

# Commonwealth and State Government wetland updates

# Australian Government Update

The Australian Government had a busy and productive year in 2014 working to promote the wise use and conservation of wetlands across the country.

Prior to the twelfth meeting of the Ramsar Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP12) in Uruguay, June 2015, Australia has submitted a detailed national report to the Ramsar Secretariat. The report provides an overview of Australia's implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the current triennium, including successes and challenges, and a summary of implementation for each of the country's 65 Ramsar sites. Australia's COP12 national report is available from the Department's website: [www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications). For more information on COP12, see: [www.ramsar.org/news/12th-meeting-of-the-conference-of-the-parties-cop12](http://www.ramsar.org/news/12th-meeting-of-the-conference-of-the-parties-cop12).

In preparation for COP12, Oceania contracting parties gathered in Fiji on 18-20 August 2014 for the sixth Oceania Regional Meeting. Australia was represented by Mr David Papps, head of Australia's Administrative Authority for the Ramsar Convention, and Ms Georgina Usher, Australia's National Focal Point for the Convention. Other contracting parties represented at the meeting included Kiribati, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Fiji. The meeting provided an opportunity for parties to share experiences and discuss regional issues ahead of COP12, including draft resolutions that are likely to be put forward. A summary of the sixth Oceania Regional Meeting is available here: [www.ramsar.org/news/oceania-contracting-parties-prepare-for-cop12](http://www.ramsar.org/news/oceania-contracting-parties-prepare-for-cop12).

Closer to home, the Australian Government released the Boundary Description and Mapping Guidelines for Ramsar wetlands. The Guidelines provide guidance and extensive examples on how to describe boundaries, generate and manage spatial data and produce maps for Australian Ramsar sites. They are intended to assist Ramsar site managers and agencies that have a role in the preparation and approval of documentation for Ramsar wetlands. The guidelines update and replace the Mapping Specifications for

Australian Ramsar Wetlands (Version 1), and can be accessed on the Department's website: [www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/wetlands/boundary-description-and-mapping-guidelines-second-edition](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/wetlands/boundary-description-and-mapping-guidelines-second-edition).

The Boundary and Mapping Guidelines form part of the Australian National Guidelines for Ramsar Wetlands which provide a framework for Ramsar Convention implementation in Australia and provide jurisdictions and other interested parties with guidance on the management of Ramsar sites. Other guidelines can be accessed on the Department's website: [www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/ramsar/australian-national-guidelines](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/ramsar/australian-national-guidelines).

To celebrate World Wetlands Day 2015 and the global theme of 'Wetlands for our Future', the Australian Government has developed a number of materials which can be found on the Department's World Wetlands Day webpage: [www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/world-wetlands-day](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/world-wetlands-day). There is also a calendar of events at this link to highlight World Wetlands Day 2015 events happening across Australia. In addition, the Ramsar Secretariat has developed a set of materials to celebrate the occasion which can be found at: [www.ramsar.org/activity/world-wetlands-day-2015](http://www.ramsar.org/activity/world-wetlands-day-2015).

The Australian Government has also released a new publication showcasing 23 of Australia's Ramsar wetlands, including the iconic Kakadu National Park in the top end, Barmah Forest in the Murray–Darling Basin, the Coorong in South Australia and Moulting Lagoon in Tasmania. The publication highlights the unique environmental and cultural aspects of these sites, and demonstrates the wide diversity of wetland ecosystems across the country. The publication can be found on the Department's website: [www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/celebrating-australias-wetlands](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/celebrating-australias-wetlands).

During 2014, an exhibition toured the country, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the listing of the world's first Ramsar wetland, Cobourgh Peninsula in the Northern Territory, and to show the variety of Australia's wetlands. Over 35 000 visitors saw the exhibition, which was on display at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra, Kakadu National Park, ReefHQ in Townsville and the Boondall Wetlands Centre in Brisbane. Staff also attended the World Parks Congress in November 2014 to discuss Ramsar wetlands with Congress participants at an exhibition.

In addition, to celebrate the 40th anniversary, a video about the Cobourgh Peninsula Ramsar wetland was produced in partnership with the National Film and Sound Archive. It highlights the Indigenous, historical and environmental values of the Peninsula.

See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKcX3i3JuVI&list=UU3rz6-O0WRfvRcvtl8Q0R-Q>.

The Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds has been revised with public consultation ending in December 2014. The plan has been updated to outline a national framework for identifying research and management actions to protect migratory shorebirds and will be finalised in early 2015. More information can be obtained here: [www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/migratory-species](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/migratory-species).

At consultative meetings on the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA), China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) and the Republic of Korea-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA), held in Incheon, Republic of Korea in November 2012, it was agreed to recommend to their respective Governments a number of amendments to the Annex to each Agreement. As a result of these recommendations, there will be a net addition of 5 species and removal of 28 species from the EPBC Act migratory species list. Recent consultative meetings on the bilateral migratory bird agreements were held in Deqing, China in November 2014.

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership recently held its 8th Meeting of Partners in Kushiro, Japan. Partners reported on their progress on implementing actions in their jurisdictions, including additions to the Flyway Site Network. The Partnership's website can be accessed here: [www.eaaflyway.net](http://www.eaaflyway.net).

Australia participated in the Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) which was held in November 2014.

The meeting involved negotiations aiming to set conservation actions for the benefit of the world's migratory species for the coming years. Thirty-one proposals to add species to the Convention's two appendices to improve the conservation status of endangered species were approved, including shark, ray and sawfish species, the Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) and several migratory bird species. The meeting marked a milestone in the development of the CMS to fulfill its mandate to conserve endangered migratory species. Further information on the CMS can be found here: [www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int).

In October 2014, Australia participated in the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in the Republic of Korea. Parties to the CBD welcomed the work of the Ramsar Convention and initiatives that support the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands. The importance of wetlands was emphasised, particularly regarding their significance for ecosystem function and services for migratory bird species, sustainable livelihoods, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. The meeting also encouraged Parties to continue improving cooperation between conventions, to enhance effectiveness and implementation of CBD objectives. Further information on the CBD can be found here: [www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int).

# New South Wales Government Update

## Environmental watering continues to produce good results and strengthens partnerships in New South Wales.

Wetland communities and river systems in New South Wales continue to make significant progress towards recovery following consecutive years of higher rainfall after the drought and the continued delivery of environmental water and on-ground works and infrastructure.

In 2013–14, the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) delivered approximately 625 000 megalitres of water to a range of rivers and wetlands across the Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and the Murray and Lower Darling valleys. The aim has been to build on the improvements to wetland health achieved during the wet period of 2010–11, to improve drought resilience of wetlands and maintain basic ecological functions.

Highlights in 2013–14 include working with partners to achieve significant environmental flow outcomes in the Gwydir and Lower Murray–Darling catchments. In the Gwydir catchment, Commonwealth and New South Wales environmental water was used for four successful environmental flows into recovering wetland and in-stream systems. Waterbird ground surveys recorded up to 44 waterbird species in the Mehi-Mallowa systems, including threatened species.

In the Lower Murray–Darling valley, an environmental water program was started in the Edward-Wakool River system, in partnership with the Commonwealth government. The objective is to restore Murray cod (*Maccullochella peelii*) habitats and provide opportunity for their recruitment over several years of environmental watering.

In addition, OEH has successfully delivered environmental flows into Tuppall Creek with the support of local landholders, Murray Local Land Services, the Commonwealth government and Murray Irrigation. The natural hydrology of Tuppall Creek is



*Peron's tree frog (Litoria peronii) is one of four types of frog species found in Tuppall Creek, New South Wales*

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now recovering following decades of restricted water flows. This ongoing project is strongly supported by local landholders.

During 2013–14, OEH began implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan (the Basin Plan) in collaboration with other agencies. Under the Basin plan, OEH is responsible for developing annual watering priorities and Long Term Watering Plans. Long Term Watering Plans will provide long term guidance for environmental watering to achieve outcomes at both catchment and Basin-wide scales. These plans will be developed over the next four years for all major Basin catchments.

Please visit [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater) for more information about NSW Office of Environment and Heritage environmental watering, including the latest Environmental Water Use in NSW Outcomes 2013–14.

# Victorian Government Update

The Victorian Government is preparing documentation for the Ramsar nomination of the Glenelg Estuary and Long Swamp wetland in south-west Victoria, and working to improve waterway planning and wetland management and data collection.



*Lake Monibeong, in the Glenelg Estuary and Long Swamp wetland system, is part of the proposed Ramsar site nomination being prepared by the Victorian Government*

(© Copyright, Dr Andrea White)

In Victoria, a highlight for 2014 was the announcement by the Premier, the Hon. Dr Denis Napthine that work would commence to prepare documentation for the nomination of the Glenelg Estuary and Long Swamp in south west Victoria as a new Ramsar site. This site is an internationally important non-breeding area for sanderling (*Calidris alba*) and an important breeding area for hooded plover (*Thinornis rubricollis rubricollis*). Ramsar listing is strongly supported by the Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and local community groups, notably Nelson Coastcare.

Following the release of the Victorian Waterway Strategy in October 2013, Victoria's nine CMAs have completed regional waterway strategies which set out an eight-year work program for each region's waterways (rivers, wetlands and estuaries). The regional waterway strategies include management planning arrangements for seven of Victoria's 11 Ramsar sites. Individual Ramsar site management plans are being developed for the remaining four sites in 2014 and 2015.

In September 2014, a further update of the Victorian Wetlands Inventory was completed. The inventory adopts a new wetland classification framework that aligns with the Interim Australian National Aquatic Ecosystem Classification Framework. The update drew on additional data sources to improve the accuracy of several wetland attributes. For example, Geoscience Australia's Water Observations from Space dataset proved useful in populating wetland water regime categories. A report on the project is available on the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) website: [www.depi.vic.gov.au](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au).

DEPI released the Index of Condition System in 2014 ([ics.water.vic.gov.au/ics](http://ics.water.vic.gov.au/ics)). The system stores results of statewide Index of Wetland Condition (IWC) and Index of Stream Condition assessments. It also provides access to the tools and publications that support the IWC.

CMAs worked with landholders, wetland managers and communities to undertake a wide range of on ground management activities across the state. Environmental water was delivered to several wetlands in accordance with environmental water management plans prepared by CMAs and the annual seasonal watering plan developed by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder ([www.vewh.vic.gov.au/news-and-resources/resource-library/seasonal-watering-plan](http://www.vewh.vic.gov.au/news-and-resources/resource-library/seasonal-watering-plan)). Work was undertaken to restore the hydrology of several wetlands which had been subject to drainage, for example, Gooseneck Swamp on the Wannon River. Invasive species control and fencing wetlands on private land to manage or exclude livestock grazing are other activities that occurred in wetlands across Victoria in 2014.

# Queensland Government Update

The Queensland Government continues to support important wetland management and research in the third phase of the Queensland Wetlands Program (QWP).

Since its inception in 2003, the Program has developed many useful tools for wetland management, contributing to a suite of ground-breaking initiatives and first offs for planners, wetland managers, councils and community groups.

QWP's Phase 3 will build on the earlier phases with a focus on whole-of-catchment management, the promotion of existing tools and the integration of these tools into decision making.

The 'Wetlands and catchment management and rehabilitation in South East Queensland' project has seen extensive collaboration with every Council in South East Queensland, other state departments, non-government organisations and catchment groups to identify, map and model where groundwater dependent ecosystems occur in this region.

A range of products are under development, including handbooks of groundwater dependent ecosystems in each catchment, detailed groundwater dependent ecosystem mapping for use in land use planning and management, and conceptual models which assist with understanding groundwater dependency. An Aquatic Conservation Assessment for South East Queensland for riverine and non-riverine wetlands has also been developed. This conservation ranking product can also contribute to better catchment management decisions.

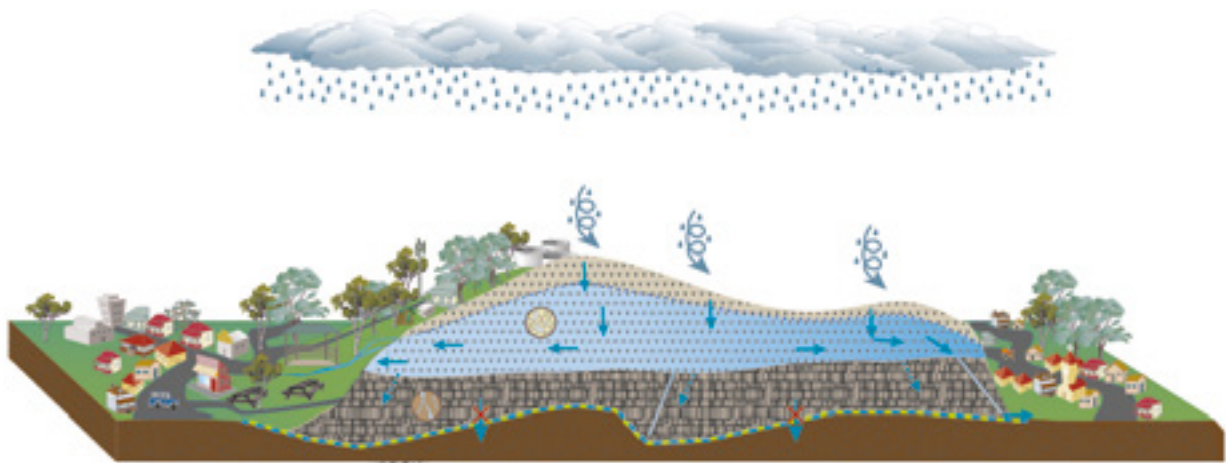
QWP is also driving The Critical Reef Support Project (CRS) funded by the Queensland Regional Natural Resource Management Investment Program. Its major goal aligns with the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 targets and involves engaging with stakeholders to facilitate and support the management of wetlands from a whole-of-landscape perspective, providing training and support, and developing products and tools specific to stakeholders, including a pin map that links project summaries for on-ground wetland works to locations on a publically available 'pin' map.

Shorebirds and waterbirds are also a priority for Queensland. Outlines of the ecology, breeding requirements, significant habitat overviews and threatened species status of many species will shortly be loaded to *WetlandInfo* ([www.wetlandinfo.chp.qld.gov.au](http://www.wetlandinfo.chp.qld.gov.au)), Queensland's primary source of wetland management resources.

More links to specific wetlands data and information, management tools, monitoring programs, assessment techniques, education tools and latest initiatives have also been uploaded.

The Queensland Government is working with the Australian Government to update the Ramsar Information Sheets and related Ramsar site documentation for Queensland's five Ramsar sites: Moreton Bay, Great Sandy Strait, Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area, Bowling Green Bay and Currawinya Lakes. Under the Ramsar Convention, Queensland regularly updates information on wetlands designated as sites of international importance.





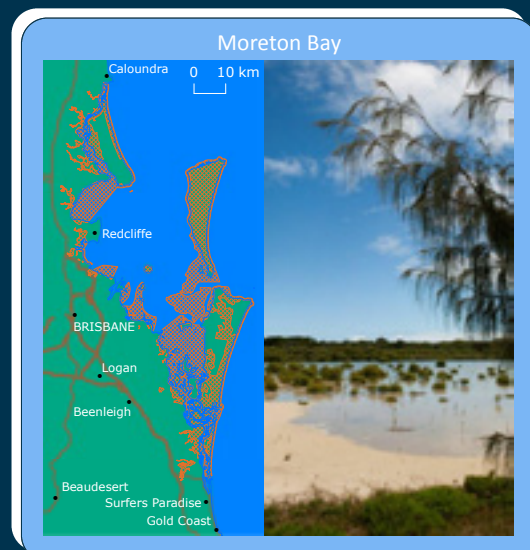
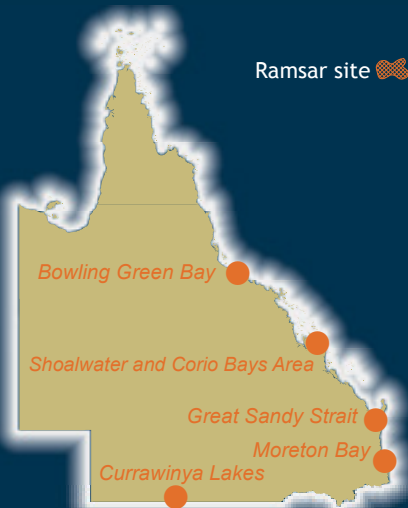
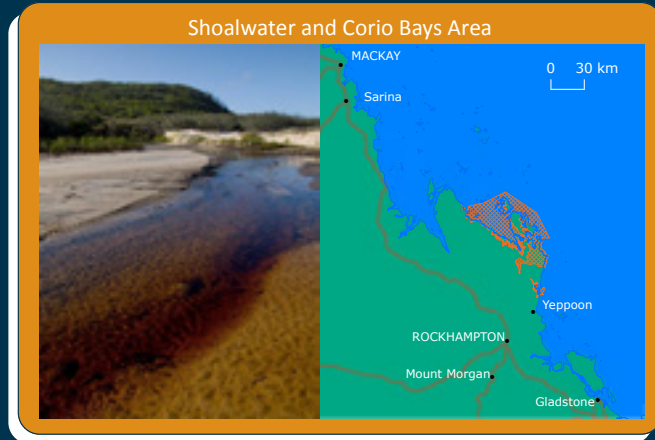
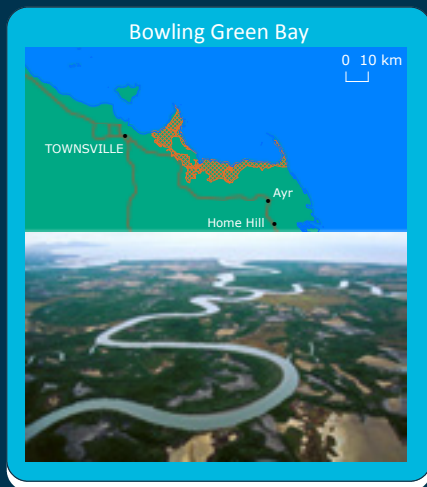
*One of the many conceptual models developed to help explain surface water and groundwater relationships*

(© Copyright, Queensland Wetlands Program)

Another key focus has been the development of an integrated intertidal and subtidal habitat classification system for coastal marine and estuarine habitats ([wetlandinfo.ehp.qld.gov.au/resources/static/pdf/resources/fact-sheets/fs-coastal-marine-estuary-clasification-191113.pdf](http://wetlandinfo.ehp.qld.gov.au/resources/static/pdf/resources/fact-sheets/fs-coastal-marine-estuary-clasification-191113.pdf)). This will help coastal planning and management in Queensland. The project will build on the existing, attribute-based, aquatic ecosystem classification and typology work of the Interim Australian National Aquatic Ecosystem (ANAE) Classification Scheme. The project will also apply this classification system to the existing intertidal mapping component of the Queensland Wetlands Mapping (QWM).

This project is a collaboration between several Queensland Government agencies, Gladstone Ports Corporation, Queensland universities, CSIRO, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and natural resource management bodies. Gladstone Ports Corporation has provided financial assistance to this project as a fish habitat initiative, meeting approved development-related fish habitat offset requirements.

# Queensland's 5 Ramsar Sites



Queensland has five Ramsar Sites (© Copyright, Queensland Wetlands Program)



# South Australian Government Update

South Australia has undertaken a number of major projects in the Murray–Darling Basin, and has secured a substantial bird conservation site north of Adelaide.

Improved wetland management continues to be implemented in the SA Murray–Darling Basin with substantial infrastructure and planning activities completed in 2014–15, through the \$100 million Riverine Recovery Project, funded by the Australian and South Australian Governments. Activities include:

- completion of works at Riverland Ramsar site at Lakes Merreti and Woolpolool to improve water flow onto the floodplain and enable more natural wetting and drying regimes
- upgrade to hydrological management infrastructure at the Ramsar listed Banrock Station and new infrastructure completed at 4 further wetland sites in the region
- construction of the Deep Creek regulator on the Pike Floodplain to allow native fish, in particular large bodied fish, access to the Pike Anabranche fast flowing habitat
- wetland management planning and design of structures for 14 more sites.

Construction of significant new environmental water management infrastructure at the Chowilla Floodplain Icon Site, was completed during 2014 as part of The Living Murray Program of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority. The works include a major environmental regulator on Chowilla Creek incorporating denil and vertical slot fishways and ancillary structures on Woolshed Creek and Chowilla Island Loop. The new infrastructure will be operated in conjunction with raising of Lock 6 to generate broad scale floodplain inundation at relatively lower River Murray flows. See [www.environment.sa.gov.au/chowilla-floodplain](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/chowilla-floodplain) for more information.

The provision of environmental water from The Living Murray and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office has helped to prolong and extend flows to the Coorong and estuary. This has improved water quality in the region, populations of birds, fish and aquatic plants such as *Ruppia tuberosa* post the Millennium drought. A summary of ecological monitoring results from this region from 2012–13 can be found at [www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/river-murray/river-restoration-and-environmental-water/monitoring-river-health](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/river-murray/river-restoration-and-environmental-water/monitoring-river-health).



*Port Gawler Conservation Park and surrounds which will form part of the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary*

(© Copyright, South Australian Coast Protection Board)

The South East Flows Restoration Project (SEFRP), funded by the \$200 million Australian and South Australian Government's Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth Recovery Project (CLLMM) began in 2014. The SEFRP aims to re-direct freshwater into the Coorong from the South East drainage system while enabling additional water to be diverted into South East wetlands en route to the Coorong. This will improve the health of the Coorong and supports other CLLMM Recovery Project actions to restore lakeshore and estuarine habitats.

Gulf St Vincent is the second most important area for shorebirds in South Australia behind the Coorong. The Gulf is bordered by shallow waters and fringed by extensive mudflats, mangroves, sandy beaches and saltmarsh wetland. The area regularly supports in excess of 25 000 shorebirds with 12 species occurring in internationally significant numbers.

A 35 kilometre long commercial saltfield complex on the coastline north of Adelaide has become an important resource for the resident and migratory birds. The Dry Creek Saltfield consists of diverse and relatively pristine saltmarsh and wetland habitat that is in decline elsewhere in the region and across the State due to urban encroachment, pollution and agricultural expansion. Salt production ceased in June 2013 and the State Government took the opportunity to secure a significant conservation and community asset whilst also helping to prevent severe degradation of the operating saltfield through acid sulphate soil development.

In mid-2014, the South Australian Government purchased 2300 hectares of land along this coastline to add to existing conservation parks and Crown land. Between 2014 and 2018, it will work to create a significant sanctuary (the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary) that will not only protect migratory birds, but will also preserve and protect coastal ecosystems which are crucial for sustaining water quality in Gulf St Vincent. The mangroves, saltmarsh and wetlands will help to protect against the future impacts of sea level rise and provide a natural green space for community amenity and wellbeing.

Please visit the following site for further information on the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary [www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/plants-and-animals/adelaide-bird-sanctuary](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/plants-and-animals/adelaide-bird-sanctuary).

# Tasmanian Government Update

## New conservation covenants on private land in Tasmania will help to protect the Pitt Water-Orielton Lagoon Ramsar site.

Tasmania has 20 600 hectares of wetlands, with 60 per cent protected under state and federal legislation. Recent conservation programs have identified wetlands as a priority, and 1160 hectares have now been protected under conservation covenants on private land.

In particular, significant areas of unreserved saline wetlands on private land in the Pitt Water Estuary have been placed under conservation covenant to protect threatened plant species and saltmarsh plant communities from being degraded due to stock access. These covenant areas have effectively increased the area under protection adjacent to the Pitt Water Nature Reserve by around 50 hectares. These areas also provide significant potential for climate retreat to extend the existence of saltmarsh vegetation communities and habitat into the future.

Pitt Water Nature Reserve is also within the Pitt Water-Orielton Lagoon Ramsar Site, a site of international significance as important feeding habitat for migratory shorebirds. It also provides important habitat for resident shorebird species, including increasingly rare species such as the pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*) and great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*).

The Derwent Estuary Program, an agreement between state and local government and industry partners to restore, promote and protect the Derwent Estuary, has been extended for another five years.



*Pitt Water-Orielton Lagoon Ramsar site from Butchers Hill (Richmond, Tasmania) including area of a conservation covenant protecting saline wetlands*  
(© Copyright, Iona Mitchell)

NRM Groups have been driving a range of wetland-related activities across the state. Examples include:

- a 10 year management plan for the Apsley Marshes Ramsar site is being implemented.
- NRM South is working with diverse partners in coastal areas and Ramsar sites to minimise damaging impacts on a range of wetland environments.
- Cradle Coast NRM, King Island NRM Group and local volunteers have been monitoring catchment health on King Island.
- NRM North continues its collaboration with a range of partners via the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program.

For more information, please visit the website of the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment: [dpi.pwe.tas.gov.au](http://dpi.pwe.tas.gov.au).