

**CONVENTION ON WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE
ESPECIALLY AS WATERFOWL HABITAT
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**

6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

Brisbane, Australia: 19-27 March 1996

**OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION IN THE
OCEANIA REGION**

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE CONVENTION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Comments on the Implementation of the Convention and its Effectiveness

1. The Convention appears to be more effective in developed countries, in contrast to the uneasiness experienced by developing countries. The major difficulty in Papua New Guinea in implementing the Ramsar Convention or other conventions is the limited capacity of the developing countries and the limited resources available from the Ramsar Bureau.
2. Australia's offer to host the 6th Meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention has raised the public profile of wetlands conservation. The commitment of the Federal Government is reflected in the last two Federal budgets where a total of \$8.1m over 5 years has been allocated to the National Wetlands Program administered by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. The growing public interest has created pressure to ensure that wetland issues are considered during the environmental assessment process. Over the past twelve months, ANCA has commented on approximately 200 proposals that may impact on wetlands. In a majority of cases, the international obligations imposed by the Ramsar Convention, Bonn Convention and Australia's two bilateral migratory bird agreements with Japan and China provide a useful mechanism to trigger further investigation and assessment. The Convention also provides useful moral support for efforts to conserve and wisely manage wetlands generally.
3. Within New Zealand, the Convention is a guide as to the appropriate management of wetlands. Day to day protection of wetlands, however, is achieved through applying legislative opportunities for reservation, covenanting, or acquisition by non-government organisations, and use of resource consent processes and planning documents under the Resource Management Act 1991.

Comments on the Future Role of the Convention and its Implementation

4. It is encouraging to note the growing number of Contracting Parties to the Convention, and through cooperation it is hoped to be able to encourage additional Parties to join from the East Asia and South Pacific region. The move towards development of a Strategic Plan for the Convention is also viewed as a positive and timely initiative, and one which can assist the Convention grow in a directed manner, in cooperation with other international agreements and regional strategies.
5. The Oceania Region is supportive of the Convention's move toward a broader focus on wetlands of all types and values, and the growing recognition that wetlands cannot be managed

in isolation of their surrounding catchments. The move to further encourage community empowerment for the management of local wetlands is warmly endorsed by Australia. It is hoped that the future directions of the Convention will allow it to continue as a far-sighted, responsive and comprehensive framework for promoting the cooperation of all Contracting Parties towards the wise use of wetlands.

6. Wetland conservation must be integrated with other development projects to deliver benefits of conservation to local communities and the national economy. Development options could include availability of capital through other funding mechanisms (eg GEF and the World Bank) rather than grants only (eg GEF and UNEP/UNDP). The obligations and implications of accession to a number of related inter-government conventions require clarification. The ability to respond to Conventions varies from Country Party to Country Party, depending on resources.
7. Making sure that the Ramsar Convention is relevant in the region and receives more recognition within it, will require ensuring that the Convention complements and enhances conservation action under other umbrellas, including other Conventions and initiatives like Agenda 21. The requirements of membership of the Ramsar Convention need to be such that they are not a major imposition for small island nation bureaucracies nor compromise their ability to advance wetland conservation objectives in a practical way.

A. BASIC INFORMATION ON MEASURES TAKEN BY CONTRACTING PARTIES

A.1 Administrative Authority

8. Within the Oceania Region, the authorities responsible for administration are the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) in Papua New Guinea, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) in Australia and the Department of Conservation in New Zealand. The Australia and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) provides a forum for the discussion and formulation of coordinated programs throughout Australia and New Zealand.

A.2 Wetlands Designated in Oceania to the List of Wetlands of International Importance since December 1992

9. Papua New Guinea designated the Tonda Wildlife Management Area in 1993, a site comprising 590,000 ha.
10. With the addition of two sites, Bowling Green Bay, a 35,500 hectare site in north east Queensland, and Moreton Bay, a 113,314 hectare site in south east Queensland, Australia has a total of 42 Ramsar sites with an area of approximately 4.6 million hectares. Both sites contain extensive marine and estuarine systems and are amongst the most important sites for migrating shorebirds in Australia.
11. New Zealand has designated no sites since 1992.

A.3 Contributions to the Ramsar Budget

12. Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand have contributed to the Core Budget as determined by the 5th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in Kushiro. In addition, the Australian Government through ANCA has provided funds to the Ramsar Convention Bureau to support the hosting of the 1996 Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in Brisbane, Australia.

B. FURTHER INFORMATION ON WETLANDS DESIGNATED FOR THE LIST OF WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE**B.1 Wetlands Deleted from the List of Wetlands of International Importance**

13. In the past triennium, no wetlands in Australia, Papua New Guinea or New Zealand have been deleted from the List, nor have the boundaries of any listed wetland been restricted.

B.2 Changes in Legal Status or Degree of Protection of Listed Wetlands

14. In 1995, the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve, including the majority of the Riverland Ramsar site, was registered under the UN Man and the Biosphere Program. Three sites totalling 772 ha within the Pittwater - Orierton Ramsar site were included in the Pittwater Nature Reserve. In Western Australia, some listed sites and adjoining areas have been protected by being gazetted under an Environmental Protection Policy which prohibits unauthorised filling, mining, drainage and discharge of industrial effluent into approximately 1100 lakes on the Swan Coastal Plain.
15. In New Zealand, the Whangamarino Wetland and Kopuatai Peat Dome sites received increased legal protection by a change in their legal status from Stewardship Area to Government Purpose Reserve, Wetland Management, in July 1993.

B.3 Ecological Changes to Listed Wetlands

16. In Papua New Guinea an environmental assessment of the ecological status of the listed site is planned for 1996.
17. Australia notes a number of changes to the ecological character of registered wetlands. Solutions have been activity pursued including sewage treatment upgrading, partial reinstatement of water flows and commitment through management plans to ecologically appropriate practices, supported by monitoring regimes. Changes observed are mainly due to development and human habitation, although some natural changes are observed. Changes include:
- spread of aquatic weed being enhanced by high rainfalls and flooding;
 - impact of feral buffalo, cattle and pigs on habitats;
 - decreases in natural flooding regimes due to water supply for irrigation;
 - creation of an island by natural sand movement and the human-aided relocation of Little Tern to the island;
 - disturbance to ecological health from reduced water quality arising from urbanisation and agriculture;
 - draining of excess water into wetlands;
 - increased salination as part of natural drying cycles, due to diversion of flood events or resulting from control of agricultural salinity;
 - decreases in salinity due to high rainfalls and repair to diversion schemes;
 - eutrophication due to decreased water flows;
 - presence of pest fish species.
18. In New Zealand, restoration of vegetation and water levels are slowly creating positive changes in two New Zealand sites. Predation of wetland birds by cats and stoats has prompted ongoing pest control.

B.4 Information on the Status of any Wetlands mentioned in Kushiro Rec. C.5.1

19. No Papua New Guinea or Australian wetlands were mentioned in Kushiro Recommendation C.5.1.. No further New Zealand wetlands on the East Asia flyway have been designated as Ramsar sites since the 5th COP held at Kushiro.

B.5 Management Planning for Ramsar Sites and other Wetlands

20. Papua New Guinea notes that funds and expertise are not available to allow a management plan to be prepared for the listed site.
21. In contrast, the Australian Federal Government is working cooperatively with the State and Territory Governments towards the development of improved management arrangements at Australia=s 42 Ramsar-listed wetlands, using the National Wetlands Program administered by ANCA as a basis. In Australia, adequate management plans are operational for 10 Listed Sites, 2 are currently under review and 29 have management plans in preparation. The Federal Government is pursuing avenues with the State and Territory Governments to more formally set out management responsibilities in relation to Ramsar sites in Australia, for example by the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between the two levels of government.
22. In New Zealand, all five Listed Sites are included in regional Conservation Management Strategies under the Conservation Act 1987. Two of the Listed Sites have management plans specific to the site.

B.6 Additional information on Listed Wetlands

23. During 1993, ANCA in Australia provided funds for projects in Victoria and Tasmania to accurately define the site boundaries of 20 Ramsar listed wetlands . This work will aid the improved management of these sites.

C. WISE USE OF WETLANDS

C.1 Progress Towards Formulation and Application of a National Wetlands Policy

24. In Papua New Guinea, the DEC is currently undergoing a major reform process. A national wetland conservation and management policy is expected to be a significant outcome of the new establishment.
25. Since the last meeting of Contracting Parties, Australia has made substantial progress towards the establishment of a Wetlands Policy for the Australian Government. It is anticipated the draft policy will receive Government endorsement in early 1996. The draft policy relates to the activities of the Federal Government, particularly management of Federal lands, and the impact on wetlands of Federal legislation, programmes and decisions, and will establish a position from which the Government can initiate dialogue with its State and Territory counterparts for a cooperative approach to wetland management.
26. The 'New Zealand Wetlands Management Policy' was adopted by the New Zealand Government in 1986. The objectives of the policy include the preservation and protection of important wetlands (particularly those of international, national and representative importance); the maintenance of an inventory of wetlands; and the promotion of public awareness of wetland values. The Resource Management Act 1991 in effect implements the Policy through planning requirements, including Regional Coastal Plans and Regional and District Plans.

C.2 National Committee

27. In Papua New Guinea, a DEC Wetlands Working Group was established in 1994 and is at present developing the wetlands programme with assistance from Asian Wetland Bureau-Oceania.
28. In Australia, a broadly based National Wetlands Advisory Committee was established in August 1995. The role of the Committee is to advise the Federal Minister for the Environment on the development of the Wetlands Policy and its subsequent implementation, and to advise on the priorities of the National Wetlands Program.
29. There is no National Wetlands Committee operating in New Zealand.

C.3 National Inventory Of Potential Ramsar Sites

30. General inventories of Papua New Guinea wetlands are available; however systematic scientific inventories of wetlands are inadequate. A preliminary investigation in collaboration with AWB-Oceania is planned for 1996.
31. In 1993, a Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia was published as a cooperative project between the Federal, State and Territory nature conservation agencies. This is an ongoing inventory project, and a second edition of the Directory is scheduled for release in March 1996.
32. The >Directory of Wetlands in New Zealand= is scheduled for publishing before the Sixth Conference of Parties.

C.4 Implementation of the Wise Use Concept

33. Papua New Guinea reports that application of wise use principles is difficult given the number of agencies with an interest in wetlands, including mining, industrial logging, agro-forestry projects and fisheries.
34. A Task Force representing relevant States and Territories has been established to determine a unified national approach to the use of lead shot. In Western Australia, a set of guidelines for use has been developed by planners so that environmental impacts can be better managed where development is to proceed. In addition, the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management has produced a report gives useful guidance to wetland managers, land use planners and others concerning the determination of appropriate buffer widths for the protection of wetland values and wetland health.
35. The wise use of wetlands is being implemented in New Zealand through both the New Zealand Wetlands Policy 1986 and complementary resource use legislation, namely the Resource Management Act 1991.

D. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE CONVENTION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

D.1 International Consultations on Shared Wetlands

36. Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea do not have any shared wetlands with other countries.

D.2 International Consultations on Shared Wetland Species

37. Papua New Guinea has been a party to general inter-country fisheries agreements on offshore fishing and migratory lobsters. In 1995, Papua New Guinea (Tonda Wildlife Management Area)

joined the Atwinning@ Ramsar Sites with Australia (Kakadu National Park), Indonesia (Wasur National Park) . ANCA and AWB-Oceania formally sought support from Papua New Guinea=s Ministry of Environment and Conservation for the East Asian- Australian Shorebird Reserve Network proposal in 1995.

38. Through the two bilateral migratory bird agreements between Japan and China, (the Japan-Australia and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreements), Australia is progressing with international cooperation in relation to migratory bird conservation. A highlight is Australia=s involvement in multilateral discussions concerning the benefits of a whole flyway approach to the conservation of waterbirds. The report entitled A National Strategy for Shorebird Conservation in Australia was released in 1993.
39. New Zealand and Australia are working co-operatively in the area of implementing the Ramsar Convention and on migratory species issues, particularly on the East Asian - Australasian Flyway.

D.3 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Fund

40. Papua New Guinea has successfully put forward three projects: a 1992 Regional Workshop on Wetland Protection and Sustainable Use; assistance in 1994 to South Pacific Countries to accede to the Convention; and in 1995, support for five South Pacific Countries to accede to the Convention.
41. Australia has not provided any additional voluntary contributions to the Wetland Conservation Fund but has provided financial support to assist countries within the region. Australia has also provided assistance for the recruitment of South Pacific countries to the Ramsar Convention.
42. New Zealand does not receive any direct support from Development Agencies in wetland conservation within its boundaries.

E. WETLAND RESERVES AND TRAINING

E.1 Establishment of Wetland Reserves

43. The NSW Government is in the process of establishing 7 new reserves which contain significant wetlands. In the Northern Territory, an additional area of 7690 ha of wetlands on the Mary River floodplain has been set aside for conservation management. In Western Australia, seven new Nature Reserves providing legal protection to wetlands within their boundaries have been declared since December 1992.
44. In New Zealand a range of wetland types has been protected by reservation or covenanting by the Department of Conservation since mid 1992. In addition, Fish and Game Councils have bought and continue to purchase areas of wetland throughout New Zealand and are actively involved in wetland restoration.

E.2 Wetland Zoning and Public Awareness

E.2.1 Essential Character of Wetlands and the Need for Zonation Related to Wetland Reserves

45. In Queensland, Australia, the Moreton Bay Marine Park Zoning Plan is being developed with four zones identified. Three of these are protected area categories which recognise high conservation values, yet allow for different levels of use, and a general use zone which applies to areas of lesser known conservation value or areas where other uses preclude a more protective zoning.

46. A recent review of coastal Victoria recommended the adoption of zoning of sites within or abutting several Ramsar sites. These proposed recommendations are currently subject to public comment before final recommendations are produced in early 1996 for Government consideration.
47. The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement, under the Resource Management Act 1991 requires Regional Coastal Plans to identify Areas of Significant Conservation Value. The Act also enables the Department of Conservation and other interested agencies to use the public notification process for regional and district plans to identify wetlands, including coastal and estuarine areas, for special protection under these plans.

E.2.2 Measures to Promote Public Awareness of Wetland Values in Wetland Reserves

48. In 1995-96 the Federal Government is in the process of establishing interpretative signs at some of Australia=s Ramsar wetland reserves. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has a general education program on the importance of wetlands, which is implemented by the Districts which directly manage each protected area. In the Northern Territory, public awareness of wetland issues has been heightened by the recent opening of three significant information centers. In Victoria, a major wetlands education centre is located at Serendip Sanctuary and information boards are installed at high profile locations in Department of Conservation and Natural Resources managed conservation reserves. In Western Australia, the Cockburn Wetlands Education Centre is located near the Beeliar chain of wetlands south of Perth. In addition, boardwalks, an observation hide, walking trails and information shelters have been installed for visitors to the Spectacle Swamps south of Perth.
49. In New Zealand, Conservation week is an annual conservation promotion run by the Department of Conservation and includes a strong wetland component. Other public awareness activities include summer holiday programmes, Department of Conservation volunteer programmes, and school based case studies. Wetlands are also components of the tourism infrastructure in some parts of New Zealand, with interpretation and boardwalks creating a quality experience. The Environmental Care Code and the Water Care Code are voluntary codes of behaviour developed to encourage visitors to be responsible in the outdoors and to care for the environment.

E.3 Education and Training

50. An initial training programme in Papua New Guinea has concentrated on avian faunal surveys, taking part in IUCN/SSC CSG Regional Workshop training in Darwin, coastal marine management training.
51. Under the National Wetlands Program, ANCA is developing a Wetland Manager=s Resources Library, producing a series of key wetland information sheets and jointly publishes a national wetlands newsletter, *Wetlands Australia*, with the Murray Darling Basin Commission. In the Northern Territory, wetland issues are incorporated in most tertiary education programs relating to natural resource management. In Tasmania, a Waterfowl Identification Test for recreational hunters has been introduced. In Western Australia, educational programs and activities involving wetlands are undertaken by numerous State Government agencies, Local Government, research institutes, private enterprise, community groups and individuals.
52. In New Zealand, education and training in relation to wetland is part of general training courses provided by Universities. The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand offers a New Zealand Wetlands

course and a New Zealand Native Plants course. The Department of Conservation is currently developing a training programme which will include competencies for ecological management.

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