



Environment,  
Climate Change  
& Water



## Delivering the Ramsar Convention in NSW

*Responsibilities and roles of stakeholders in managing Ramsar wetlands in NSW*

Cover photos:

Main photo: Reed beds creek system at Central Murray State Forests  
(Emma Wilson, DECCW)

Top right-hand photo: Ibis chicks at Central Murray State Forests  
(Industry & Investment NSW)

Bottom right-hand photo: Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia celebrating the  
Ramsar listing of Shortland Wetlands within the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site  
(Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia)

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## Abbreviations

CEWH	Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
DECCW	Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW
DEWHA	Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
EP&A Act	<i>Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i> (NSW)
EPBC Act	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (Commonwealth)
MDB	Murray–Darling Basin
MDBA	Murray–Darling Basin Authority
NOW	NSW Office of Water (within DECCW)

# 1 Introduction

In NSW a diverse range of stakeholders are working cooperatively to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands and to implement the Ramsar Convention. Effective conservation of wetlands requires complementary management of both land and water by government and land managers. Water availability is the primary pressure on inland wetlands, while urban development is a significant pressure on coastal wetlands. Cooperation and coordination between all players remains pivotal to the conservation and restoration of wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention and other wetlands.

Conservation and site management are key elements, as is honouring Australia's commitment to nominate significant, relevant wetlands for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List). Once listed, wetlands remain so in perpetuity and need to be managed to ensure their special ecological values are maintained or improved.

In 2006, the then Department of Environment and Climate Change produced the *NSW Ramsar Plan 2006–09: a plan for the protection and wise use of Ramsar wetlands in NSW*. The plan provides a framework and guidance for nominating new sites and objectives and proposed actions for new and existing sites, as well as promoting partnerships and encouraging greater understanding of the Ramsar Convention.

This document aims to help private and Trust-based Ramsar managers understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining the values of their respective sites, as well as the roles and responsibilities of governments and non-government agencies. This document also provides guidance with regard to the individual site-management principles, roles and responsibilities identified in each memorandum of understanding negotiated between non-government Ramsar site owners in NSW and the Australian and NSW governments. The guidance contained in these pages is consistent with legislation and resource management processes in NSW at the time of writing.

This publication updates the 2006 publication *Delivering the Ramsar Convention in NSW – Responsibilities and roles of stakeholders in managing Ramsar wetlands in NSW*. There are several important changes that have occurred since the previous publication. Those effecting the greatest change are summarised below.

- In September 2007, Australia's 65th Ramsar site, the Paroo River Wetlands, was designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Paroo Ramsar site is the 12th Ramsar-listed site in NSW and contains one of the last remaining unregulated wetland systems in the State.
- The Commonwealth *Water Act 2007* commenced on 3 March 2008. The objectives of the Act are to manage the Murray–Darling Basin water resources in a way that gives effect to relevant international agreements and to protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystems of the Basin. The Act establishes the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) to manage the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings, and the Murray–Darling Basin Authority, which is to prepare a Basin Plan by 2011. The Basin Plan will set a long-term sustainable limit on the use of both surface and groundwater in the Murray–Darling Basin.
- In 2008, the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) published national guidance material on describing the ecological character of Australian Ramsar Wetlands and mapping specifications for Australian Ramsar Wetlands.
- Water sharing plans made under the NSW *Water Management Act 2000* provide a share of the water for the environment, including Ramsar wetlands. The first of these plans are due for review in 2014 and those that are in the Murray–Darling Basin will need to be consistent with the Basin Plan.

- Recovery of water for the environment, particularly for major wetland systems, is being achieved by the purchase of water licences by the Australian and NSW Governments (e.g. NSW RiverBank, The Living Murray Initiative and the Australian Government's Restoring the Balance in the Murray–Darling Basin Program) and/or by investing in improved water efficiency (e.g. Rivers Environmental Restoration Program, NSW Wetland Recovery Program and the \$5.8 billion Sustainable Rural Water Use Efficiency and Infrastructure program).



Macquarie Marshes Ramsar site (Bill Johnston, DECCW)

## 2 The Ramsar Convention

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Ramsar, Iran, 1971 (the Ramsar Convention, [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)) aims to halt and, where possible, reverse the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve those that remain through the adoption of wise use principles. It was the first global habitat treaty. Australia signed the Convention in 1974, becoming one of the first Contracting Parties, who agree to:

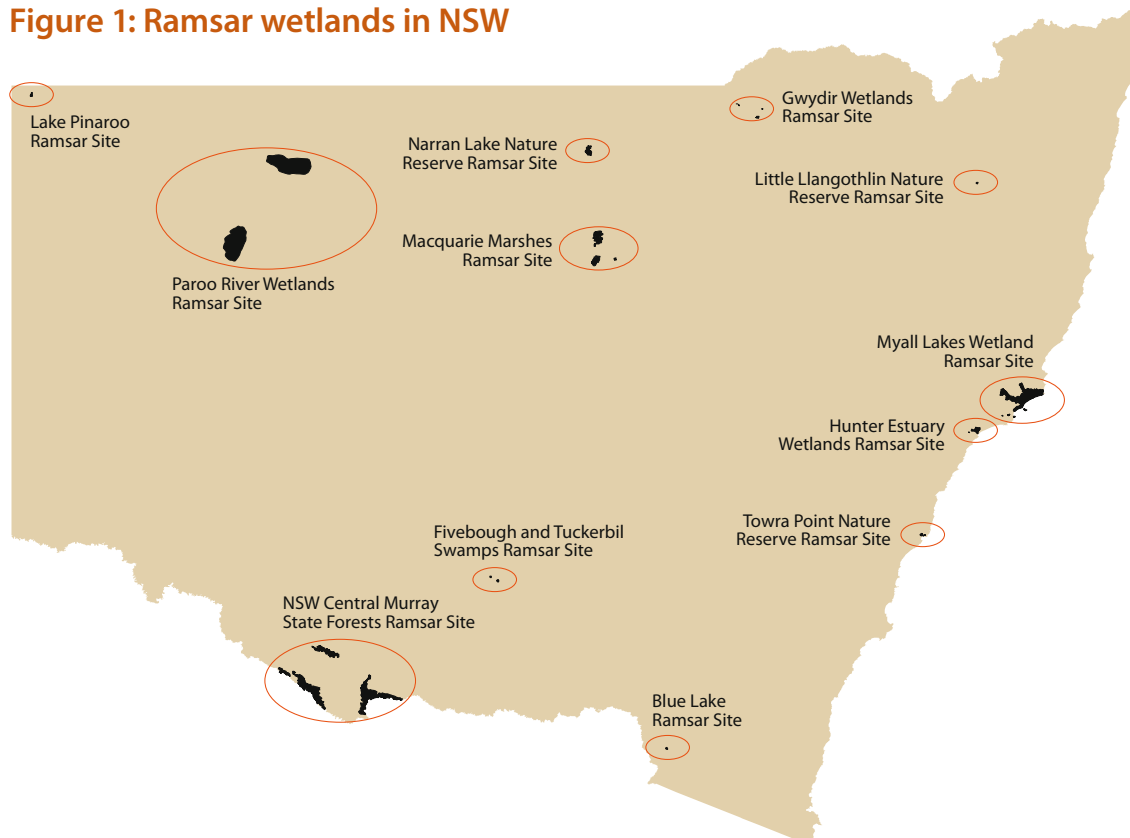
- designate at least one site that meets Ramsar criteria to the Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List)
- maintain the ecological character of listed Ramsar sites through conservation and wise use
- promote the wise use of all wetlands within their borders through national land-use planning, conservation and management
- promote training in wetland research, management and wise use, and
- consult with other Contracting Parties about implementing the Convention.

The definition of 'wise use' of wetlands was updated in 2005 to 'the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development' (Ramsar Convention 2005, Resolution IX.1 Annex A).

The guidelines that have been agreed to by conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention are mainly aimed at helping countries establish a strategic framework for managing their wetlands and to help identify significant wetlands for nomination to the Ramsar List.

As of June 2009, 65 Australian wetlands – including 12 in NSW – had been designated to the Ramsar List (see below). Current lists of Ramsar wetlands, both in Australia and internationally, can be found at [www.ramsar.org/doc/sitelist.doc](http://www.ramsar.org/doc/sitelist.doc).

**Figure 1: Ramsar wetlands in NSW**



The Ramsar Convention's Programme on Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) 2009–2015 was agreed to in Changwon, Republic of Korea, at the 10th Meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties. It builds on previous programs to help countries raise awareness of wetland values and functions and meet their obligations under the Convention.

Successful partnerships and communications between the Australian and NSW governments, private land managers and non-government organisations greatly enhance NSW's capacity to protect Ramsar sites, support the wise use of all wetlands, and uphold Australia's commitments under the Convention.

This document recognises the importance of that partnership. It has been prepared by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW (DECCW) through a consultative process with the Ramsar managers in NSW.



Driftwood on lake shore, Myall Lakes Ramsar site (Fiona Miller, DECCW)



Striped burrowing frog at Gwydir Wetlands (Neal Foster, DECCW)

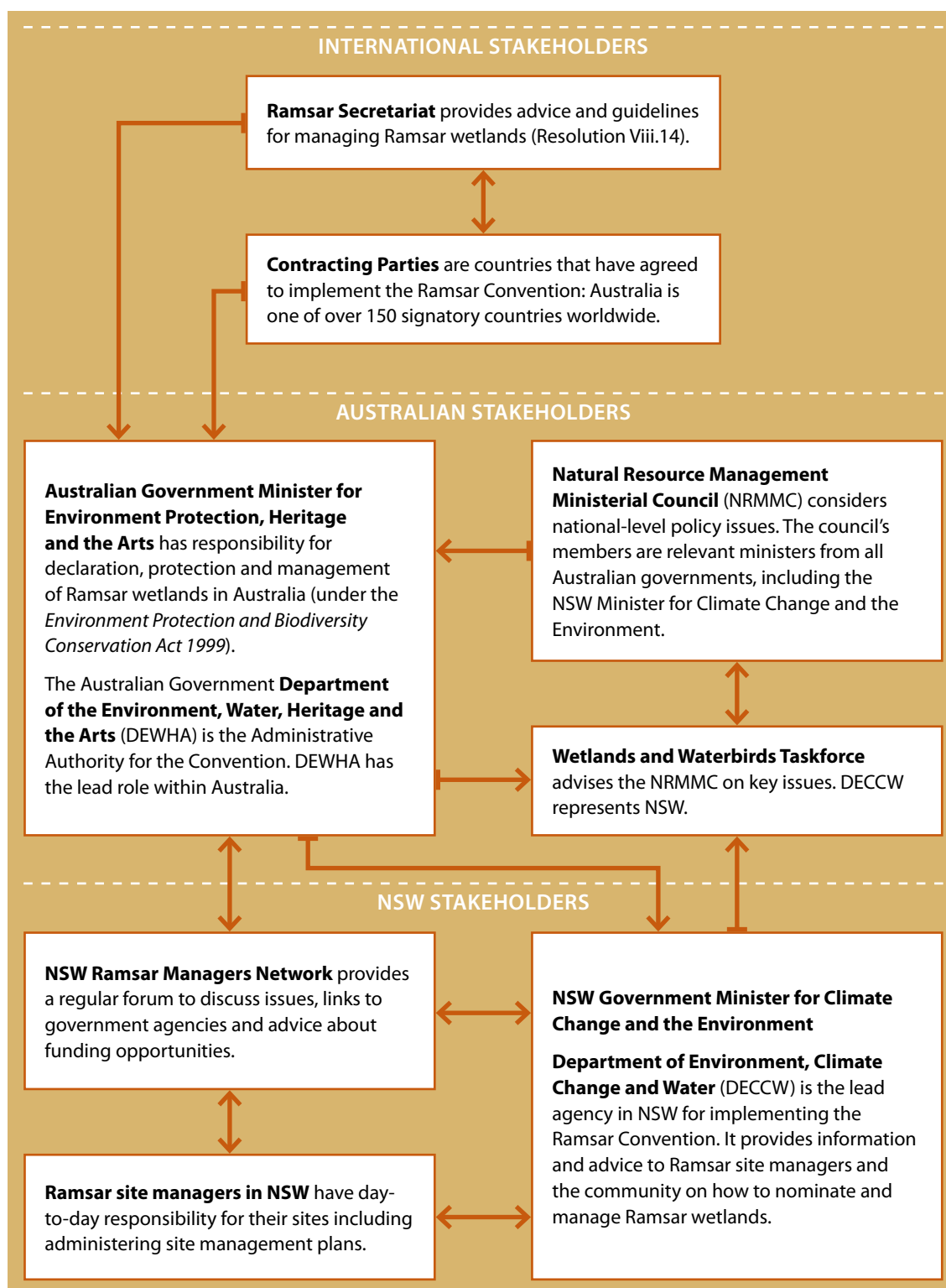


Flooded claypans in Nocoleche Nature Reserve, Paroo River Wetlands (R. Kingsford)



Figure 2 outlines the link between the international Ramsar Secretariat and the day-to-day workings of private Ramsar managers in NSW. It is a unique relationship, based on the common goal of wise use of wetlands.

**Figure 2: Interrelationships of key stakeholders in Ramsar site management – a global to local perspective**



# 3 Roles and responsibilities in managing Ramsar wetlands

Any wetlands designated to the Ramsar List benefit from the Australian Government's consequent obligation to promote their conservation and wise use. In 2005, the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention established the definition of wise use of wetlands as 'the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development'. In the case of privately owned lands, the landowner or owners are expected to balance their own needs and expectations of their property against the Ramsar requirement to promote the conservation and wise use of their Ramsar wetland. The Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) establishes a framework for managing Ramsar wetlands through the Australian Ramsar management principles and for protecting their ecological character.

The key stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities in managing Ramsar wetlands are identified below. Section 3.3 is a summary of the main NSW Government processes that are available to assist Ramsar wetlands owners with various aspects of management. However, these tools apply to all wetlands across NSW whether or not they are Ramsar-listed. The nomination process for Ramsar sites in NSW is outlined separately in the *NSW Ramsar Plan 2006–09: a plan for the protection and wise use of Ramsar wetlands in NSW*.

## 3.1 Ramsar Secretariat

The Ramsar Secretariat is located in Gland, Switzerland. The Secretariat is an independent body answering to the Contracting Parties to the Convention, and to the Ramsar Standing Committee.

Meetings of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention are held every three years to discuss policy issues, report on activities and set the agenda and priorities for the next three years. The Ramsar Secretariat provides administrative services and advice to Contracting Parties about implementing the Convention. In Australia, information and resolutions from meetings of Contracting Parties to the Convention are interpreted and implemented by the Australian Government in partnership with states and territories and site managers.

## 3.2 Australian Government

As the Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention, the Australian Government has the lead role in implementing the Convention in Australia. This role is primarily delivered through DEWHA and specific functions are explained below.

Recent national water reforms complement many of the aims of the Ramsar Convention. The Commonwealth *Water Act 2007* aims to manage the Murray–Darling Basin (MDB) water resources in a way that gives effect to relevant international agreements and to protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystems of the MDB (see section 3.2.2 on the Murray–Darling Basin Authority below).

The Act also establishes the CEWH. The CEWH will manage the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings for the purpose of protecting or restoring specific environmental assets – in the Murray–Darling Basin and outside the Basin where the Commonwealth owns water.

The *Water Act 2007* and the EPBC Act together provide the primary Commonwealth legislative framework for the protection and wise use of Ramsar wetlands.

Reports and publications by the Australian Government on Ramsar issues are available at [www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/index.html)

The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council operates under the Council of Australian Governments and includes representatives from each state and territory as well as the Australian and New Zealand governments. It enables coordinated approaches to be taken on a number of natural resource issues. The Wetlands and Waterbirds Taskforce advises the NRM Council on ways to implement the Ramsar Convention and meet national targets by taking action at the state level.

### 3.2.1 Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

DEWHA is the Australian Administrative Authority for the Ramsar Convention. This means DEWHA is responsible for managing Australia's engagement with the Ramsar Secretariat and is responsible for submitting relevant documents and information such as new site designations, National Reports to the conferences of the Contracting Parties and notifications of adverse change in ecological character at Australian Ramsar wetlands.

Domestically, DEWHA leads the development of Australian Government policy and programs relating to the implementation of the Convention. It acts as an administrator and communication hub for state and territory governments and the broader community in meeting Australia's Ramsar obligations.

DEWHA is also the responsible agency for administering the EPBC Act. From a Ramsar perspective, the Act sets out Commonwealth legislative requirements for the designation of Ramsar wetlands, the management of Ramsar wetlands and the protection of the ecological character of Ramsar wetlands. DEWHA administers these requirements on behalf of the relevant Minister.

For designated Ramsar wetlands, the EPBC Act requires that anyone proposing to undertake an action that has, will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland, must refer that action to the Minister for Environment so that the action may undergo an environmental assessment and approval process. Further information about making a referral under the Act can be found at [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/approval.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/approval.html)

DEWHA will review referrals that are submitted and advise the proponent within 20 days if the plans must undergo a formal impact assessment. If no assessment is required, the action can proceed. If assessment is required, approval for the development may still be given, with or without conditions.

Because the EPBC Act operates separately from NSW environmental legislation, proposals involving wetlands may also need to satisfy state laws in relation to possible impacts.

DEWHA is also responsible for administering Australian Government funding programs that can be accessed to help improve the conservation and wise use of Ramsar wetlands. The Water for the Future and Caring for our Country programs are the principal funding sources from which Australian Government funds are available for water purchase, irrigation efficiency projects and land management or conservation projects.

In addition to these programs, DEWHA is also developing a Ramsar Rolling Review program to promote and support on-site monitoring, reporting on condition and threats and documentation to inform national reporting. This program is intended to be implemented in partnership with Ramsar site managers and state governments.

In line with its responsibilities under the EPBC Act and Australia's commitments under the Ramsar Convention, DEWHA is developing a set of guidelines to facilitate improved management of Ramsar sites and maintenance of ecological character. The first three modules of the National Guidelines were released in 2008 and 2009. They are:

- *Mapping Specifications for Australian Ramsar Wetlands*
- *National Framework and Guidance for Describing the Ecological Character of Australian Ramsar Wetlands*, and
- *National Guidance on Notifying Change in Ecological Character of Australia's Ramsar Wetlands (Article 3.2)*.

The Australian Government, through DEWHA, may also:

- enter into agreements with stakeholders regarding the management of Ramsar sites on private land (facilitated by DECCW in NSW)
- maintain Ramsar site information on behalf of site managers in the Australian Wetlands Database, see [www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/database/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/database/index.html)
- promote wetlands inventory, conservation and management as priorities for natural resource management and investment, and
- incorporate Ramsar conservation and wise use priorities into natural resource management planning processes in partnership with all stakeholders.

### 3.2.2 Murray–Darling Basin Authority

The Commonwealth *Water Act 2007* established an independent Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) with the support of an Intergovernmental Agreement signed by all six basin jurisdictions. The MDBA is responsible for managing the water resources of the Murray–Darling Basin and is charged with preparing a Basin Plan by 2011.

The Basin Plan provides for the integrated management of the water resources of the Murray–Darling Basin in a way that promotes the objects of the *Water Act 2007*. The mechanisms for achieving this include:

- setting long-term average sustainable diversion limits for the Basin water resources
- developing a water quality and salinity management plan, and
- identifying risks to the Basin's water resources (such as climate change) and developing strategies to manage those risks.

The Basin Plan must also include an Environmental Watering Plan, the objects of which are to protect and restore the wetland and environmental assets of the Basin and to protect biodiversity dependent on the Basin's water resources. The *Water Act 2007* also provides for local water resource plans which will be consistent with the Basin Plan. The Basin Plan and water resource plans under the *Water Act 2007* must address the threats to the Basin water resources, promote conservation of declared Ramsar wetlands within the MDB and take into consideration the ecological character descriptions of all Ramsar wetlands in the Basin [*Water Act 2007* section 21 (3)].

### 3.3 NSW Government

NSW has committed, through intergovernmental agreements and partnerships, to meet the requirements of national legislation and initiatives such as the EPBC Act and the *Water Act 2007*, which all have important protective implications for Ramsar wetlands.

NSW has also committed to providing for the protection, sustainable use and management of NSW wetlands through the State Plan (Priority E4) that aims to deliver better outcomes for native vegetation, biodiversity, land, rivers and coastal waterways.

Water sharing plans (WSPs) prepared under the *Water Management Act 2000* provide a share of the water for the environment, including Ramsar wetlands. The first round of these plans are due for review in 2014 and those that are in the Murray–Darling Basin will need to be consistent with the Basin Plan.

Recovery of water for the environment, particularly for major or icon wetland systems, is being achieved by purchasing water licences (e.g. NSW RiverBank, The Living Murray Initiative) or by investing in improved water efficiency (e.g. The Living Murray Initiative, Rivers Environmental Restoration Program and NSW Wetland Recovery Program).

Below are the details of services provided by NSW Government departments to help maintain the ecological character of the State's Ramsar sites.

Note: In July 2009, the functions of the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) and those parts of the Department of Water and Energy (DWE) related to water resources were combined into one department. The NSW Office of Water (NOW) was established within the new Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water and carries out the water resource functions previously performed by DWE.

#### 3.3.1 Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water

Within NSW, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) is the principal agency responsible for implementing the Ramsar Convention.

DECCW provides information and advice to Ramsar land managers and community groups about how to nominate and manage Ramsar wetlands. It also helps compile or review technical reports and promotional material relating to Ramsar values, the Ramsar Rolling Review and sites in NSW. DECCW is represented on the national Wetlands and Waterbirds Taskforce.

DECCW is the sole or part land manager for ten Ramsar wetlands in NSW. These are Blue Lake, Kooragang (part of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands), Lake Pinaroo, Little Llangothlin Lagoon, Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve (part of Macquarie Marshes), Old Dromana (part of the Gwydir Wetlands), Myall Lakes, Narran Lake, Towra Point and Paroo River Wetlands.

As well as managing the Ramsar sites that are part of the DECCW estate, the Department:

- protects wetland-related biodiversity and threatened species through administering the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and *Native Vegetation Act 2003* and implementing the NSW Wetlands Policy 2010
- provides technical advice and guidance in preparing plans of management for Ramsar-listed wetlands
- works with Aboriginal communities and with other government agencies to support the involvement of Aboriginal people in the management of their traditional lands, waters and natural resources

- takes part in regular reporting to the Ramsar Secretariat about the implementation of the Convention in NSW, including site management
- undertakes water recovery programs such as the purchase of water for the environment and ecological restoration of wetlands (e.g. NSW Riverbank, NSW Wetlands Recovery Program, NSW Rivers Environmental Restoration Program)
- undertakes estuary and floodplain management planning that involves protection and wise use of wetlands in general, and Ramsar-listed wetlands in particular
- coordinates descriptions of the ecological character of any Ramsar wetland in NSW and reports any changes to the Australian Government, and
- reports to the Natural Resources Commission on progress towards wetland targets set in the State Plan.

DECCW is the lead agency in NSW for the management of allocated environmental water, which includes:

- the management of environmental water allocated in regulated river water sharing plans and adaptive environmental water licences arising from the purchases of entitlements from willing sellers, and
- the recovery of water (water savings) through infrastructure projects in regulated and unregulated rivers.

DECCW is working with other government agencies to ensure environmental water is delivered to identified environmental assets, including prioritised individual wetlands.

DECCW may also:

- promote education and awareness, within the community and government agencies, about wetland management and protection
- raise public and government awareness of the Ramsar Convention, its principles and the significance of wetland values in general, and
- produce and disseminate wetland management guidelines and advice that promote the wise use of wetlands.

### 3.3.2 The NSW Office of Water

The NSW Office of Water (NOW), within DECCW, is responsible for the development and review of water sharing plans under the *Water Management Act 2000*. The objects of this Act are to provide for the sustainable and integrated management of the water sources of NSW, and, in particular, to protect, enhance and restore water sources, their associated ecosystems, ecological processes and biological diversity and their water quality. Water sharing plans have a 10-year lifespan and aim to protect water for the environment while also providing certainty for water users. Where relevant, plans will need to be consistent with the Murray–Darling Basin Plan as they are made or remade.

Statutory water sharing plans that include the establishment of extraction limits and environmental rules must be made in regulated rivers, unregulated rivers and groundwater systems for the *Water Management Act 2000* to take effect. As of May 2010, 46 water sharing plans had commenced, covering 85% of water use in NSW. Macro water sharing plans are the newest plans being rolled out. The macro planning process is designed to develop broader scale water sharing plans covering most of the remaining water sources in the State. Remaking water sharing plans will begin in 2014 when the first of these plans expire. Where no water sharing plan is in place, water regulation is in accordance with the *Water Act 1912*.

NOW monitors the extraction of water entitlements against plan limits and regulates water extraction to ensure environmental water is not illegally diverted. NOW also monitors and reports on the implementation of water sharing plans and reviews and amends programs for these with input from other government agencies.

### 3.3.3 Industry & Investment NSW

Industry & Investment NSW (I&I NSW) (previously the NSW Department of Primary Industries) administers fisheries, agriculture and the State's forests. Each of these areas has a different focus regarding wetlands.

#### **Fisheries**

I&I NSW has a number of statutory responsibilities relating to aquatic habitats and animals in NSW. These include:

- implementing the requirements of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* and *Policy and guidelines: aquatic habitat management and fish conservation 1999*, which relate to the protection of wetlands as fish habitats, and
- remediating weirs, levee banks and other water infrastructure in cooperation with other stakeholders, to ensure improved passage of fish within rivers and to wetlands.

I&I NSW also provides educational information promoting the role of wetlands as fish habitats, and assists with the rehabilitation of the ecological characteristics of wetlands as part of the Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation Program. I&I NSW also works closely with other departments such as DECCW on wetland recovery programs to ensure that resource management decisions support wetland function and protection.

#### **Forests**

Under the *Forestry Act 1916*, I&I NSW's public trading enterprise Forests NSW administers all state forests. As a consequence, Forests NSW is land manager of the Central Murray State Forests (CMSF) Ramsar site which covers a significant area at 84,000 hectares. In relation to CMSF, Forests NSW fulfils the roles and responsibilities of a Ramsar site manager (see section 3.5).

#### **Agriculture**

Consistent with its role in promoting production systems that encourage and enhance all aspects of biodiversity, the agricultural arm of I&I NSW may work with landholders to improve or maintain practices that reduce impacts to all wetlands, including Ramsar wetlands. I&I NSW also works with Livestock Health and Pest Authorities in relation to controlling wetland pest species such as feral pigs.

### 3.3.4 Land and Property Management Authority

The Land and Property Management Authority (LPMA) is the government agency that undertakes the functions of the previous NSW Department of Lands. LPMA manages Crown land in accordance with the *Crown Lands Act 1989*, the *Western Lands Act 1901* and the *Crown Lands (Continued Tenures) Act 1989*. Where Crown land has been designated to the Ramsar List, the LPMA has the roles and responsibilities that are common to all Ramsar site managers (see section 3.5).

The Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps Ramsar site is Crown land. The Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust is an incorporated body comprising representatives from Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc., LPMA, Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Leeton Shire Council and DECCW. The Trust provides advice about management of the wetlands to the LPMA, and performs some of the actions set down in the management plan. The Trust also liaises with the licensees of Fivebough Swamp and Tuckerbil Swamp about their management activities, as specified in the conditions of each licence. Part of the Gwydir Wetlands Ramsar site is also Crown land.

### 3.3.5 State Water

State Water (or State Water Corporation) is NSW's rural bulk water delivery corporation. In accordance with water sharing plans it delivers water for the environment including water to wetlands.

In November 2005, the State Water Corporation and the Department of Environment and Conservation (now DECCW) signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to work together to achieve state-wide natural resource targets as well as specific environmental objectives affected by both agencies, e.g. improved water quality and environmental flows.

### 3.3.6 Department of Planning

State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) developed by the Department of Planning under the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) regulate land use and development of significance to the State and people of NSW.

SEPP 14 – Coastal Wetlands aims to ensure that coastal wetlands are preserved and protected for environmental and economic reasons. The policy identifies over 1,300 wetlands of high natural value from Tweed Heads to Broken Bay and from Wollongong to Cape Howe.

Land clearing, levee construction, drainage work or filling may only be carried out within these wetlands with the consent of the local council and the agreement of the Director General of the NSW Department of Planning. This kind of development also requires an environmental impact statement to be lodged with a development application.

### 3.3.7 Catchment Management Authorities

NSW has 13 Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs). CMAs carry out or fund activities in accordance with the NSW *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

CMAs aim to engage regional communities in the key natural resource management issues facing their catchment. This is because CMAs are restricted to natural resource management issues and not broader management issues. Their responsibilities include:

- developing catchment action plans and associated investment strategies to provide for proper natural resource planning at a catchment level
- recommending and managing incentive programs to implement catchment action plans and maximise environmental outcomes
- assisting landholders to further the objectives of its catchment action plan (e.g. incentives for rehabilitating wetlands such as fencing, revegetating, alternative water points and stewardship payments)
- providing education and training courses and materials in connection with natural resource management (e.g. wetland resource material)



- contributing to advice on the management of environmental water through Environmental Water Advisory Groups administered by DECCW
- leading the development of valley-scale non-statutory Environmental Water Management Plans and contributing to plans for significant wetlands in partnership with DECCW and NOW, and
- providing a regional perspective on environmental water management and ensuring its objectives are integrated with other natural resource management objectives.

DECCW and other NSW natural resource agencies provide CMAs with advice, information, scientific expertise and technical assistance in delivering their catchment action plans.

### 3.3.8 Natural Resources Commission

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) of NSW provides credible, independent advice to the NSW Government on managing the State's natural resources, including wetlands. The state-wide targets for wetlands, originally recommended by the NRC and set out in the NSW State Plan, have been adopted by every NSW CMA subject to local circumstances and their catchment action plan. CMAs are to demonstrate (as are other natural resource management agencies) how their activities contribute to the State milestones. The NRC is responsible for reporting on progress towards the state-wide targets. The NRC is also entrusted to audit and assess the extent to which water sharing plans contribute to the achievement of the state-wide natural resource management standard and targets in the relevant catchment area (see the NRC website at [www.nrc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au)).

## 3.4 Local government

Environmental management is a core function for local councils. As well as undertaking specific environmental programs such as stormwater improvement, waste education and biodiversity protection, councils are beginning to incorporate environmental considerations into their traditional responsibilities such as road maintenance, garbage collection, libraries and subsidised childcare.

Local governments can influence planning in and around Ramsar wetlands through provisions of the EP&A Act and local environmental plans (LEPs). Councils can help other agencies establish adequate buffers around wetlands, encourage wetland-sensitive development within their respective boundaries and control development on site by using the regulations of SEPP 14 or local planning instruments.

Councils also play a key role in informing their communities about the values of wetlands and are key partners in the management of wetlands. An example of this role is the Leeton Shire Council's participation as a member of the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust.

Councils are also responsible for the implementation of noxious weed control under the *Noxious Weeds Act 1993*.

### 3.5 Ramsar site managers

Managers of Ramsar sites in NSW are varied, and examples include private land owners (e.g. in the case of the Gwydir Wetlands and Macquarie Marshes), community entities (e.g. Hunter Estuary Wetlands), Trusts (e.g. Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps), traditional owners (e.g. Paroo River Wetlands) and government departments (e.g. NSW Central Murray State Forests). The majority of Ramsar sites in NSW are managed by DECCW and are within national parks.

The primary role and responsibility of the manager of a Ramsar wetland is to manage the site in a manner consistent with the wise use principles of the Ramsar Convention, and to maintain the ecological character of the wetland (as determined during the nomination process or through completion of an ecological character description) to the best of their ability.

Detailing the ecological character of a wetland includes identifying its significant features and describing its existing uses, e.g. grazing or stormwater treatment. Such uses may continue if they were pre-existing and contribute to the site's capacity to meet nomination criteria. Any new use or significant change to land management needs to be referred to the Australian Government for assessment under the EPBC Act. It also needs to be referred to the NSW Government if NSW legislation is triggered (e.g. *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*). Where both Commonwealth and NSW legislation is triggered, a bilateral agreement exists between the NSW and Australian Governments to streamline assessment.

When a land manager consents to their site's designation to the Ramsar List and agrees to manage it to maintain its ecological character, they agree to develop and implement a Ramsar site management plan and monitor and report on the ecological character of their site (Ramsar Rolling Review) with support from the NSW and Australian Governments.

Note: Developing a site management plan is a requirement under the EPBC Act and the Australian and NSW government departments, DEWHA and DECCW respectively, can provide assistance.

Responsible management of a Ramsar site generally includes:

- managing the site in a way that is consistent with the Ramsar Convention's wise use principles
- notifying the Australian Government of any actions on- or off-site that may have a significant impact on the ecological character of the wetlands
- notifying appropriate NSW natural resource agencies of natural resource issues that may affect the health and management of the wetland
- seeking any guidance and assistance from DECCW and other agencies that may be needed in managing and representing the needs of the wetlands
- informing the Australian Government and NSW Government of any intention to transfer ownership or otherwise sell the land on which the wetland is situated, and
- notifying future land managers of the property's Ramsar status, should the property be sold or otherwise change ownership.

Ramsar site managers may also choose to promote the Ramsar values of their site by imparting knowledge and experience in Ramsar wetland management to other land managers on request, and, when necessary, actively represent the needs of the Ramsar wetland to government, community members, catchment management authorities and others.

### 3.5.1 Ramsar Managers Network

The Ramsar Managers Network (RMN) was created in September 2003 by the NSW Minister for the Environment to support the commitment to conservation made by private Ramsar managers.

The main goals of the network are to develop solutions to management issues and provide a link to government and relevant resources.

The Network currently includes representatives from:

- private and community Ramsar site managers
- DECCW (including NOW)
- I&I NSW
- DEWHA
- WWF Australia
- Wetlands and Waterbirds Taskforce, and
- Paroo Ramsar Management Group (including Baakantji and Budjiti peoples, traditional owners of the Paroo wetlands).

## 3.6 Traditional owners

The 8th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention (CoP) passed a resolution that recognised the value of including indigenous people in Ramsar management planning. It was also resolved that information about Ramsar wetlands would be improved if information about indigenous cultural and spiritual values relevant to a site are acknowledged in the Ramsar Information Sheet published for each designated wetland. This was reiterated and reinforced in a separate resolution at the following CoP.

Contracting Parties are also encouraged to incorporate cultural values in wetlands policies and strategies, as well as in wetlands management plans.

In NSW, Aboriginal cultural resource use and access is an important example of the wise use of wetlands. It involves caring for Country and maintaining strong spiritual and cultural connections. Representatives of the Baakantji and Budjiti people have signed a memorandum of understanding with DECCW recognising their input and commitment to the Paroo River Wetlands Ramsar nomination and their involvement in the ongoing management of the Paroo Ramsar wetland site.

### 3.7 Non-government organisations

Numerous non-government organisations (NGOs) are involved worldwide in promoting sustainable wetlands management.

International and Australian NGOs involved in wetland management in NSW include, but are not limited to:

- **International:** Wetlands International Oceania, WWF International, IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), IWMI (International Water Management Institute) and BirdLife International (all are partners to the Ramsar Convention and active participants in Ramsar processes in Australia.)
- **Australia-wide:** National Parks Association of NSW, WetlandCare Australia, Australian Wetlands Alliance, WWF Australia, Nature Conservation Council of NSW and the Australian Floodplain Association.
- **Regional:** Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia, Timber Communities Australia (a stakeholder in the NSW Central Murray State Forests Ramsar Site that promotes multiple uses for forests and aims to ensure that ecologically unique forest areas are properly managed).

# Appendix 1: Government Ramsar contacts

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## Australian Government

General information from the Australian Government about Ramsar is available at the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act website at [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html)

The site includes an interactive map and 'Protected matters search tool' ([www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html)) that provides information on matters of national environmental significance, including Ramsar wetlands.

Specific questions about Australia's obligations under the Ramsar Convention or concerns about activities on or near a property having an impact on a Ramsar site should be directed to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Any action that is likely to have a significant impact on a Ramsar site requires referral under the EPBC Act unless it is the continuation of an already approved action under relevant state or territory legislation.

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts  
Switchboard: 02 6274 1111  
Post: Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT 2601

Wetlands/Ramsar  
Director, Wetlands Section  
Aquatic Systems Health Branch  
Phone: 02 6274 1111  
Fax: 02 6274 2322  
Website: [www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/index.html)

EPBC Act Referrals  
Director, South East QLD and NSW Section  
Post: Referral Business Entry Point, Environment Assessment Branch  
Email: [epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au](mailto:epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au)  
Phone: 1800 803 772  
Fax: 02 6274 1789  
Website: [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/)

EPBC Act Compliance and Enforcement  
Director: Compliance 2 Section  
Post: Compliance and Enforcement Branch  
Approvals and Wildlife Section  
Phone: 1800 110 395 or 02 6274 1372  
Fax: 02 6274 1878  
Website: [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/compliance/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/compliance/index.html)

Caring for our Country Facilitators:

Environment – Kate Gowland

Phone: 02 8969 2128

Email: [kate.gowland@nrm.gov.au](mailto:kate.gowland@nrm.gov.au)

Sustainable Farm Practices – Russell Glover

Phone: 02 6648 5822

Email: [russell.glover@nrm.gov.au](mailto:russell.glover@nrm.gov.au)

Website: [www.nrm.gov.au/index.html](http://www.nrm.gov.au/index.html)

Post: Australian Government Land and Coasts Team, Communications Team,  
GPO Box 787, Canberra ACT 2601

## NSW Government

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water is the lead government agency in NSW for the delivery of the Ramsar Convention. General information is available at its Ramsar wetlands website ([www.ramsarwetlands.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ramsarwetlands.nsw.gov.au)). Specific queries can be directed to the relevant person from the list below.

Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water

Ramsar Program Coordinator

Senior Policy Officer: Alison Curtin

Post: PO Box A290 South Sydney NSW 1232

Email: [alison.curtin@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:alison.curtin@environment.nsw.gov.au)

Phone: 02 9995 6062

Fax: 02 9995 6602

Ramsar Program

Policy Officer: Brian Leahy

Post: PO Box A290 South Sydney NSW 1232

Email: [brian.leahy@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:brian.leahy@environment.nsw.gov.au)

Phone: 02 9995 6052

Fax: 02 9995 6602

## Appendix 2: Bibliography

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*Australia's Ramsar Sites*, (factsheet), Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water Heritage and the Arts, 2008, Australia  
[www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/pubs/ramsar.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/pubs/ramsar.pdf)

*Communication, Education, and Public Awareness to Promote Wise Use of Australia's Wetlands, National Action Plan 2001–2005: The Next Step* (November 2002), Environment Australia, 2002, Australia  
[www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/pubs/cepa1102.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/pubs/cepa1102.pdf)

