

**"Wetlands: water, life, and culture"**  
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**Regional overview of the implementation of the Convention and  
its Strategic Plan 1997-2002: Oceania**

The National Reports upon which this overview is based can be consulted on the Ramsar Web site, on  
[http://ramsar.org/cop8\\_nr\\_natl\\_rpt\\_index.htm](http://ramsar.org/cop8_nr_natl_rpt_index.htm)

**Contracting Parties in Oceania:** Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea

**Contracting Parties whose National Reports are included in this analysis:** Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea

**Contracting Parties yet to submit National Reports:** none

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**1. Main achievements since COP7 and priorities for 2003-2005**

**1.1 Main achievements since COP7**

The nature of the questions in the COP8 National Report Format, and the content of the answers provided by Contracting Parties, make it difficult for many topics to be clear about precise achievements since COP7 as opposed to overall current implementation status. Nevertheless, the following achievements, some of which reflect continuing activities initiated prior to COP7, can be highlighted:

- i) Significant progress towards accession by a number of Pacific Island countries, with accession assistance provided through Environment Australia;
- ii) Implementation and further development in two countries of policy frameworks, in Australia also at provincial level, and in wetlands policy and objectives in relation to water management and biodiversity conservation;
- iii) Continuing integration of wetland issues into broader-scale resource planning and management;
- iv) Continued progress in wetland restoration, and availability of a number of guidance tools for restoration and rehabilitation;

- v) Continuing and strong work in involving local communities and indigenous peoples in all aspects of wetland management and decision-making, and recognition of the cultural significance of wetlands;
- vi) Increasing private sector involvement in wetland management and monitoring;
- vii) Extensive and developing communication, education and public awareness programmes and activities, especially in and through Australia;
- viii) Directories of important wetlands (potential Ramsar sites) in place fully (Australia, New Zealand) or partly (Papua New Guinea) and further evaluations underway;
- ix) A 14% increase since COP7 in the number of designated Ramsar sites in the region;
- x) A high proportion of Ramsar sites in the region having management planning processes underway and over 60% of Ramsar sites with a management plan or equivalent in place, measures identified to maintain the ecological character of many sites, and site management committees involving local stakeholders in place in 63% of Ramsar sites;
- xi) Further development of, and involvement in, actions for shared migratory species, notably waterbirds through the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 2000-2005, and further Ramsar site twinning arrangements being developed;
- xii) Environmental impact assessments required in all three countries for developments with potential for significant impact on wetlands;
- xiii) National Ramsar/wetland Committees or their equivalent active in all three countries, though with comprehensiveness of membership varying; and
- xiv) training opportunities increased, and training needs assessments further developed.

## 1.2 Priorities for 2003-2005

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Ramsar Oceania meeting (Samoa, May 2002) identified a number of key challenges and priorities for future implementation of the Convention in order to achieve sustainability of wetland resources of the region.

In addressing these challenges it is particularly important in the Oceania region to recognize the interdependence of people, their cultures and their livelihoods with the wetlands of the region, and to work within the customary and other relevant land tenure systems widespread within the region if effective planning and management of wetlands is to be achieved.

Specific challenges which need to be addressed through priority future actions include:

- i) reversing the degradation and loss of particular wetland types, notably mangroves and coral reefs, and coastal systems generally;
- ii) achieving the sustainable use of wetlands to meet the needs and aspirations of the Pacific island countries and territories;

- iii) addressing the impacts of climate change and of invasive species;
- iv) responding to human pressures, especially those driven by the significant economic and social transformations occurring across the region, including pollution and development pressure;
- v) increasing awareness at all levels of government to improve attitudes towards wetlands (e.g. shifting the continuing perception that wetlands are wastelands); and
- vi) reducing threats to endangered species caused by loss of wetland habitat.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Ramsar Oceania Regional meeting identified as priorities for future action:

- i) enhancing technical expertise and training;
- ii) continuing to review and improve legislative and policy frameworks for wetlands;
- iii) obtaining high level support and recognition for wetland issues, including across all sectors of government;
- iv) improving implementation of integrated approaches to natural resource management, including wetlands;
- v) through communication, education and public awareness, improving public recognition of wetland values and functions;
- vi) increasing cooperation between countries and territories of the region, including the development of linkages between wetland projects;
- vii) increasing access to funding and resources for capacity building for wetland policy and management;
- viii) strengthening existing local wetland management initiatives by NGOs, community based organizations (CBOs), resource owners (e.g., in managing Wildlife Management Areas), individual volunteers and other stakeholders; and
- ix) addressing poverty alleviation in the context of environmentally sustainable use and management of wetlands.

For Contracting Parties in the region, the following additional priorities emerge from the implementation review in Section 2 below:

- i) Complete and/or compile wetland inventories;
- ii) Make more comprehensive policy, legislation and institutional capacity reviews;
- iii) Strengthen the consistent recognition and management of wetlands in relation to broader scale sustainable use policy and management;

- iv) Increase private sector involvement in wetland management;
- v) Widen development and application of incentive measures for wetlands;
- vi) Apply a more fully strategic approach to identification and designation of Ramsar sites, in line with Resolution VII.11;
- vii) Continue to develop and implement management planning processes, including ecological character monitoring at all Ramsar sites;
- ix) Monitor and report changes, or likely changes, in ecological character of all Ramsar sites, in line with Article 3.2 of the Convention;
- x) Improve coordination of implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, including membership in national Ramsar/wetland committees, and wide membership of these committees to involve other sectors and stakeholder representatives;
- xi) Continue to pursue twinning arrangements between Ramsar sites so as to enhance capacity of wetland managers;
- xii) Increase project development capacity in developing countries in the region, and enhance collaboration between development assistance agencies and Ramsar Administrative Authorities concerning wetland-related projects;
- xiii) Further develop reviews of training needs and opportunities and develop training programmes as necessary; and
- xiv) Continue promotion of Convention membership and accession assistance amongst Pacific Island States.

## **2. Implementation activities undertaken since COP7**

The following points should be noted in reading the analysis of implementation activities provided below:

- a) For brevity, the following abbreviations and acronyms are used regularly throughout this report: CEPA, the Convention's Education and Public Awareness programme; COP7, the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Costa Rica, 1999; COP8, the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Spain, 2002; CPs, Contracting Parties; PNG, Papua New Guinea; RIS, Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands; SGF, Ramsar Small Grants Fund.
- b) Australia's COP8 National Report includes a substantial amount of additional information, particularly concerning implementation at the State/Territory level. For access to this further detail, see [http://www.ramsar.org/cop8\\_nrs\\_australia1%2B2.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/cop8_nrs_australia1%2B2.pdf)
- c) With just three Contracting Parties, and these with very substantial differences in their stage of implementation, capacity and resourcing for wetland conservation and

wise use, it would be misleading to present numerical statistics concerning implementation status in Oceania in comparison with other Ramsar regions and globally, and in only a few instances in the summaries below are such statistics provided.

- d) From the information provided in the format of the current Convention Work Plan and COP8 National Report Format, implementation is summarized below under each of the topics of the Operational Objectives of the draft Convention's Strategic Plan 2003-2008, with the number of the Operational Objective given in square brackets [.....].

## 2.1 Inventory and assessment

### A. Wetland inventory [1.1]

No comprehensive national wetland inventory has yet been made by any of the three countries in the region. The reasons for this differ. For Papua New Guinea there has been a lack of capacity and resources. New Zealand experienced technological difficulties in the earlier development of an inventory, but are now planning to resume work: inventory is available for wetlands in five areas. Australia notes the major challenges to undertaking such a comprehensive inventory on a continental scale, and particularly the issues of an appropriate inventory method to cover its many important ephemeral wetlands, as well as the challenge of how to incorporate and appropriately address traditional knowledge and information held by indigenous peoples, taking into account their intellectual property rights.

Although not compiled into a national-scale inventory, Australia has undertaken much wetland inventory work at a sub-national scale, for particular bioregions, and at State and Territory level, for which wetland inventories have been made or are under way. Information is being collated from these as part of a National Land and Water Resources Audit, whose methodology will aid building a national wetland inventory. Information on recognized nationally important wetlands, in the *Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia*, is Web-accessible. Recent inventory work has added 20 further wetlands to this *Directory*, which includes Australia's External Territories, and assessment is underway for a further 15 data-deficient sites.

Australia's *Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia* is available as an on-line searchable database, regularly updated, as well as in hard copy (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2001). New Zealand's earlier database of 3000 important wetlands is to be rebuilt in modern software, and a 1996 database of its 'top 100 wetlands of international importance' can be made available in PDF format.

### B. Wetland assessment [1.2]

Specific questions concerning wetland assessment in the COP8 National Report Format largely concerned assessing and reporting change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites. This topic is covered in Section 2.11.B.

## 2.2 Policies and legislation, including impact assessment and valuation

## **A. Policy instruments for wetland wise use [2.1]**

A National Wetland Policy or equivalent is in place in Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand has a 1986 National Wetland Management Policy which will shortly be reviewed prior to its replacement and incorporation into a National Policy Statement on Biodiversity 2002. PNG is intending to establish a working group to initiate development of a National Wetland Policy by 2005. In Australia, a Commonwealth Wetlands Policy with the goal of conserving, repairing and managing wetlands wisely was established in 1997. In addition, there is a national framework for wetland policies in each jurisdiction, with wetland policies already established in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and policies due for completion by the end of 2002 in the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and South Australia. All state wetland policies reflect implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

Concerning incorporating Ramsar obligations into national environmental policies and plans, in New Zealand these are addressed through the country's Biodiversity Strategy (2000), and likewise in PNG's National Biodiversity Strategy and wetlands are also considered in integrated catchment environment management plans. In Australia the Council of Australian Governments have agreed the COAG Water Reform Framework, designed to improve the efficiency of the water industry and to arrest the widespread degradation of natural resources, in particular the unsustainable use of freshwater resources. The country's Ramsar obligations are addressed through this Framework. In addition, in 2001 Australia launched its National Objectives and Targets for Biodiversity Conservation 2001-2005, with targets for 10 priority outcomes, all of which contain specific targets for meeting Ramsar obligations, including 85% of Ramsar sites with management plans being implemented (by 2003), all jurisdictions with effective legislation and management plans in place to protect nationally significant wetlands (by 2005), and a number of targets for migratory waterbirds and for coastal and marine systems (see <http://chm.environment.gov.au>).

## **B. Development, review and amendment of policies, legislation, institutions and practices [2.2]**

Both New Zealand and PNG report, without any details, having undertaken reviews of laws and institutions related to wetlands. In Australia, a review of water resource management was undertaken in the early 1990s, and in the late 1990s a comprehensive review of all Commonwealth of Australia environmental legislation was begun – two States have already reviewed, and one State and one Territory are currently reviewing and reforming, their wetland-related legislation. The reviews have led, or are now leading to, changes in management practice, particularly in relation to water resource management and the recognition in the 1994 Water Reform Framework that the environment is a legitimate “user” of water. From their National Reports it is not generally clear for the CPs in the region to what extent such reviews have led to institutional changes designed to improve wetland conservation and wise use, but there have not been overall resource reviews of the capacity of wetland-related institutions so as to ensure they can implement the Convention (see also Section 2.18).

Reviews of government plans and policies which may affect wetlands have not been undertaken (PNG – lack of capacity) or are incomplete (Australia and New Zealand). In

New Zealand only the most important influences have been reviewed (reviews of others are underway), but some perverse incentives which affect wetlands have been removed. Australia's reviews have so far focused only on water resource management, but a comprehensive policy review in New South Wales will be completed in 2002.

Specific issues of legislation and policies concerning environmental impact assessment (EIA) and wetlands are covered in section 2.15.B. In no CP is economic valuation a specific overall requirement of EIA legislation or policies, but in some cases at least in Australia socio-economic issues are assessed, and in New South Wales tools and methodologies to assist economic valuations are under development.

## **2.3 Integration of wetland wise use into sustainable development**

### **A. Methodologies for wetland conservation and wise use [3.1]**

Few actions and related questions in the COP8 National Report Format specifically addressed this issue, but a review of resource materials for wetland management, policies and practices has been partially undertaken by Australia's Wetland Information Network (AWIN) as part of its CEPA work, and further review (including how to improve access to such materials) is now being planned. There are very few resource materials yet available in PNG.

### **B. Peatlands [3.2]**

Peatlands as a priority wetland ecosystem for attention is a new element of the proposed Strategic Plan 2003-2008. Attention to peatlands in the COP8 National Report Format relates only to a priority for their Ramsar site designation as an under-represented wetland type. During the triennium, one new Ramsar site designated in Australia included peatlands.

### **C. Recognition of wetland values and functions [3.3]**

Attention to enhancing recognition of wetland values and functions is broadly covered in the COP8 National Reports within actions concerning CEPA implementation (see section 2.9 below).

### **D. Integration of wetland policies into broader planning and management from local to national scales [3.4]**

During the 2000-2002 triennium actions relevant to CPs concerned integrated management at river basin and coastal zone scales rather than integration at the policy level itself. Such management is at least partly practiced in all three Oceania CPs. PNG is divided into seven catchments for implementation of Integrated Catchment Management Plans. In New Zealand integrated resource management approaches applying to the whole country have been required since 1991, but full implementation has been slow to progress through approvals mechanisms. At least 35% of Australia's land area is managed through integrated river basin, coastal zone or catchment management approaches, including a number of major cross-border (i.e. cross-State) river systems. A new national coastal policy will promote an integrated catchment management approach.

## **2.4 Restoration and rehabilitation [4.1]**

Although Australia does not have a national-scale assessment of priority wetlands for restoration, a number of inventories are in place or underway which provide status information which can form a basis for this, and detailed work has been undertaken in some areas, notably the Murray Wetlands, which has developed methodologies for assessing the feasibility and costs/benefits of restoring different wetlands. Other significant approaches to wetland restoration are underway for the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Defence lands, Western Australia and the National Land and Water Resources Audit, though it is noted for this last that precise assessment is hindered by a lack of inventory and monitoring data. As a result of these assessments, Australia has a significant number of actions underway implementing wetland restoration at priority sites. Wetland restoration priority assessment has not been emphasized in New Zealand, and PNG note that as most of their wetlands are still pristine, this has likewise not been a priority.

Australia has a large amount of resource information on wetland restoration, including through Web sites (covering case studies, research and general information), manuals, fact sheets and management plans. These include a 1996 Manual of Wetlands Management (Victoria), factsheets on e.g. removal of invasive species, protecting riparian zones, and earthworks around aquatic environments; and three wetland restoration-related publications by Land and Water Australia, downloadable from <http://www.lwa.gov.au>

## **2.5 Invasive alien species [5.1]**

The COP8 National Report Format had few questions specific to invasive species, other than concerning the availability of invasives resource material in support of Wise Use guidelines implementation. Australia has a wide range of resource material available to support actions on invasive species, at national, regional and local levels, including, for example, on alien invasive fish, woody and exotic trees along watercourses, and invasive marine algae. Wetland risk assessment methodologies have been applied to wetland invasive species, and case studies on mimosa and on cane toads have been prepared as part of the STRP's work on invasive species.

## **2.6 Local communities, indigenous people, and cultural values [6.1]**

Ensuring and encouraging full involvement of local communities and particularly indigenous peoples in wetland management and decision-making is a major and important issue throughout the region, particularly in relation to tribal authorities and customary land tenure. In PNG local communities are encouraged to manage their own wetlands under the leadership of Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Committees: WMAs are protected areas which are managed by the local people of the area. In New Zealand the Department of Conservation works collaboratively with tribal authorities in wetland planning, management and restoration, and are supporting a pilot work to develop partnership projects with a local sub-tribal authority, with the preparation of a consultation plan.

Australia reports that a wide range of policies and programmes are in place throughout the country which seek to enhance local community and especially indigenous peoples' involvement. These include the 1997 Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth of Australia, which includes a guiding principle recognizing the importance of the knowledge,

innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and the contribution these can make to a cooperative approach to wetland conservation and wise use. The National Wetlands Program (NWP), one of 21 environmental and natural resource programmes of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), has provided so far AUS \$ 17 million to promote wetland conservation, restoration and wise use, through direct funding to almost 200 community-based projects. Other significant NHT initiatives include the Waterwatch Australia Program, providing a community-based volunteer network for water quality monitoring, and the Coastcare Program, which supports community involvement in the management of coastal and marine wetlands. A number of initiatives and programmes are also underway which encourage indigenous peoples' wetland management, including the Indigenous Land Management Facilitators Project, the Indigenous Protected Areas Program, the Caring for Country Unit in Northern Australia, and the Community Ranger Scheme providing access to training and education. However, Australia also notes that despite this wealth of initiatives, there remain significant challenges to ensure a full leading role of indigenous peoples in managing their wetlands, rather than remaining only in advisory roles.

Local communities are encouraged to undertake monitoring of wetlands – in Australia approximately one-third of Ramsar sites or their catchments are currently being monitored through the Waterwatch Australia Program, and this programme also includes monitoring at many other non-Ramsar wetlands. At PNG's two Ramsar sites, local communities undertake the management and monitoring through their Wildlife Management Area Committees, and in New Zealand local communities are encouraged to take interest in the health of their wetlands.

Representatives of local stakeholders are involved in all 33 of Australia's Ramsar sites which have active site management committees, as they are through the WMA Committees at PNG's two Ramsar sites, and for all five of New Zealand's Ramsar sites. Many such committees are reported as involving women or women's groups.

In all three CPs in Oceania there is recognition and support by government for the application of traditional knowledge and management practices. In Australia this includes both legislative frameworks and programmes designed to assist transfer and application of indigenous knowledge, including the Indigenous Land Management Facilitators Program and Indigenous Protected Areas Program. Particular focus on ensuring understanding and use of traditional knowledge in wetlands management has been made in Kakadu National Park, and for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. PNG's Wildlife Management Area Committees have been established through legislation specifically to give local people management control of their natural resources. Cooperative traditional management partnerships with the Maori in New Zealand are encouraged by the Department of Conservation.

## **2.7 Private sector involvement [7.1]**

A number of policies are in place in Australia which aim to increase private sector understanding of wetland values and functions, including through the Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth of Australia, and several government jurisdictions are encouraging improvement of private sector understanding and involvement. The National Landcare Programme, established in 1992, has been developing public – local community – private sector partnerships and most of its projects are sponsored by the corporate sector. A good

example is the link between this programme and the Banrock Station Winery, through which a royalty from sales provide an ongoing income to fund wetland restoration projects. In recognition of the importance and innovation of this and other contributions to improving wetland awareness and management, Banrock Station has been selected for one of the three 2002 Ramsar Awards to be presented at COP8. New Zealand is currently running a high profile campaign to engage the farming sector in wetland conservation work, and encourages the private sector to nominate their efforts for National Wetland Awards. PNG has been encouraging private sector sponsors to support its wetland work, including World Wetlands Day materials.

There are some interesting examples of the private sector becoming involved in wetland monitoring at particular Ramsar sites in the region, notably in Australia with the Ecosystem Health Monitoring Program at Moreton Bay RS, which includes all major organizations discharging nitrogen and which includes incentives to encourage improvement in wastewater treatment and recycling; and in a paper company contributing to monitoring of impacts of their waste discharge, which has led to improvements in discharge quality. In PNG particularly the mining sector undertake monitoring programmes, whilst in New Zealand, although priorities for private sector involvement concern management and restoration more than monitoring *per se*, a stream monitoring kit and national community group and landowner water quality monitoring programme is being developed.

## 2.8 Incentives [8.1]

Some review of incentive measures has been undertaken in New Zealand and Australia, but incentives have not yet been assessed in PNG. A two-stage review funded by the Commonwealth Government of Australia may provide valuable information on incentives of relevance to other CPs both in the region and more widely. The first stage (completed) assessed the Private and Social Values of Wetlands, evaluated whether landholders' management strategies met the requirements of society as a whole, and provided recommendations for improvement. The project used surveys, modeling techniques and cost-benefit analyses, and has identified a number of potential changes to institutional frameworks to provide increased incentives, and removal of disincentives, for improved wetland management by private owners. The review's second stage, begun in 2001 (Incentive Measures – Freshwater Ecosystems and Private Landholdings) is assessing current incentive measures and drawing upon other countries' experiences.

## 2.9 Communication, education, and public awareness [9.1]

The extent of CEPA activity varies greatly among the three CPs in the region. Australia has a wide-ranging programme of CEPA activities, New Zealand is focusing on local community and indigenous people's awareness, and PNG lacks capacity and expertise to develop CEPA.

Some assessment of regional CEPA needs has been made as part of the Asia Pacific Wetland Managers Training Programme, and some training resource materials are already available on wetland management through this programme (see also Section 2.20). In future it is recognized that such assessment can be facilitated through the SPREP-Ramsar joint work plan. The Wetlands Centre, Australia, is coordinating development of a communications strategy for Wetland Link International Australia, linking Australia's

wetland centres nationally and internationally, and there is also development of a centres and education contacts network nationally and internationally in relation to the East Asian-Australasian shorebird flyway, with input to waterbird flyway work also from New Zealand.

In terms of national CEPA task forces and the development of national action plans, New Zealand and Australia have task forces, with particularly wide membership in Australia, who are implementing an action plan, including holding regional workshops and fora, Web links to relevant Web sites, resource surveys, etc., and a wide range of CEPA activities aimed at different target groups, with further initiatives planned for parts of the action plan.

Australia has a substantial number of wetland centres and other more general centres featuring wetlands, including 13 at Ramsar sites, and New Zealand has such centres at two of its Ramsar sites. PNG recognizes the potential for establishing centres at its Ramsar sites. Many centres and museums in Australia and New Zealand have exhibits featuring wetlands.

Detailed information on the extent to which wetland issues are incorporated into school curricula is generally lacking, but in Australia wetland issues are covered in primary and secondary general science modules – documenting such curriculum activities has been identified as a future task in Australia's CEPA Action Plan.

No CPs in the region have made voluntary contributions to support the Bureau implementation of the Convention's Outreach Programme.

Australia and New Zealand have appointed both government and NGO CEPA Focal Points, and PNG has appointed a government Focal Point but not yet an NGO Focal Point.

All Ramsar site managers in New Zealand, and all but one in Australia, have Internet access, but the very high communication costs in PNG have prevented establishing such access for its site managers.

## **2.10 Designation of Ramsar sites**

### **A. Application of the Strategic Framework [10.1]**

Australia has *A Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia* (first published 1993, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2001), which will continue to be further updated and is now available on-line. Its criteria for inclusion of a wetland include some which are different or additional to the Ramsar Criteria, notably that the wetland is of outstanding historical or cultural significance. New Zealand has identified a significant number of potential Ramsar sites in its 1996 *Directory of Wetlands in New Zealand* – between 73 and over 100 depending upon the degree of clustering of mosaic and linked systems. PNG has no national wetland directory, but the 1993 *A Directory of Wetlands in Oceania* lists 33 wetland sites in the country.

A wholly systematic approach to the designation of coherent national networks of Ramsar sites, in the sense of that established by the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11), does not

appear to be fully in place in any of the three Oceania CPs. However, a number of activities to apply a systematic approach, including active consideration of ways of increasing the range of wetland types and designation of under-represented wetland types (see also below), have been undertaken by Australia. A systematic assessment of nationally important wetlands in Western Australia against the Ramsar Criteria identified 38 wetlands/wetland systems not currently designated but which met Ramsar Criteria. To date this has led to designation of three new sites and the extension of four existing sites. New Zealand has deferred development of a designation list until full community consultation processes, focusing on involvement of the indigenous Maori community, have been developed. Although PNG answered “yes” to a systematic approach, no further information was provided.

So as to progress further Ramsar site designations, Australia has examined wetlands within the Commonwealth Government’s jurisdiction, and RISs have been prepared for a further two sites, with another under consideration. WWF-Australia has also been funded to promote site designations in remote parts of the country, and Australia has funded work to assist non-Parties in Oceania towards accession, including first site designations, also funding Wetlands International to assist technically in documenting candidate sites in the region.

At COP7 (Resolution VII.12), Oceania CPs indicated that the following site designations were planned for the 2000-2002 triennium: Australia 4 sites; New Zealand 3 sites, and Papua New Guinea 2 sites. Since COP7, a total of eight new Ramsar sites have been designated in the Oceania region (all in Australia), and four other Ramsar sites in Australia have been extended, covering a total additional area of 179,372 ha. This represents a 14 % increase in the number of sites, but only a 3 % increase in total area of designated sites, since COP7. Thus Australia has exceeded its COP8 target for designations, but the targets have not been achieved by New Zealand and PNG.

Concerning further planned designations, an intended number of sites was not indicated by Australia, although included in the National Report is information that RISs have been prepared for at least two further sites, with another under consideration, and there is a target of 10 new sites in under-represented wetland types by 2005. No targets were indicated by New Zealand or PNG.

Of Australia’s 57 Ramsar sites, 23 include recognized under-represented wetland types (coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, peatlands and/or intertidal wetlands), including two sites designated since COP7; additional such sites are reported as a priority for designation. PNG has identified a target of identifying and prioritizing such sites for designation, but New Zealand has deferred any focus on this issue until after development of its consultation process.

PNG faces a major challenge in designating sites that lack previous protection, as a result of the traditional land tenure system applying to almost all the country, such that making such designations requires substantial prior awareness and engagement activities, for which resources are generally lacking. Since COP7, Australia has designated one new site, and extended one other, in privately owned or leased land areas which had no previous conservation protection. Overall, 12 (19%) of the 64 Oceania Ramsar sites have been designated in areas lacking previous protection.

As island states, designation of shared wetlands is not relevant to Australia and New Zealand; in PNG this has not been progressed owing to lack of resources.

## **B. Maintenance and use of the Ramsar Sites Database [10.2]**

For almost all designated Ramsar sites in the region, information in RISs and quality of maps is up-to-date and of suitable quality. From information held by the Bureau and analysis provided by Wetlands International as part of their role in managing Ramsar site information for the Convention, an updated RIS (required when the existing RIS is more than six years old) is outstanding for one site in Australia, five sites in New Zealand and one site in PNG. Improved quality of Ramsar site maps is needed for two sites in New Zealand and one in PNG.

## **2.11 Management planning and monitoring of Ramsar sites**

### **A. Maintenance of the ecological character of all Ramsar sites [11.1]**

Measures to maintain the ecological character of Ramsar sites are understood for some Ramsar sites in the region, and documented for some of these. In New Zealand they are understood for three sites, but have not been documented separately. Australia has appropriate measures documented for 21 (37%) of its 57 Ramsar sites. PNG reported that measures were documented, but provided no explanatory information.

Questions and answers in the COP8 National Report Format concerning the status of management plans in Ramsar sites have proved generally difficult to interpret. None of the three CPs have management plans in place for all Ramsar sites (cf. 20% of CPs globally). Overall, site management plans are reported as in place for 39 (61%) of Ramsar sites in the region, but management planning processes are underway at a larger number of sites. New Zealand has a site management plan for one site (Farewell Spit), but with management planning for its other three sites forming part of broader-scale catchment and/or coastal zone planning and management processes. PNG's two sites do not have specific management plans, since management of the sites is implemented through their local communities' Wildlife Management Area processes. Australia has no management plans in place for 19 sites, but plans are in preparation for eight of these, and plans are being implemented in a total of 28 sites. Management planning for a number of sites forms part of broader-scale protected areas management. Australia notes that most State/Territory government agencies with Ramsar site management planning responsibilities consider that insufficient resources are being allocated for this work.

Zoning measures are reported as in place for 17% of the region's Ramsar sites, all in Australia. Zonation measures are applied to Ramsar site management as appropriate in Australia, although some States do not apply formal zoning systems. The approach and extent of zoning required necessarily varies considerably depending upon the issues and nature of land tenure of sites, with zoning being regarded as having been a useful management tool for several sites. Overall, zoning measures are reported for 11 of Australia's 57 Ramsar sites. PNG lacks capacity for development and implementation of zoning. In New Zealand, precise zoning has been vigorously discouraged since 1991 in favour of a range of planning-based controls, with some success reported particularly where the sensitivity of an area requires strict protection.

Strict protection measures to regulate activities in wetlands have been applied by two CPs (Australia and New Zealand), with such measure used in the management of 37 (58%) of Ramsar sites in the region. New Zealand notes that strict protection measures, whilst necessary, are not always sufficient alone and need to be combined with active management. In both Australia and New Zealand, strict protection measures are applied to both designated Ramsar sites and other wetlands.

All three CPs have site management committees established at some (Australia, 58% of sites) or all (New Zealand and PNG) of their Ramsar sites: overall 63% of sites have committees or their equivalent. Local stakeholder representatives are involved in all such committees.

**B. Monitoring the condition of Ramsar sites, including application of Article 3.2 and Montreux Record) [11.2]**

Regular reviews to identify factors potentially altering the ecological character of Ramsar sites are undertaken by Australia and New Zealand, whilst resource limitations have precluded this in PNG other than for one Ramsar site through an SGF2001 project. Detailed information on changes in ecological character for each Ramsar site is provided in Australia's National Report. In Victoria, for example, Australia notes that there has been little or no further change in ecological character at most Ramsar sites since 1982, although long-term threats require ongoing management and restoration initiatives. New Zealand has undertaken specific assessment work to assess threats at several sites, as the basis for management responses. Australia reports that change or likely change in ecological character has occurred in at least 20 Ramsar sites, in many concerning changes in water quantity and quality (including increasing salinity) and invasive species, and lists a number of actions taken to address these threats.

Article 3.2 of the Convention requires CPs who detect change or likely change in ecological character in a Ramsar site to report this, without delay, to the Ramsar Bureau. Notwithstanding the information provided by Australia in its COP8 National Report it appears that, in Oceania as is the case for other regions, reporting mechanisms are not in place to inform the Bureau, since such Article 3.2 reports continue to be almost wholly received from third-parties and not from Administrative Authorities.

Although there are no comprehensive systematic monitoring programmes in place in Australia, monitoring of at least some features is undertaken at 37 of its Ramsar sites. Australia has recently undertaken work on how to more precisely define and document 'ecological character' as the basis for improving monitoring for change in ecological character, through a pilot project to develop descriptions of the ecological character of eight Ramsar sites and work to assess the degree of acceptable change in character for each site. This work will not only assist Australia in developing clearer ecological character descriptions for sites, but also has considerable relevance for developing methods that are globally applicable.

No Ramsar sites in Oceania are listed on the Montreux Record.

**2.12. Management of shared water resources, wetlands and wetland species**

**A. Inventory and integrated management of shared wetlands and hydrological basins [12.1]**

As islands, such transboundary approaches at national scale are not relevant for New Zealand and Australia. However, Australia's integrated river basin, coastal zone and catchment management approaches include a number of major cross-border (i.e. cross-State) river systems.

**B. Cooperative monitoring and management of shared wetland-dependent species [12.2]**

Questions in the COP8 National Report Format related only to national-scale monitoring rather than international cooperation on such monitoring and management. PNG has no resources for waterbird or other wetland-dependent species monitoring. New Zealand notes that there is no statutory requirement or financial incentive for such monitoring, but that there is some monitoring of waders and other waterbirds. Its focus is largely on endangered or threatened endemic species, but regular wader counts are also undertaken by NGOs. In Australia, waterbird population monitoring is a priority for groups linked to the national NGO Birds Australia, which coordinates data collection by around 9,500 people. A second *Atlas of Australian Birds* is being compiled, with a special component on monitoring wetlands and waterbirds. The Australasian Wader Studies Group is monitoring wader populations throughout the country, with additional surveys (also by Wetlands International) in remote areas. At international scale, Environment Australia is supporting Wetlands International in a review and updating of wader population estimates for the East Asian – Australasian Flyway.

Also on an international scale, the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 2000-2005 and the development of its three flyway site networks (for Anatidae, cranes, and shorebirds (waders)) contributes to shared management of migratory waterbirds.

**C. Support and promotion of regional arrangements under the Convention [12.3]**

None currently relevant to the Oceania region.

**2.13 Collaboration with other multilateral environmental agreements and institutions [13.1]**

Australia has a national level Inter-Departmental Committee on Wetlands (IDC) with a broad membership of different sectors, meeting as necessary to discuss Ramsar implementation issues (and also those concerning bilateral migratory waterbird agreements). From the National Report it is not clear to what extent links have been established between focal points of the different MEAs. New Zealand does not regard such national-level coordination as a priority, and PNG lacks the capacity to do this. No CP in the region reports having specifically reviewed the CBD-Ramsar Joint Work Plan to identify priority areas of cooperation for implementation at the national level, but both Australia and New Zealand report that wetland issues are linked to their National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP) developed for CBD implementation.

## **2.14 Sharing of expertise and information [14.1]**

No CPs report exchange of information, technical assistance or expertise with regard to South-South cooperation, although Australia's support to Oceania Small Island States, through Wetlands International and others, for identification and designation of Ramsar sites and related work could be regarded as such activity.

Two Australian Ramsar sites are twinned with wetland sites in Japan, and PNG is developing a twinning arrangement to support capacity building for enhanced management between their Tondulu Wildlife Management Area and a site in each of Indonesia and Australia.

## **2.15 Financing the conservation and wise use of wetlands**

### **A. Promoting international assistance to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands [15.1]**

PNG reports a lack of capacity to prepare project proposals for submission to funding agencies, but two SGF projects have supported Ramsar implementation, and capacity building and wetland inventory training has been supported by the Evian Foundation through the Ramsar Bureau and through a number of Australian funding organizations. The programme of work on Asia-Pacific migratory waterbirds has core funding support from Australia and Japan.

AusAID allocates funding to wetland-related activities as a development priority, provided they are linked to poverty reduction and achieving sustainable development. During 2000-2001 AusAID funding for wetland-related work amounted to Aus\$ 7.3 million. Australia also contributes funding to multilateral donor agencies which include wetlands in their mandate. New Zealand report no regular wetlands funding – projects are assessed on their individual merits.

PNG acts as the South Pacific representative to the GEF Council, and Australia is represented on GEF Council as part of the Australia/New Zealand/Republic of Korea Constituency.

### **B. Environmental safeguards and assessments as part of all development projects (including foreign and domestic investments) affecting wetlands [15.2]**

Environmental Impact Assessments are required generally for development projects affecting wetlands if they are of national environmental significance in Australia – State and Territory jurisdictions have additional legislation concerning specific types of activity in wetlands that require EIA, but these vary between different jurisdictions. Both New Zealand and PNG report that EIAs are required for activities potentially affecting wetlands, but provide no details.

Specific requirements concerning requirement for EIAs for proposed activities which could affect the ecological character of Ramsar sites are not reported by New Zealand or PNG. Prior to 2000 there was no such process in Australia, but with the coming into force of its Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, Ramsar sites are

afforded special protection status and EIA is required for any action which will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar site. Significance criteria have been developed to assist in determining what is a significant impact.

## **2.16 Financing of the Convention [16.1]**

Australia and New Zealand are up to date with their annual dues payments to the Convention. Payments have not been received from PNG for the years 1999 onwards.

No Oceania country makes regular voluntary contributions to the SGF (and noted as not a priority by New Zealand). Australia has provided additional financial support for convention implementation in Oceania through a number of initiatives, including the Asia Pacific Wetlands Managers Training Programme, to Wetlands International for the Pacific Islands Liaison Officer, and funding to assist pre-accession countries and for the development of the Ramsar-SPREP MoC and joint work plan. Australia also funded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Oceania Ramsar Regional Meeting (Samoa, May 2002).

No country has made voluntary contributions to the Convention's Outreach programme, but report having provided in-kind outreach support particularly in relation to World Wetlands Day activities.

## **2.17 Institutional mechanisms of the Convention [17.1]**

No COP8 National Report format answers were specifically requested on this topic. All three Oceania CPs have nominated National Focal Points for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel. Australia and New Zealand have nominated both governmental and non-governmental CEPA Focal Points, but PNG has yet to nominate its NGO CEPA Focal Point.

## **2.18 Institutional and financial capacity of Contracting Parties [18.1]**

Training-related capacity is covered under section 2.20. below.

New Zealand has not reviewed national institutions related to wetlands so as to ensure that resources are available to implement the Convention, and does not consider this a priority. Although Australia has not conducted such a review, it has established a number of mechanisms at high level to coordinate natural resource management issues, including jointly with New Zealand (the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council – NRMCC), at whose first meeting it was agreed that wetland and migratory waterbird issues would be a standing agenda item. It is anticipated that capacity and resource reviews will be soon undertaken by a number of Australian States, and in Victoria annual resource reviews are undertaken. PNG has recognized the need for a Wetlands Support Officer in its ministry responsible for the Convention and this post has been established, initially under SGF funding.

National Ramsar/wetland Committees or their equivalents have been established in each of the three Oceania CPs. In PNG, this committee is formed only of representatives from the Department of Environment and Conservation, but operates closely with Wetlands International, and it is planned to widen this to a cross-sectoral National Wetlands Committee. New Zealand's Committee involves several ministries, local government,

farmers and, since recently, the leading natural environment NGO. Australia's Wetlands and Migratory Shorebirds Taskforce provides specialist advice to the NRMCC and comprises only governmental conservation agency representatives – although Ramsar International Organization Partners generally attend as observers, it does not include other NGOs or stakeholder representatives as it is convened under a Ministerial Council structure.

Mechanisms for the coordinated implementation of the Ramsar Convention in relation to other multilateral environmental agreements appear so far limited in the region (see also Section 2.13 above).

In Australia, funds for wetland conservation and wise use are allocated by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. At Commonwealth level, funding is made through the National Wetlands Program. Some States also have specific wetlands programmes funded as part of a broader allocation for the environment, although others do not have a specific budget line for wetlands. New Zealand funds wetlands work through its 2000 Biodiversity Strategy and purchase agreements by government agencies. PNG did not provide details of wetland funding allocations.

## **2.19 Working with International Organization Partners (IOPs) and others [19.1]**

Although no specific questions were asked in the COP8 National Report Format, in a number of parts of their National Reports Australia and PNG indicate a close working relationship with the Convention's IOPs, e.g. through involvement in National Wetland Committees, in waterbird and flyway activities, and in technical and policy assistance to Pacific Island States in preparing for accession to the Convention. IOPs are also assisting in on-the-ground wetland training and conservation delivery.

## **2.20 Training [20.1]**

Analysis of training needs is not a priority in New Zealand, and PNG lacks appropriately trained personnel to make such an analysis – PNG has informally identified training needs, however, and this has led to training exercises being conducted by Wetlands International. In Australia a broad training needs and opportunities analysis, focusing on wetland managers, has been made but overall training needs analyses have not been done at Commonwealth or State level. Training needs and opportunities have been assessed also for a number of specific issues, and a variety of courses on different aspects of wetlands, and for different personnel levels, have been held, including through the Asia Pacific Wetland Managers Training Program. Through this, a training gap has been recognized in wetland management training targeted for indigenous peoples, in Australia and throughout the region. A survey of wetland education resources, to be made as part of the CEPA Action Plan (see section 2.9 above), should identify a significant part of available training opportunities.

On-the-job training and exchanges for wetland managers to enhance their capacity has taken place in a number of ways in Australia, both within States and through some international exchanges. Manager exchange training takes place within the Department of Conservation in New Zealand, but no such training has been undertaken in PNG.

Although not established in a manner comparable to the project-based Wetlands for the Future initiative, the Asia Pacific Wetland Managers Training Program has contributed Aus\$ 800,000 to manager training in the region during the 2000-2002 triennium.

## **2.21 Membership of the Convention [21.1]**

No new CPs from Oceania have joined the Convention so far during this triennium. However, at the time of writing several Pacific Island States are actively progressing their accession processes, notably Palau (accession papers completed), Fiji, Samoa, the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. This process has been assisted and supported by Australia through funding to Wetlands International and to former Ramsar Bureau Deputy Secretary General Bill Phillips, with additional support from the World Wide Fund for Nature. New Zealand has not reported taking any actions to encourage new CPs, but PNG has used attendance at meetings to share its experiences in joining the Convention with non-Parties.