsar site confers upon it the prestige of international recognition, it also raises the profile of the site; enhances opportunities for management assistance and improves long-term management of the wetland; and increases legislative protection through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Ramsar site managers are responsible for, amongst other things, managing Ramsar sites to maintain the ecological character of the site.

Ramsar site nominations can be initiated by the Australian, state and territory governments, non government organisations (NGOs), community entities, trusts, Traditional Owners, individuals, private landowners or a company. Proposed nominations on state or private land require support from the relevant state government. Nominations for sites wholly within Commonwealth land require Australian Government support. In practice, most Ramsar site nominations are proposed and developed by the state or territory governments, which have priorities for new Ramsar sites and processes for reviewing and supporting Ramsar nominations. Nominations may also be made based on priorities agreed by the Australian, state and territory governments.

The guidelines are intended to facilitate more effective, efficient, and timely Ramsar nominations, and to provide greater transparency and certainty to site managers, governments and the community about the nomination process. The guidelines describe the practical requirements for proposing a Ramsar site nomination including the minimum information required to support a nomination. These guidelines do not cover the strategic identification of new Ramsar sites.

The development of a Ramsar site nomination should be the result of a collaborative process between site managers/landowners and the Australian and state or territory governments. Consultation with the landowner(s) and key stakeholders is an important consideration in both the preparation of a Ramsar nomination and the negotiation of ongoing management arrangements for the site.

To add a wetland to the Ramsar List there needs to be clear evidence that the site is internationally important by providing adequate justification that the site meets at least one of the Ramsar criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance. The nomination will need to be supported by the following documentation: Ramsar Information Sheet; boundary description and map(s); an ecological character description; a management plan or system; and a summary of consultative outcomes for the nomination. The documentation requirements cover the information required for nomination, baseline information on ecological character and management planning for the site. It should be noted that the nomination process can be lengthy and may require considerable resources to complete.

A Ramsar site nomination is considered by the Australian Government on its merits, to ensure that: the site meets the Ramsar criteria for international importance; appropriate consultation with key stakeholders has taken place; suitable management arrangements are in place for the site, including appropriate watering arrangements (where required); ongoing stakeholder engagement arrangements are in place for the site; and whether the site will assist Australia to meet the requirements of the Ramsar Convention's *Strategic Plan*.

The Australian Government processes for reviewing Ramsar site nominations are independent of state or territory government processes and timeframes for developing and proposing site nominations. The final decision to add a site to the Ramsar List rests with the Australian Government Environment Minister. Once agreed, the Australian Government will forward the nomination to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat for inclusion on the Ramsar List.



Eighty-mile Beach. Sarah Stuart-Smith

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

These guidelines outline the Australian Government's processes and requirements for adding sites to the *List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar List) under the *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat* (commonly known as the Ramsar Convention). These sites become known as Ramsar sites and form part of the Australian Ramsar estate. These guidelines do not cover information and decisions around the strategic identification of Australian sites for addition to the Ramsar List.

This document provides a nationally consistent framework for Ramsar site nominations in Australia and its offshore Territories. It is intended to facilitate more effective, efficient, and timely Ramsar nominations, and to provide greater certainty to site managers, governments and the community about the Ramsar site nomination process and outcomes. It describes the practical requirements for proposing a Ramsar site nomination including the minimum information required to support a nomination. It should be noted that the nomination process can be lengthy and may require considerable resources to complete.

State and territory governments (hereafter referred to as state governments) may have specific additional processes for receiving and undertaking Ramsar site nominations which are not covered in these guidelines.

1.2. The Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention is an international intergovernmental treaty established in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran. The broad aims of the Ramsar Convention are to halt and, where possible, reverse, the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve those that remain through wise use and management.

Wise use is defined as "... the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development^{1,2}." The Ramsar Convention defines ecological character as the combination of the ecosystem components, processes, benefits and services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time (Ramsar Convention 2005). In Australia this is taken to be at the time of listing.

Parties to the Ramsar Convention are required, amongst other things, to

- designate sites³ for the List of Wetlands of International Importance '... on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology'; formulate and implement planning to promote conservation of listed sites, consider appropriate management measures after designation, and formulate and implement planning to promote the wise use of wetlands⁴; and
- arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.⁵

The Contracting Parties have adopted a *Strategic Framework and Guidelines for the Future Development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*⁶ (Strategic Framework). The vision for the Strategic Framework is "to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services". The Strategic Framework is amended through Resolutions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The latest version of the Strategic Framework can be accessed through the Ramsar Convention website, www.ramsar.org.

The *Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan (2009–2015)*⁷ also sets global targets for development of the List, which specifically asks Contracting Parties to consider designating wetland types that are under-represented in the Ramsar List and to work toward ensuring that adequate management planning processes are established prior to listing.

1.3. The Ramsar Convention in Australia

Australia has been a Contracting Party to the Convention since May 1974. The Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPoC) is the Australian Administrative Authority to the Ramsar Convention and, together with relevant Australian and state government agencies and land and water managers, is responsible for the wise use of Australia's wetlands.

The implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Australia is supported by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). A wetland, or part of a wetland, that is designated by the Australian Government under Article 2 of the Ramsar Convention for inclusion on the Ramsar List is a declared Ramsar wetland for the purposes of the EPBC Act. Ramsar wetlands are a matter of national environmental significance that are protected under the Act. The EPBC Act regulates actions that will or are likely to have a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland⁸.

¹ The phrase "in the context of sustainable development" is intended to recognise that whilst some wetland development is inevitable and that many developments have important benefits to society, developments can be facilitated in sustainable ways by approaches elaborated under the Convention, and it is not appropriate to imply that 'development' is an objective for every wetland.

² In the first instance only one site need be designated but Contracting Parties are encouraged to designate more.

³ *Ramsar Convention 1987*, Article 3.1 further clarified in Resolution 5.1 Annex 2

⁴ *Ramsar Convention 1987*, Article 3.1 further clarified in Resolution 5.1 Annex 2

⁵ *Ramsar Convention 1987*, Article 3.2

⁶ Ramsar CoP9 (2005) Resolution IX.1 Annexes A and B

⁷ Ramsar CoP10 (2008) Resolution X.1

⁸ EPBC Act 1999, Part 3 Subdivision B, s16



The EPBC Act also establishes a framework for managing Ramsar listed wetlands through the Australian Ramsar Management Principles⁹. The principles are intended to promote national standards of management, planning, environmental impact assessment, community involvement and monitoring for all Australian Ramsar wetlands in a way that is consistent with Australia's obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

1.4. Wetland definition

The Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as:

"Areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres¹⁰."

[Wetlands] may incorporate adjacent riparian and coastal zones, islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands.¹¹"

Wetlands account for a wide variety of habitat types including rivers, shallow coastal waters and coral reefs. The Ramsar Convention has adopted a wetland classification framework which includes 42 types, grouped into three categories: marine and coastal wetlands; inland wetlands; and human-made wetlands (Ramsar Convention 2009).

Marine and coastal wetlands include marine waters; coral reefs; rocky, sandy, shingle or pebble shores; estuarine waters; intertidal flats, marshes or forested wetlands; coastal lagoons; and coastal subterranean wetlands including karst systems.

Inland wetlands include a range of fresh, saline, brackish and alkaline wetlands such as rivers, streams or creeks; inland deltas; lakes, marshes and pools; geothermal, subterranean and karst wetlands. These wetlands may be seasonal or permanent. Human-made wetlands include a range of purpose built wetlands such as fish ponds; irrigated agricultural land; salt evaporation pans; reservoirs; gravel pits; sewage farms; canals and subterranean wetlands. These wetlands may also be listed under the Ramsar Convention, provided the site meets at least one of the Ramsar listing criteria.

More information about these wetland types is provided in the *Explanatory notes and guidelines for completing the information sheet on Ramsar wetlands* (Ramsar Convention 2009).

1.5. Ramsar listing—benefits

Ramsar listing may have a number of benefits such as:

- regular monitoring and reporting of ecological character;
 - providing opportunities to access expert advice on site-related management issues (e.g. through the Ramsar Convention's personnel, the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel or a Ramsar Advisory Mission, where appropriate);
 - increasing collaboration across all levels of government;
 - attracting increased attention as a tourism destination or as an educational facility; or
 - increasing legislative protection through the EPBC Act and preventing actions that are likely to adversely affect the ecological character of the wetland.
-
- the prestige of international recognition;
 - assisting in formalising the site's conservation status which may result in increased conservation efforts at the wetland and increased opportunities for natural resource management funding at the wetland;
 - focus attention on wetland management and conservation;
 - providing greater security for long term management;

⁹ EPBC Act 1999 Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2, Subdivision 2 s335 and *EPBC Regulations 2000* Schedule 6

¹⁰ *Ramsar Convention 1987*, Article 1.1

¹¹ *Ramsar Convention 1987*, Article 2.1



1.6. Ramsar listing—obligations and responsibilities in the Australian context

The expectation is that Ramsar sites are listed in perpetuity. As a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention, Australia is obliged to promote the conservation of listed sites including considering appropriate management measures after designation. Meeting Australia's obligations under the Ramsar Convention is a shared responsibility across the Australian, state and territory governments as well as site managers.

The following section describes some of the obligations and responsibilities of different parties in relation to Ramsar site nomination and some of the consequential management responsibilities for nominated sites. There may be additional roles and responsibilities related to other aspects of the Ramsar Convention that are not listed below.

Australian Government

Some of the key obligations and responsibilities of the Australian Government in relation to designating and managing sites added to the Ramsar List include:

- designating Ramsar sites on account of international significance in terms of ecology, biology, zoology, limnology or hydrology¹²;
- working with state and territory governments to promote the conservation of Ramsar sites and wise use of all wetlands, and review Ramsar site condition;
- reporting any changes to the ecological character of Australia's listed wetlands¹³ and responding to the Secretariat's inquiries about reports from third parties (Ramsar Convention 2002a);
- developing and implementing management plans for all sites wholly within Commonwealth areas in accordance with the EPBC Act¹⁴;
- using its best endeavours to ensure there are management plans for wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention that are not wholly within Commonwealth areas¹⁵;
- regulating actions that will have, or are likely to have, a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland. This includes relevant actions that occur outside the boundaries of a Ramsar wetland¹⁶;
- providing advice on the Ramsar Convention and any agreed assistance to wetland managers¹⁷; and
- reporting to the regular Conference of the Contracting Parties.

In addition to the above, the Australian Government is the site manager and/or landowner for a number of Commonwealth sites and has the same management responsibilities as outlined in the site manager section below.

¹² Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 2.1, 2.2

¹³ Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 3.2

¹⁴ EPBC Act 1999 Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2, Subdivision 2 s328

¹⁵ EPBC Act 1999 Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2, Subdivision 2 s333

¹⁶ EPBC Act 1999, Chapter 5, Part 3 Division 1, Subdivision B, s16

¹⁷ Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 6.3

State Governments

Many Ramsar site nominations are generated by the state governments. In these cases the state government is responsible for:

- leading the development of the nomination documentation for candidate nominations within the state including the consultation on these nominations;
- liaising with the Australian Government about nominations within the jurisdiction; and
- coordinating and updating information on Ramsar sites within the state (e.g. Ramsar National Report).

In addition to the above, the state government is the site manager or landowner for many sites and has the same management responsibilities as outlined in the site manager section below.

Site Managers/Landowners

The site manager is generally the landowner or legal manager of the land within the Ramsar site. This may be the Australian or state government, an individual, a community entity, trust, Traditional Owner, a company or other organisation. Many sites cross multiple tenures and may have more than one manager/landowner.

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 things.¹⁸

Site managers/landowners are encouraged to consider the Australian Ramsar management principles¹⁹ when developing management arrangements, including:

- managing 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;
- having 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; and
- taking 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; and
- notify future land managers of the property's Ramsar status, should the property be sold or otherwise change ownership.



Pulu Keeling National Park. Robert Thorn

¹⁸ EPBC Act 1999, Chapter 2, Part 3, Division 1, Subdivision B, s16

¹⁹ EPBC Act 1999, Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2, Subdivision F and EPBC Regulations 2000, Schedule 6

2. Nomination requirements

To add a wetland to the Ramsar list there needs to be adequate justification that the site is internationally important and a robust and transparent process for assessing the nomination. The following sections outline the documentation requirements and processes for nominating a Ramsar site.

2.1. Who can nominate a Ramsar site?

Ramsar site nominations can be initiated by the Australian or state governments, non government organisations (NGOs), community entities, trusts, Traditional Owners, individuals, private landowners or a company. In practice, most nominations are proposed by the state governments either from state priorities or in response to a nomination initiated by another party. It should be noted that each state government will have priorities and processes for identifying and supporting a Ramsar nomination.

Any proposed nominations on state or private land require support from the relevant state government (see section 5.2). Third party nominations for sites wholly within Commonwealth land require Australian Government support.

2.2. Who can designate a Ramsar site?

The Ramsar Convention Secretariat only accepts additions to the Ramsar List from the Contracting Party's Administrative Authority. Australian Ramsar site nominations must be made through the Australian Administrative Authority to the Ramsar Convention. The Australian Government will consider Ramsar nominations for sites within each jurisdiction that are proposed by the relevant state government Minister and supported by all relevant nomination documentation (see Section 2.3). The final decision to add a site to the Ramsar List rests with the Australian Government Environment Minister.

2.3. Documentation requirements

In accordance with the Ramsar Convention, appropriate management of Ramsar wetlands includes describing and maintaining the ecological character of the wetland and implementing management planning processes that promote conservation and wise use at the time of listing. The Ramsar Convention suggests that all new Ramsar sites should have effective management arrangements in place before designation. Therefore, to enable the Australian Government to consider and assess a candidate wetland for Ramsar listing and to ensure the best management outcomes for the wetland, the following documents need to be submitted with the nomination:

a) Cover letter from the formal nominator (e.g. Australian, state Minister or delegate for the Australian Ramsar Administrative Authority) to the Australian Government Environment Minister, requesting the inclusion of the site on the Ramsar List, expressing support for the listing and commitment to the on-going management of the site;

b) Completed Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) using the current template developed by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat (www.ramsar.org). See section 7.1. This must include adequate justification against at least one of the Ramsar listing criteria; see section 4.1.

c) Site boundary description and map including an accurate written description of the boundaries of the site,

accurate spatial data, and a suitable map(s) of the site that meets the requirements of the Ramsar Secretariat, the Mapping Specifications for Australian Ramsar Wetlands (DEWHA 2008a) and any other Australian Government requirements; see section 7.2.

d) Ecological character description that meets the requirements of the National framework and guidance for describing the ecological character of Australian Ramsar wetlands (DEWHA 2008b) and any supplementary guidance; see section 7.3.

e) Management plan or management system that meets the requirements of the Australian Ramsar Management Principles (Schedule 6 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000) and any other Australian Government requirements; see section 7.4.

f) Summary of consultative outcomes which demonstrates that adequate and appropriate consultation has been undertaken with key stakeholders (e.g. who was consulted, what mechanisms were used, what is the level of stakeholder support, and whether there are any objections or grievances in relation to the nomination); see section 7.5.

To achieve a positive outcome for the community and the environment the development of a Ramsar site nomination should be the result of a collaborative process between site managers/landowners and the state and Australian governments.

For many sites (other than those wholly on Commonwealth land), the state government will lead, or be involved with, the development of the nomination documentation and consultation on the nomination.

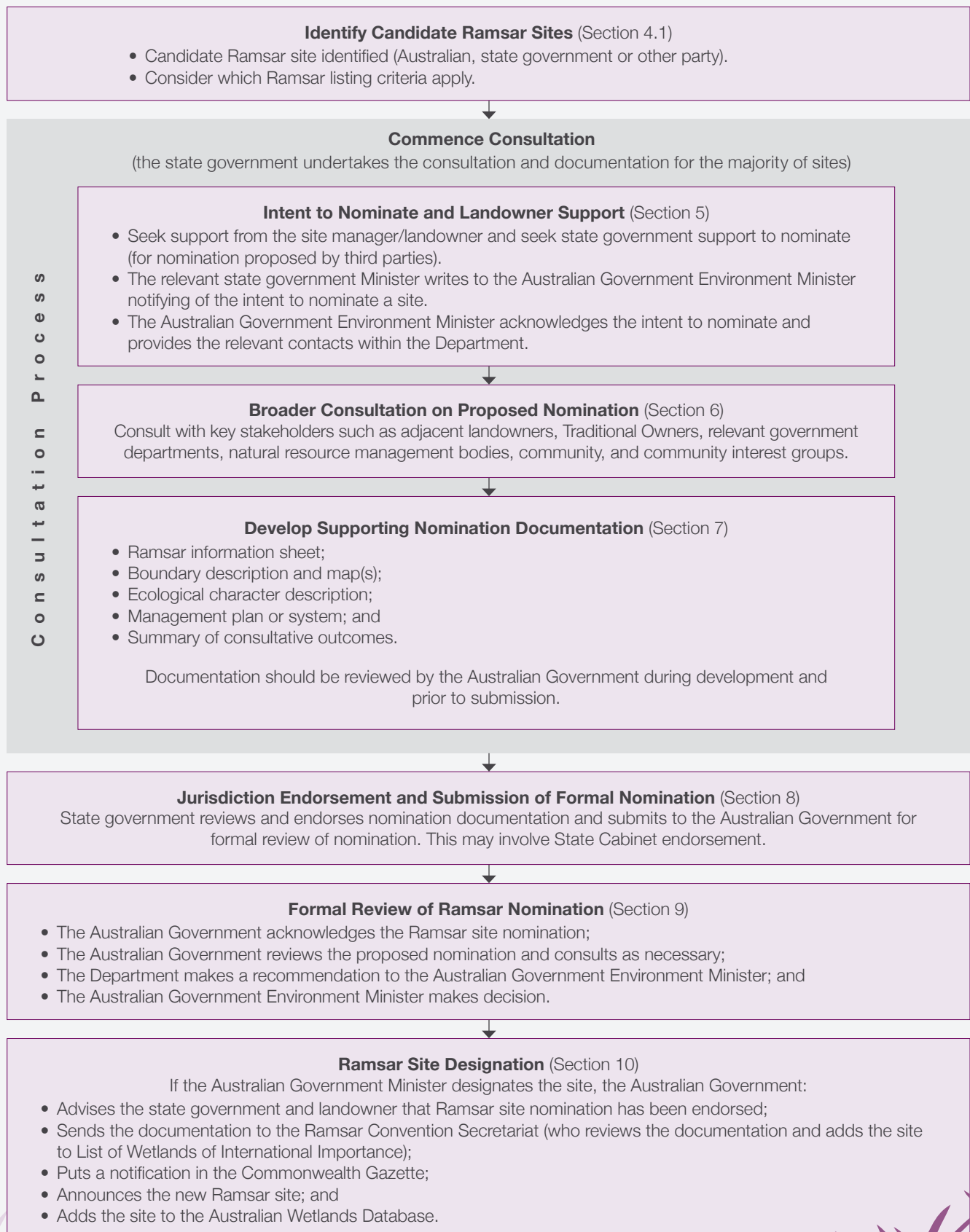
The RIS, ecological character description and management plan should be reviewed by the Australian and the state government prior to submission. This enables the documents to be checked against the Australian Government and Ramsar Convention requirements prior to submission of the formal nomination request. A checklist of documentation requirements is at Appendix 2.

3. The nomination process

Figure 1 provides an overview of the nomination process for Australian Ramsar sites. The steps are described in more detail in subsequent sections. The state governments may have specific additional processes for receiving and undertaking Ramsar site nominations which are not covered in these guidelines.



Figure 1: Overview of the nomination process.



4. Identify candidate Ramsar sites

4.1. Site identification and initial assessment against Ramsar criteria

As described in section 2.1 Ramsar site nominations may be initiated by the Australian or state governments, NGO, community entities, trusts, Traditional Owners, individuals, private land owners or a company. Before proposing a site for nomination, an initial assessment of whether the site meets any of the Ramsar listing criteria should be undertaken. More detailed assessment will be undertaken during the development of the nomination documents but the listing cannot proceed unless the site meets at least one criterion. Justification against each selected criterion is required (see also section 7.1).

Wetlands should be selected for the Ramsar List on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology²⁰. The Ramsar Convention has developed criteria for the designation of Ramsar wetlands which relate to identifying sites that contain representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity. For a wetland to be designated as a Ramsar site it must satisfy one or more of the criteria (Table 1). These criteria are reviewed from time to time.

Table 1—Current (2005) Ramsar criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance²¹

Group A of the criteria: Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types	
	Criterion 1: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region*.
Group B of the criteria: Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity	
Criteria based on species and ecological communities	Criterion 2: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.
	Criterion 3: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region*.
	Criterion 4: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.
Specific criteria based on waterbirds	Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.
	Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1 per cent of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.
Specific criteria based on fish	Criterion 7: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.
	Criterion 8: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.
Specific criteria based on other taxa	Criterion 9: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1 per cent of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.

* In Australia, the biogeographic regionalisation scheme for aquatic ecosystems is the Australian Drainage Division system for inland and coastal ecosystems (Commonwealth of Australia 2011), and the Integrated Marine and Coastal Regionalisation of Australia (IMCRA) for marine ecosystems at the Provincial Bioregions scale (Commonwealth of Australia 2006b).

²¹ COP 9 (2005) Resolution IX.1 Annex B: Revised Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance

²⁰ Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 2



More detailed information about the Ramsar listing criteria and application of the criteria can be found in the current version of the *Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Convention 2008) or the *Explanatory notes and guidelines for completing the information sheet on Ramsar wetlands* (Ramsar Convention 2009).

This guideline is concerned with the process of nomination not the identification of candidate Ramsar sites. However, it should be noted that while many wetlands will meet at least one of the Ramsar criteria for nomination, not all such wetlands will automatically be considered for nomination. Other factors such as land tenure, ability to maintain the ecological character in the long term, representativeness, consideration of alternative management measures (e.g. conservation agreements, protective area tenure), Australian and state government priorities and other factors may influence which sites are nominated. The decision to proceed with the nomination will be made by the state government or, if the wetland is wholly on Commonwealth land, the Australian Government.

5. Intent to nominate and landowner(s) support

5.1. Obtain in-principle support from landowner

To ensure the best management outcomes for the wetland, the nominating party needs to obtain in-principle support for the Ramsar nomination from the landowner(s) of the site. The Commonwealth may designate a wetland for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance kept under the Ramsar Convention only after seeking the agreement of relevant States, self governing Territories and landholders²².

5.2. Seek support from relevant state governments of the intent to nominate

With the exception of nominations wholly within Commonwealth land, all nominations require the support of the relevant state government prior to submitting the nomination to the Australian Government. Where the nomination has not been initiated by the state or Australian Government, the nominating party should write to the relevant state government department responsible for coordinating Ramsar listings. The state government will consider the merit of the nomination and determine whether to proceed.

In the case of third party nominations wholly within Commonwealth land, a written request should be sent to the Australian Government Environment Minister.

5.3. Notify the Australian Government of the intent to nominate

The Australian Government Environment Minister needs to be informed in writing of the intent to nominate a site at the earliest possible time—in the form of a letter, outlining the location of the site, why it is considered internationally important (i.e. which listing criteria are being considered), who is responsible for management, any consultation to date (if applicable), from the relevant state Minister. By notifying the Australian Government of the intent to nominate a site, it allows for greater consideration of the merit of the proposal and helps ensure that nomination requirements are met.

The Australian Government Environment Minister will acknowledge the intent to nominate and will provide the relevant contacts within the Department.

²² EPBC Act 1999 Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2, Subdivision 2 Clauses 326 (1)-(3).

6. Broader consultation

Consultation with key stakeholders is an important consideration in both the preparation of a Ramsar nomination and the negotiation of ongoing management arrangements. Consultation should be transparent and be undertaken with as many relevant stakeholders as possible. Some of the key groups may include: landowners; land and water resource managers; Indigenous Australians, including Traditional Owners who have rights and obligations for the site; surrounding landowners; government management agencies; Catchment Management Authorities or other Natural Resource Management bodies; community; industry; and community interest groups.

The level and type of consultation activities will be influenced by the land tenure, number and type of stakeholders involved and the degree of public/stakeholder interest in the proposed Ramsar nomination. Consultation may be important at several key stages in the nomination process such as:

- securing support for the site nomination from key stakeholders;
- developing the supporting nomination documentation (Section 7), in particular the ecological character description, management plan and communication plan for the site;
- determining the site boundaries (Section 7.2); and
- securing management agreements with land owner or other key parties (if applicable).

For most sites the relevant state government will undertake or be involved with the consultation for sites in that jurisdiction. State governments may have their own specific consultation requirements.

6.1. Traditional Owner consent

Indigenous Australians are major stakeholders in the management and protection of Australia's natural and cultural resources. It is important that consultation with Indigenous Australians who have rights and obligations to the site begin early and continue throughout the nomination process. If the nomination is initiated by a third party or if the site is within the protected area system, it is the policy of some state governments to require traditional owner consent to proceed with a nomination. The relevant state government should be able to provide appropriate contacts.

6.2. Objections/grievances

As part of the consultation process, there should be opportunities for stakeholders to formally provide an objection to the listing or to register any grievances surrounding the nomination process. Details of stakeholder comments including rationale behind any grievances and details of how these grievances have been addressed, or attempted to be addressed, should be recorded in the consultation summary (See section 7.5).

7. Develop supporting documents

The following supporting documents should be drafted to support the nomination:

- Ramsar information sheet (See Section 7.1);
- Boundary description and map (See Section 7.2);
- Ecological character description (See Section 7.3);
- Management plan or system (See Section 7.4) and
- Summary of consultative outcomes (See Section 7.5).

For many sites (other than those wholly on Commonwealth land), the state government will lead, or be involved with, the development of the nomination documentation and consultation on the nomination.

The Australian Government should also be given the opportunity to review these documents during development. This enables documents to be checked and any issues resolved prior to submission. The Australian Government may seek advice from the Ramsar Convention Secretariat on the development of the site documentation.


7.1. Preparing the Ramsar information sheet

The Information Sheet for Ramsar Wetlands, also known as the Ramsar information sheet (RIS), is designed to capture essential information on all designated Ramsar sites. The RIS contains information about the site including the location, boundary and tenure of the site; justification against the listing criteria; physical, ecological and hydrological features of the site; wetland types; noteworthy flora and fauna; conservation measures; and land use, recreation and tourism information about the site. The RIS is submitted to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat by the Administrative Authority of each Contracting Party and should be reviewed and updated (where required) every six years or on the occasion of any significant change in a site's ecological character.

The RIS should be reviewed by the relevant state management agency, site manager (if applicable) and the Australian Government before being submitted as a final version. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat recommends that a draft RIS be submitted for review via the Australian Government to ensure that the RIS meets the Ramsar Convention Secretariat's requirements and enables the Ramsar Convention Secretariat to seek additional information or changes to the RIS prior to the site being added to the Ramsar List.

Listing criteria

The RIS contains the justification for sites being included on the Ramsar List. A specific explanation is needed of how each selected criterion applies to the proposed Ramsar site. This description must not just restate the criterion, but provide the necessary evidence and other details to describe the way in which that criterion applies specifically at the site being designated. If adequate justification is not provided, the Australian Government may seek additional information prior to accepting the RIS and the Ramsar nomination.



Detailed information about the wetland criteria and details about their application can be found in the *Explanatory notes and guidelines for completing the information sheet on Ramsar wetlands* available on the Ramsar website (Ramsar Convention 2009).

7.2. Ramsar site boundary description and map

Determine the boundaries of the site

Detailed guidance on determining the site boundaries is provided in the current version of the *Strategic Framework and Guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Convention 2008). The main points from these guidelines are provided below.

The boundaries of a Ramsar site should allow management of the site to be undertaken at the appropriate scale for maintaining the ecological character of the wetland (Ramsar Convention 2008).

When determining the boundary the following should be considered:

- including the entire wetland as well as a buffer zone. This is particularly important for small and vulnerable sites which may be more sensitive to outside influences.
- including relevant riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands²³.
- including areas of land necessary to provide and maintain the hydrological functions needed to conserve the international importance and integrity of the site.

Where it is not possible to include the entire wetland, it may be useful to include the following within the boundaries of the wetland:

- complexes or mosaics of vegetation communities, not just single communities of importance;
- zones of communities or communities showing natural gradients (e.g. wet to dry, saline to brackish, oligotrophic to eutrophic, rivers to banks);
- all phases of natural succession of vegetation communities (e.g. from open shallow water, to communities of emergent vegetation, to reed swamp, to peatland, to wet forest). The site may need to be large enough to ensure that pioneer stages can continue to develop within the Ramsar site; and/or
- terrestrial habitat of high conservation value that is continuous with the wetland and will enhance its own conservation value (Ramsar Convention 2008).

In many cases, the boundary of one property may not capture the whole wetland and a collaborative approach to the nomination and management of the site may be required. Planning and management processes should consider how to manage any potentially negative impacts arising from land-use practices on adjoining land or within the drainage basin to maintain the ecological character of the Ramsar site. This should be addressed in the management plan or system for the wetland.

Ideally, the boundary of a Ramsar site should be geographically fixed and should not be defined in terms of features that are likely to change position over time, for example, rivers, shorelines, fences, levees or roads. However, this is not always possible, particularly for wetlands, and steps should be taken to ensure that any important mobile ecological features of the Ramsar site are not likely to migrate outside the proposed boundaries over time. The Ramsar boundary should be chosen to accommodate the likely long term movement of such features.

Cluster of wetlands

In some cases it may be more meaningful to list a cluster of wetlands as one Ramsar site. The Ramsar Convention's Strategic Framework indicates that:

"clusters of sites could be considered for listing where these are:

- i) component parts of a hydrologically linked system (e.g., a complex of valley mires, or system of groundwater-fed wetlands along a spring line, or karst and subterranean wetland systems); and/or
- ii) linked in their use by a common population of animal (e.g., a group of alternative roost or feeding areas used by one population of waterbirds); and/or
- iii) formerly geographically continuous before being separated by human activity; and/or
- iv) otherwise ecologically interdependent (e.g., sites forming part of a distinct wetland district/ landscape with a common developmental history and/or supporting discrete species populations); and/or
- v) found in arid or semi-arid zones, where complexes of dispersed wetlands (sometimes of a non-permanent nature) can both individually and collectively be of very great importance for both biological diversity and human populations (e.g., essential links in incompletely known chains)." (Ramsar Convention 2008, p14)

Where a cluster of wetlands is designated, the rationale for treating the component parts collectively as one listed site should be clearly stated in the RIS (Ramsar Convention 2008). A number of Australian Ramsar sites contain a cluster of wetlands. For example Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes, Becher Point Wetlands and Kerang Wetlands.

Verify the land tenure

There are no limitations on Ramsar nomination based on land tenure. The land tenure of a wetland will influence who is responsible for managing the site. Wetlands on public land are generally the responsibility of government agencies, whereas those that are on private land will be managed by the landowners. Some wetlands may cross different land tenures and will be jointly managed by the landowners and the government agencies responsible for reserves and wildlife.

²³ Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 2.1



As part of determining the boundary of the candidate site, the land tenure should be verified. This will ensure that all landowners are included in the process and determine how much of the waterways are within the landowners' tenure. Broad land tenures include:

- **Public land** belongs to the Crown and includes land which is reserved, owned for public purposes or vacant. For example, reserves for nature conservation, forestry, marine conservation, water conservation, mining, defence, and vacant and other Crown land;
- **Private land** can be freehold land or Crown leasehold land, the latter normally being held on long term lease or licence. This makes up the largest part of Australia; and
- **Aboriginal land** may be freehold, leasehold or Crown reserve, and is those areas available for the use, benefit and residence by Indigenous Australians (Geoscience Australia 2010).

State governments primarily carry out the administration of land tenure in Australia. To find out about land tenure of the potential site, contact the relevant department in your jurisdiction.

Document the process

The process of defining the boundary of the site should be documented to clearly show the decision making process and the intent of boundary decisions. The record of decisions should articulate, for example, the:

- features that make up the Ramsar site;
- data source(s) for those features;
- process for ensuring accuracy and/or ground-truthing including what data and equipment were used;
- consultation processes and whether key stakeholders agreed; and
- land parcels and tenure included or excluded (fully or partially) and the rationale behind this.

Describe the boundary of the site


Once the boundary of the candidate site has been determined and the land tenure verified, the boundary needs to be described precisely²⁴. Precise identification of site boundaries helps to ensure that the exact boundaries of the Ramsar site can be easily identified and prevent confusion and disputes over the location of the site.

In Australia, it is the written detailed description in the RIS that defines the 'declared Ramsar wetland' and sets the legal boundaries under the EPBC Act rather than the gazetted map or description. Therefore, for legal purposes, the written description of the boundary must be included as part of the RIS. If the site is a complex one or the written description would be too large to be conveniently placed within the body of the RIS, it is appropriate to provide a short description in the body of the RIS and refer to an appendix to the RIS where a full written



Marigu Billabong, Parry Lagoons, Ord River Floodplain.
Jim Mollison

²⁴ Ramsar Convention 1987, Article 2.1



description is provided. The boundary description will be used to gazette Ramsar wetlands under the EPBC Act and to assess the impact of proposed and actual actions on Ramsar wetlands under the EPBC Act.

The legislative requirements and Ramsar Convention guidance for the written boundary descriptions can be summarised into the following guiding principles:

- The boundary description should be such that it enables the dimensions and boundaries to be objectively ascertained²⁵.
- The description should be easy to read and clearly define the intent.
- A map may be referred to in the description to aid interpretation.
- The description should reference where possible topographic features and existing legally defined boundaries.

Map the Boundary

Once the boundary of the candidate site has been agreed and described, the boundaries of the site need to be clearly and precisely delineated on a map (Article 2.1, Ramsar Convention 1987; DEWHA 2008a). The map and digital Ramsar wetland boundary must be consistent with the written description. Information and spatial data for Australia's Ramsar sites are supplied by the relevant state governments.

There are a number of requirements for mapping Ramsar sites which are described in *Module 1 of the National guidelines: mapping specifications for Australian Ramsar wetlands* (DEWHA 2008a). These guidelines cover the information that should be mapped, scale, mapping standards, format, metadata requirements, cartographic standards and other requirements. Before being finalised, the mapped boundaries should be reviewed by the relevant state and Australian Governments to ensure the Ramsar mapping specifications are met.

Additional guidance on the Ramsar Convention requirements for mapping can be found in the *Explanatory notes and guidelines for completing the information sheet on Ramsar wetlands* available on the Ramsar website www.ramsar.org (Ramsar Convention 2008).

7.3. Ecological character description

Contracting parties are expected to manage the Ramsar sites so as to maintain the ecological character of each site, and in doing so retain those essential ecological and hydrological functions that ultimately provide the site's benefits and services (Ramsar Convention 2008). The ecological character of the site must be described at the time of nomination. Each contracting party is also expected to remain informed of any changes to the ecological character of Ramsar sites in its territory and on the list, and to notify the Ramsar Secretariat at the earliest opportunity if the ecological character of a site has changed or is likely to change²⁶.

Ecological character descriptions provide a baseline description of the wetland at a given point in time and provide information about the critical environmental features (components and

processes) and benefits/services of the site. As site condition may change naturally over time, the ecological character description also includes limits of acceptable change in order to describe what is known about the natural variability of the site (or the expected range for artificial wetlands). This information can be used to help ensure the ecological character of the site is maintained. The ecological character description documents a key information set that can inform the development of management plans or system and the monitoring programs designed to detect change in ecological character.

The *National framework and guidance for describing the ecological character of Australian Ramsar wetlands* (DEWHA 2008b) establishes a framework and minimum requirements for describing ecological character for wetlands in Australia.

Before being finalised, the ecological character description should be reviewed by the state government, private site manager(s) (where applicable) and the Australian Ramsar Administrative Authority. Additional expert advice may be sought on the documentation if required. The ecological character description forms part of the nomination documentation and will be sent to the Ramsar Secretariat as part of the nomination.

7.4. Management plan or management system

Contracting Parties have agreed to formulate and implement planning to promote conservation and wise use of listed sites and other wetlands and consider appropriate management measures after designation²⁷. All new sites should have effective management arrangements in place before designation. The implementation of an effective management plan or management system involving all stakeholders is important to ensure effective management of the ecological character of the wetland.

Governance

On-ground Ramsar site management is the responsibility of the landowner/site manager (see section 1.6). The roles and responsibilities for management of the proposed Ramsar site should be clearly articulated in the management plan or management system for the site. As part of this process, parties should reach agreement on ongoing management arrangements and reporting on the implementation of the management plan or system. Opportunities for collaboration to meet management objectives should be explored, particularly as there may be other options available to achieve conservation and wise use outcomes.

For some sites it may be useful to develop a Ramsar Management Agreement to formalise the management arrangements for the site. There are several different forms of agreements or contracts that have been used in Australia for this purpose. For example, agreements could include recognition on Title; or a Voluntary Conservation Agreement. These documents should incorporate agreed management principles, which take into account the Australian Ramsar Management Principles, and any other Australian Government requirements.

All parties to the nomination of wetlands to the Ramsar List should seek legal advice on the form and content of any Ramsar Management Agreement and the mechanisms for recognition on title. Any major issues arising from this advice will need to be addressed before the documents are finalised. The state

²⁵ DSEWPaC Legal Section

²⁶ Ramsar Convention, 1987, Article 3.2; further clarified in Resolution VIII.8, 2002

²⁷ Resolution 5.1 Annex 2



management agency will generally lead the development of the Ramsar Management Agreement, and provide advice on appropriate conservation mechanisms and recognition on land title. This should be sought during the management planning phase.

Management Planning

Management planning should aim to:

- maintain or enhance the ecological character of wetlands as it is understood to have been at the time of listing through applying the principles of wise use and sustainable resource management; and
- build the resilience of wetlands to threats including pest plants and animals, urban and resource development, climate change and extended drought conditions.

Management of Ramsar sites is informed and supported by the development of key documents, specifically the RIS, ecological character descriptions and management plans, and through guidance provided by the Ramsar Convention.

Under the EPBC Act, the Australian Government Environment Minister is required to have management plans in place for all Ramsar sites entirely within Commonwealth areas, review them at least once every five years, and must not contravene these plans.²⁸ The Commonwealth must also use its best endeavours to ensure that management plans are in place for Ramsar sites within state or territory land and waters²⁹, and that the plans are reviewed at intervals of not more than seven years.³⁰

Ramsar management plans must not be inconsistent with Australia's obligations under the Ramsar Convention and with the Australian Ramsar Management Principles which are set out in Schedule 6 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000. These principles are designed to promote nationally consistent standards of management for Australia's Ramsar wetlands. The principles cover matters relevant to the preparation of management plans, the environmental assessment of actions that may affect the site, and community consultation processes. These principles can also be used to guide wetland management and the preparation of management plans for important wetlands that are not listed under the Ramsar Convention.

The issue of wetland water requirements, availability and implications for the site's ecological character should be addressed in the management plan or system for the site. It may be useful to assess the controls around the provision of water to the site (if any), such as water sharing plan provisions. Water resource managers should be consulted about the security of access to water for the site and other water sharing arrangements. In regulated systems, sites need to be able to access sufficient water to maintain the ecological character of the site. The management plan or system for the site should cover appropriate watering arrangements for the site, where required.

Communication, education, participation and awareness activities can play an important role in wetland conservation,

wise use and management. The plan should consider whether there are any relevant strategies or actions that should be implemented at the site (e.g. stakeholder education and training, promotional activities, awareness raising, and activities to encourage participation in wetland management). Such activities should be consistent with maintenance of the ecological character of the site. The number and complexity of the activities described within the plan will vary between sites, tenure of site and will be influenced by the objectives for the site and the site manager. Some private site owners may wish to maintain privacy and may not have these types of activities within the plan. If required, a separate communication plan can be prepared, however, inclusion in the management plan ensures the activities and strategies are integrated with the other management actions for the site.

In some cases a specific Ramsar management plan may not be required for the site if an existing plan covers the site and meets the requirements Ramsar Convention, the Australian Ramsar Management Principles. In some cases an addendum to the existing plan may be used to bring the plan into line with the Australian Ramsar Management Principles. Additional guidance on developing Ramsar management plans is under development.

Consultation on the plan

The management plan should be developed by, or in close consultation with, the landowner. Opportunities for consultation on the management plan should be provided. In many circumstances, a formal consultation period may be required for a management plan for public lands. Public consultation for a management plan for a site on private lands is at the discretion of the private site manager(s) and the relevant state government.

The management plan should be reviewed by the Australian and state governments before being submitted as part of the nomination. At a minimum, final drafts are required for the nomination.

Management system

In some circumstances a management plan for the site may not be required where it can be demonstrated that there is a management system in place for the site that is equivalent to a management plan. Components of a management system might include a range of plans, policies, strategies, legislation, agreements and other mechanisms for a site, that together fulfil the same purpose as a single management plan. The management system would need to be designed to maintain or enhance the ecological character of the site through applying the principles of wise use and sustainable resource management and meet the Australian Ramsar Management Principles and any other Australian Government requirements for management planning.


7.5. Summary of consultative outcomes

In determining whether to add a site to the Ramsar List, the Australian Government Minister for the Environment requires details about the consultation on the nomination. As part of finalising the documents, a summary of consultative outcomes should be prepared which demonstrates that adequate and appropriate consultation has been undertaken with key stakeholders about the nomination, in particular with Indigenous Australians. This should include at a minimum who was consulted; the mechanisms used; that stakeholder concerns

²⁸ EPBC Act 1999 Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2 Clauses 328 (1), 330(1), 331(1).

²⁹ EPBC Act 1999 Chapter 5, Part 15, Division 2 Clauses 333 (2)

³⁰ EPBC Regulations Schedule 6 Clause 2



have been considered and addressed (where appropriate); if there are any outstanding concerns and whether there have been any objections or grievances in relation to the proposed nomination. The summary should also indicate the level of stakeholder support for the proposed nomination.

8. Jurisdiction review and submission of proposed nomination

The state government will formally review all the supporting documentation and once satisfied will make a formal nomination to the Australian Government Environment Minister. The state government agency will look for assurances that:

- the site meets at least one Ramsar listing criteria;
- adequate consultation has been undertaken; and
- a management framework (plan or system) is in place to ensure the long-term management and sustainability of the site.

Once the state government agency is satisfied with the documentation provided, the information will be forwarded to the responsible state government Minister for consideration. In some jurisdictions, Cabinet endorsement may be required before a nomination can be forwarded to the Australian Government.

The relevant state government will send a letter to the Australian Government Environment Minister requesting the site be considered for nomination to the Ramsar List, together with the required documentation.

9. Australian Government review of the proposed nomination

Once the nomination has been received, the Australian Government will acknowledge the site nomination and will review/assess the proposed nomination against the Ramsar nomination checklist. A Ramsar site nomination is considered by the Australian Government on its merits, to ensure that:

- the proposed site meets at least one of the Ramsar listing criteria;
- appropriate consultation with key stakeholders, including Indigenous Australians, has taken place;
- the nominated site will assist Australia to meet the requirements of the *Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan*;
- suitable management arrangements are in place for the site, including appropriate watering arrangements (where required); and
- ongoing stakeholder engagement arrangements are in place for the site.

The Australian Government may seek further information to assist in its consideration of the nomination. The Australian Government will consult as required and will provide advice to the Minister on the nomination. The final decision to add a site to the Ramsar List rests with the Australian Government Environment Minister.

Australian Government processes for reviewing Ramsar site nominations are independent of any state government processes and timeframes for developing and proposing site nominations.

10. Ramsar site designation

Should the Minister agree to the nomination, the Australian Government will write to the state government and landowner (where different) to advise that Ramsar site nomination has been endorsed. The Australian and state governments will work together on any required announcements about the designation.

A site is designated once the Australian Government Environment Minister agrees to the nomination. The Australian Government will forward the site documentation to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat for inclusion on the Ramsar List.

Upon receipt of the nomination documentation, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat ensures that the documents and map meet the required standards and adds the site's name and basic data to the Ramsar List. The data and map are included in the Ramsar Convention's Ramsar Sites Database. The Secretariat formally acknowledges the status of the site as a Wetland of International Importance and sends a site certificate to the Administrative Authority. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat generally provides information about the new Ramsar site on its website.

10.1. Gazettal of the Ramsar site

The Australian Government Environment Minister must publish a notice in the Government Notices issue of the *Commonwealth Government Notices Gazettes* when the Australian Government designates a Ramsar site or changes the boundaries of a designated wetland. The Gazette is available at www.ag.gov.au/portal/govgazonline.nsf, government information shops and state libraries.

10.2. Site included as part of the Australian Wetlands Database


Once a site has been accepted as a Ramsar site, it will be added to the Australian Wetlands Database www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/index.html. This database contains data on Australia's Ramsar sites such as the RIS, published ecological character descriptions, maps and photographs about the site.

11. Updating information and ongoing reporting requirements

There are a number of ongoing reporting requirements for Australian Ramsar sites. Some of these are outlined below.

11.1. Ramsar Information Sheet

The data in the RIS should be checked and verified regularly. Ramsar site managers/state government should review and update (where required) the RIS for each site every six years or on the occasion of any significant change in a site's ecological character. The updated RIS sheets must be provided to the Australian Government to forward to the Ramsar Secretariat.



11.2. Change in ecological character

Site managers/owners are expected to manage each Ramsar site to maintain its ecological character. The manager/owner must inform the relevant state government and/or the Australian Government if there is any indication of actual or likely change in the ecological character of the Ramsar site. Additional guidance on such notifications is provided in the *National guidance on notifying change in ecological character of Australian Ramsar wetlands (Article 3.2)* (DEWHA 2009).

11.3. Site reporting

Site managers may be required to undertake reports on the status and management of each Ramsar site. These may be used to input to reviews of the status of Australia's Ramsar sites or to inform the Ramsar National Report which provides an overview of implementation of the Convention during the relevant Ramsar triennium.

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Glossary

Administrative Authority	<p>The agency within each contracting party charged by the national government with oversight of implementation of the Ramsar Convention within its territory.</p> <p>In Australia, the Administrative Authority is Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC).</p>
Benefits	<p>Benefits here refer to the economic, social and cultural benefits that people receive from ecosystems (Ramsar Convention 2005). These benefits often rely on the underlying ecological components and processes in the wetland.</p> <p>See also 'Ecosystem services'.</p>
Biogeographic region	<p>A scientifically rigorous determination of regions as established using biological and physical parameters such as climate, soil type, vegetation cover, etc (Ramsar Convention 2008).</p> <p>In 2008, the Natural Resource Policy and Program Committee agreed that the appropriate biogeographic regionalisation scheme for aquatic ecosystems in Australia is the Australian Drainage Division system for inland and coastal ecosystems, and the Integrated Marine and Coastal Regionalisation of Australia (IMCRA) for marine ecosystems. The IMCRA scheme to be used is the Provincial Bioregions.</p>
Biological diversity	<p>The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species (genetic diversity), between species (species diversity), of ecosystems (ecosystem diversity), and of ecological processes. This definition is based largely on the one contained in Article 2 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Ramsar Convention 2008).</p>
Candidate Ramsar site	<p>A wetland that meets at least one of the Ramsar listing criteria and is being considered for Ramsar site nomination.</p>
Change in ecological character	<p>Human-induced adverse alteration of any ecosystem component, process, and/or ecosystem benefit/service (Ramsar Convention 2005, Resolution IX.1 Annex A).</p>
Conservation Agreement	<p>A Conservation Agreement between the landowner and relevant Australian, state or territory agency can be used to formalise a Ramsar Agreement. These agreements are also registered on title, and bind successive owners.</p>
Contracting Parties	<p>Countries that are Member States to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Membership of the convention is open to all states that are members of the United Nations (UN), one of the UN specialised agencies, or the International Atomic Energy Agency, or are a Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.</p>
Critically endangered	<p>For the purposes of these guidelines and interpreting the Ramsar listing criteria, critically endangered species are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those species and communities listed as critically endangered in accordance with Section 179 (3) of the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>. The criteria for listing are described in Regulation 7.01 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000. Threatened species lists can be found at www.environment.gov.au; and• Those species as used by the Species Survival Commission of IUCN. A taxon is Critically Endangered when it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future, as defined [for both animals and plants by the criteria described in IUCN (2001) <i>IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria</i> Version 3.1 (Ramsar Convention 2008).
Declared Ramsar wetland	<p>An area that has been designated under Article 2 of the Ramsar Convention or declared by the Minister to be a declared Ramsar wetland under section 16 of the EPBC Act.</p>



Ecological character	<p>The combination of the ecosystem components, processes, and benefits and services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time. Within this context, ecosystem benefits are defined in accordance with the Millennium Assessment definition of ecosystem services as “the benefits that people receive from ecosystems” (Ramsar Convention 2005, Resolution IX.1 Annex A).</p> <p>The phrase ‘at a given point in time’ refers to Resolution VI.1 paragraph 2.1, which states that ‘It is essential that the ecological character of a site be described by the Contracting Party concerned at the time of designation for the Ramsar List, by completion of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (as adopted by Recommendation IV. 7, Ramsar Convention 1990).’</p>
Ecological communities	Any naturally occurring group of species inhabiting a common environment that interacts with each other, especially through food relationships, and that is relatively independent of other groups. Ecological communities may be of varying sizes, and larger ones may contain smaller ones (Ramsar Convention 2008).
Ecosystems	Within the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, ecosystems are described as the complex of living communities (including human communities) and nonliving environment (ecosystem components) interacting (through ecological processes) as a functional unit, which provides, inter alia, a variety of benefits to people (ecosystem services) (Ramsar Convention 2005).
Ecosystem components	Include the physical, chemical and biological parts of a wetland (from large scale to very small scale e.g. habitat, species and genes) (Ramsar Convention 2005).
Ecosystem processes	Dynamic forces within an ecosystem. They include all those processes that occur between organisms and within and between populations and communities, including interactions with the nonliving environment that result in existing ecosystems and that bring about changes in ecosystems over time (Australian Heritage Commission 2002). They may be physical, chemical or biological.
Ecosystem services	<p>Benefits that people receive or obtain from an ecosystem (Ramsar Convention 2005, Resolution IX.1 Annex A). The components of ecosystem services include (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005a and b):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provisioning services—such as food, fuel and fresh water • regulating services—the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes such as climate regulation, water regulation and natural hazard regulation • cultural services—the benefits people obtain through spiritual enrichment, recreation, education and aesthetics • supporting services—the services necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services such as water cycling, nutrient cycling and habitat for biota. These services will generally have an indirect benefit to humans or a direct benefit in the long term. <p>See also ‘Benefits’.</p>
Endangered	<p>For the purposes of these guidelines and interpreting the Ramsar listing criteria endangered species are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those species and communities listed as endangered in accordance with Section 179 (4) of the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>. The criteria for listing are described in Regulation 7.01 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000. Threatened species lists can be found at www.environment.gov.au; and • Those species as used by the Species Survival Commission of IUCN. A taxon is Endangered when it is not Critically Endangered but is facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future, as defined [for both animals and plants by the criteria described in IUCN (2001) <i>IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1</i> (Ramsar Convention 2008).
Landowner	Owner of the land. The landowner may be an individual; the Australian, state or territory government; NGO; trust; or company.



List of wetlands of international importance ('the Ramsar List')	Wetlands that have been designated by the Ramsar Contracting Party and are internationally important, according to one or more of the criteria that have been adopted by the Conference of the Parties.
Management system	A suite of plans, policies, strategies, legislation, agreements and other mechanisms for a site, that together fulfil the same purpose as a single management plan.
Monitoring	Collection of specific information for management purposes in response to hypotheses derived from assessment activities, and the use of these monitoring results for implementing management (Ramsar Convention 2002b, Resolution VIII.6).
Ramsar	City in Iran, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, where the Convention on Wetlands was signed on 2 February 1971; thus the Convention's short title, 'Ramsar Convention on Wetlands'
Ramsar Advisory Mission	A technical assistance mechanism formally adopted by Recommendation 4.7 in 1990. The main objective of this mechanism is to provide assistance to developed and developing countries alike in solving the problems or threats that make inclusion in the Montreux Record necessary.
Ramsar Criteria	Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance, used by Contracting Parties and advisory bodies to identify wetlands as qualifying for the Ramsar List on the basis of representativeness or uniqueness or of biodiversity values.
Ramsar Convention	<i>Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat</i> . Ramsar (Iran), 2 February 1971. UN Treaty Series No. 14583. As amended by the Paris Protocol, 3 December 1982, and Regina Amendments, 28 May 1987. The abbreviated names "Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)" or "Ramsar Convention" are used more commonly.
Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS)	Form upon which Contracting Parties record relevant data on proposed Wetlands of International Importance for inclusion in the Ramsar Database; covers identifying details like geographical coordinates and surface area, criteria for inclusion in the Ramsar List and wetland types present, hydrological, ecological, and socioeconomic issues among others, ownership and jurisdictions, and conservation measures taken and needed. The form is updated regularly. It is also known as the Information Sheet on Ramsar wetlands.
Ramsar List	List of Wetlands of International Importance.
Ramsar Sites	Wetlands designated by the Contracting Parties for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance because they meet one or more of the Ramsar Criteria.
Recognition on title (in relation to Ramsar listing)	While Ramsar Listing is in perpetuity, it does not automatically appear on property title. The use of Covenants on property title or other formalised notification with Ramsar Listing to permanently attach to Title is encouraged to ensure that future Ramsar site purchasers and the purchasers of adjacent lands are adequately informed of the site's location and level of protection and other legal requirements.
State Government	For the purposes of these guidelines the term state government includes state or territory governments.
Vulnerable species	<p>For the purposes of these guidelines and interpreting the Ramsar listing criteria vulnerable species are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those species and communities listed as vulnerable in accordance with Section 179 (5) of the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>. The criteria for listing are described in Regulation 7.01 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000. Threatened species lists can be found at www.environment.gov.au; and• Those species as used by the Species Survival Commission of IUCN. A taxon is Vulnerable when it is not either Critically Endangered or Endangered but is facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term future, as defined for both animals and plants by the criteria described in IUCN (2001) <i>IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1</i> (Ramsar Convention 2008).



Waterbirds	<p>The waterbirds definition for the purposes of these guidelines has been modified from the Ramsar Convention definition (Ramsar Convention 2008) to be more specific to birds occurring in Australia and has been agreed as follows:</p> <p>“Waterbirds are birds ecologically dependent on wetlands. This definition thus includes any wetland bird species. However, at the broad level of taxonomic order, it includes especially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grebes: Podicipediformes; • wetland related pelicans, cormorants, darters and allies: Pelecaniformes; • herons, bitterns, storks, ibises and spoonbills: Ciconiiformes; • swans, geese and ducks (wildfowl): Anseriformes; • wetland related raptors (eagles, kites, harriers, ospreys; • wetland related cranes, rails and allies: Gruiformes; • wetland related jacanas, waders (or shorebirds), gulls and terns: Charadriiformes; and • kingfishers (Coraciiformes).”
Waterfowl	<p>The Convention functionally defines waterfowl (a term which, for the purposes of these Criteria and Guidelines, is considered to be synonymous with "waterbirds") as "birds ecologically dependent on wetlands" (Article 1.2).</p>
Wetlands	<p>Areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres (Ramsar Convention 1987).</p>
Wetland types	<p>As defined by the Ramsar Convention’s wetland classification system.</p>
Wise use of wetlands	<p>Maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches[1], within the context of sustainable development[2]" (Ramsar Convention 2005).</p> <p>1. Including inter alia the Convention on Biological Diversity’s “Ecosystem Approach” (CBD COP5 Decision V/6) and that applied by HELCOM and OSPAR (Declaration of the First Joint Ministerial Meeting of the Helsinki and OSPAR Commissions, Bremen, 25–26 June 2003).</p> <p>2. The phrase “in the context of sustainable development” is intended to recognise that whilst some wetland development is inevitable and that many developments have important benefits to society, developments can be facilitated in sustainable ways by approaches elaborated under the convention, and it is not appropriate to imply that ‘development’ is an objective for every wetland.</p>





Checklist for Candidate Ramsar Sites

The following checklist outlines the required nomination documentation. The checklist should be completed and sent to the Australian Government Administrative Authority with the nomination documentation.

- ☐ **Cover letter** from the formal nominator (e.g. Australian Government Minister, state Minister or delegate for the Australian Ramsar Administrative Authority) to the Australian Government Environment Minister, requesting the inclusion of the site on the Ramsar List, expressing support for the listing and commitment to the on-going management of the site. The letter may cover in the location of the site; why it is considered internationally important (i.e. which listing criteria are being considered); who is responsible for management; and any consultation to date (if applicable);
- ☐ **Completed Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS)** using the current template from the Ramsar Secretariat (www.ramsar.org). This must include adequate justification against at least one Ramsar listing criteria.
- ☐ **Site boundary description and map(s)**—Including an accurate written description of the boundaries of the site, accurate spatial data, and a suitable map(s) of the site that meets the requirements of the Ramsar Secretariat and the Australian Government.
 - ☐ Accurate description of sufficient detail to define the site boundary. Also include any relevant information about how the boundary was determined.
 - ☐ Maps of the Ramsar site, clearly showing its location and the boundaries of the site in accordance with the *Mapping Specifications for Australian Ramsar Wetland (DEWHA 2008a)*.
- ☐ **Ecological character description** that meets the requirements of the *National Framework and Guidance for Describing the Ecological Character of Australian Ramsar Wetlands (DEWHA 2008b)* and any supplementary guidance.
- ☐ **Management plan (or final draft) or management system** that meets the requirements of the Australian Ramsar Management Principles (Schedule 6 of the EPBC Regulations) and any other Australian Government requirements.
- ☐ **Summary of consultative outcomes** which demonstrates that adequate and appropriate consultation has been undertaken with key stakeholders about the nomination, in particular with Indigenous Australians. This should include at a minimum who was consulted; the mechanisms used; that stakeholder concerns have been considered and addressed (where appropriate); if there are any outstanding concerns and whether there have been any objections or grievances in relation to the proposed nomination. The summary should also indicate the level of stakeholder support for the proposed nomination.

The development of a Ramsar site nomination should be the result of a collaborative process between site managers/landowners and the Australian and state governments to achieve a positive outcome for the community and the environment. The RIS, ecological character description and management plan should be reviewed by the Australian and the state government prior to submission. This enables the documents to be checked to against the Australian Government and Ramsar Convention requirements prior to submission of the formal nomination request.

The final decision to add a site to the Ramsar List rests with the Australian Government Environment Minister. If agreed, the Australian Government will forward the nomination to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat for inclusion on the Ramsar List.





Australian Government

**Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities**