

# Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

*Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).*

This Ramsar Information Sheet has been converted to meet the 2009 – 2012 format, but the RIS content has not been updated in this conversion. The new format seeks some additional information which could not yet be included. This information will be added when future updates of this Ramsar Information Sheet are completed. Until then, notes on any changes in the ecological character of Australian Ramsar sites may be obtained from the Ecological Character Descriptions (where these have been completed) and other relevant sources.

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**1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:**

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

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**2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:**

May 1999

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**3. Country:**

Australia

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**4. Name of the Ramsar site:**

The precise name of the designated site in one of the three official languages (English, French or Spanish) of the Convention. Alternative names, including in local language(s), should be given in parentheses after the precise name.

Western District Lakes, Victoria

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**5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:**

Western District Lakes, Victoria was designated on 15 December 1982

The previous RIS was dated 1992.

This RIS is for (tick one box only):

a) Designation of a new Ramsar site ☐; or

b) Updated information on an existing Ramsar site ☒

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**6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:**

**a) Site boundary and area**

The Ramsar site boundary and site area are unchanged: ☐

or

If the site boundary has changed:

i) the boundary has been delineated more accurately ☒; or

ii) the boundary has been extended ☐; or

iii) the boundary has been restricted\*\* ☐

and/or

**If the site area has changed:**

i) the area has been measured more accurately ☒; or

ii) the area has been extended ☐; or

iii) the area has been reduced\*\* ☐

**Note:** This revised area figure (see **Section 11**) is based on improved GIS Mapping (1995) and does not represent any change to the Ramsar Site boundary.

**\*\* Important note:** If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

**b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:**

There has been no significant change in the ecological character of the Ramsar site since the Ramsar information sheets were last updated in 1992. See **Section 26**.

**7. Map of site:**

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

**a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:**

i) a hard copy (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): ☐;

ii) an electronic format (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) ☐;

iii) a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables ☐.

**b) Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:**

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park, etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

**8. Geographical coordinates** (latitude/longitude, in degrees and minutes):

Provide the coordinates of the approximate centre of the site and/or the limits of the site. If the site is composed of more than one separate area, provide coordinates for each of these areas.

Latitude: 38° 00' to 38° 20'S; Longitude: 143° 07' to 143° 55'E

**9. General location:**

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s) the site lies and the location of the nearest large town.

Western Victoria between Winchelsea and Camperdown.

**10. Elevation:** (in metres: average and/or maximum & minimum)

Approximately 40 metres ASL.

**11. Area:** (in hectares)

32,898 ha

**Note:** This is a revised area figure based on GIS Mapping (1995) and does not represent any change

to the Ramsar Site boundary.

## 12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

The Western District Lakes, are important geomorphic features of a basaltic landscape. Water regimes vary both seasonally and annually so at any time the various lakes range from fresh to hypersaline. They support large numbers of mainly non-breeding waterbirds and are particularly important during periods of widespread drought and as moulting sites for some species.

## 13. Ramsar Criteria:

Tick the box under each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11). All Criteria which apply should be ticked.

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## 14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

***Criterion 1: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.***

[Justification against former **Criterion 1(a)** under the Pre-1999 Criteria]:

Western District Lakes are a particularly good example of permanent saline, moderately saline and brackish lakes in the Victorian Volcanic Plains biogeographic region.

***Criterion 3: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.***

[Justification against former **Criterion 3(b)** under the Pre-1999 Criteria]:

Large numbers of Eurasian Coots utilise the Western District Lakes Wetlands: 10,900 have been recorded on Lake Bookaar, 9,700 on Lake Colongulac, 3,100 on Lake Milangil, 10,015 on Lake Corangamite and 19,670 on Lake Murdeduke. The lakes also support very high numbers of ducks: Australian Shelduck, Australasian Shoveler and Pink-eared Duck. Banded Stilts have been recorded at Lake Beeac (up to 50,000), Lake Corangamite and Lake Cundare (2895) (ANCA 1996).

***Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.***

[Justification against former **Criterion 3(a)** under the Pre-1999 Criteria]:

The Western District Lakes regularly support well over 20,000 waterfowl. Species and groups that regularly occur in high numbers include Eurasian Coots (see below), ducks (Australian Shelduck, Australasian Shoveler, Pink-eared Duck in particular), Banded Stilts, grebes, ibis and cormorants (ANCA 1996).

***Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.***

[Justification against former **Criterion 3(c)** under the Pre-1999 Criteria]:

Lake Beeac is very significant for Banded Stilts and Red-necked Avocets and has supported internationally significant numbers of these species. Lake Corangamite has also supported internationally significant numbers of Banded Stilts (ANCA 1996).

Five per cent of the Victorian population of Black Swan and Australasian Shoveler have occurred at Lake Colongulac.

Lake Milangil has supported 5% of the Victorian population of Pink-eared Duck and Chestnut Teal.

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**15. Biogeography** (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

**a) biogeographic region:**

**b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme** (include reference citation):

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**16. Physical features of the site:**

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

The area around the Western District Lakes is a flat plain of newer basalt. Stony rises consisting of the most recent basalt flows occur, particularly around the shores of Lake Corangamite. The lakes vary widely in depth and salinity, depending upon their method of formation, their catchment area, and their outlet.

Lake Beeac has a large example of a playa or lunette. It is a closed basin and hypersaline.

Lake Bookar has several islands at high water levels. Saline water: 44 086 - 61 679 EC.

Lake Corangamite is the largest lake in Victoria, with a surface area of 23,000 ha. Water level is regulated. Salinity at present in the order of 100,000 EC.

Lake Colongulac has a variety of shoreline features including bays, spits, cliffs and islands. Salinity: 21,338 to 25,532 EC.

Lake Cundare is a hypersaline lake (122,358 to 362,573 EC) with pale grey water due to flocculation of clay particles which dries to a salt crust during summer.

Lake Gnarpurt has a salinity between 23,338 and 23,671 EC.

Lake Milangil has a distinct lunette formation, with several spits. Two islands are formed at high water levels. Salinity: 43,342 to 45,676 EC.

Lake Murdeduke is a distinctly formed playa (lunette lake) on the transition of landform from lava plains to the Barwon River flats. Salinity: 29,703 to 36,007 EC.

Lake Terangpom is a freshwater playa.

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**17. Physical features of the catchment area:**

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, and climate (including climate type).

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**18. Hydrological values:**

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

The water contained in most lakes is saline or brackish and unsuitable for domestic consumption. In some cases, however, it is suitable for, and used for, irrigation.

Sewage from Camperdown is discharged after treatment into Lake Colongulac.

Lake Bookar is the terminal lake for local catchment.

Lake Corangamite is used as a basin for artificial drainage of small wetlands on agricultural land. Some large streams (the Woody Yallock River and the Gnarkeet 'Chain of Ponds' Creek) also flow into the lake.

Lake Colongulac is a terminal lake. Sewage from Camperdown is discharged after treatment into the lake. Inflows of abattoir and butter factory waste also occur.

Lake Gnarpurt drains an extensive area to the north.

Lake Milangil is a terminal lake for a local catchment and springs occur on its western edge.

Lake Murdeduke could be considered to be part of the Woody Yallock/Lake Corangamite diversion scheme. There is possible salt seepage to Barwon River.

Lake Terangpom acts as a basin for stream flow from the Kooraweera lake system, before flowing into Lake Corangamite. It is probably a significant freshwater input to Lake Corangamite.

## 19. Wetland Types

### a) presence:

Circle or underline the applicable codes for the wetland types of the Ramsar "Classification System for Wetland Type" present in the Ramsar site. Descriptions of each wetland type code are provided in Annex I of the *Explanatory Notes & Guidelines*.

Marine/coastal: A • B • C • D • E • F • G • H • I • J • K • Zk(a)

Inland: L • M • N • Q • P • Q • R • Sp • Ss • Tp • Ts • U • Va •  
Vt • W • Xf • Xp • Y • Zg • Zk(b)

Human-made: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • Zk(c)

### b) dominance:

List the wetland types identified in a) above in order of their dominance (by area) in the Ramsar site, starting with the wetland type with the largest area.

## 20. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

On a periodic basis, this lake system supports tens of thousands of ducks, swans and coots, and is considered to be an important drought refuge for waterfowl.

The lakes range from freshwater to highly saline and consequently provide a diversity of habitat for many species of waterfowl. Lakes Beeac and Cundare support large numbers of Banded Stilt *Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*.

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## 21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 14. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g., which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

### Lake Beeac

There are isolated occurrence of Shiny Pepper-cress (*Lepidium aschersonii*) along the lake shore. This species is endangered in Victoria.

### Lake Corangamite

*Cuscuta victoriana* (Victorian Dodder) - rare

*Lepidium ashersonii* (Spiny Pepper-cress) - Endangered in Australia, endangered in Victoria.

*Leptorhynchus waitzia* (Button Immortelle) - vulnerable

### Lake Colongulac

Large mats of *Ruppia* spp. form at certain times on the Lake.

Hairy-tails (*Ptilotus erubescens*) is also found in the Western District Lakes. This species is endangered in Victoria.

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## 22. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 14. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g., which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

### Lake Beeac

Large numbers of Banded Stilts - the season, number and duration of use varies greatly. Flocks of many thousands have been recorded. Large flocks of several other species, e.g. Hoary-headed Grebe, Red-necked Avocet and Whiskered Tern, have also occurred.

Large numbers of brine-shrimps occur in the lake (the main food source for Banded Stilts and Red-necked Avocets).

### Lake Bookar

Large numbers of waterbirds. Particularly large numbers of Hoary-headed Grebe (6597), Black Swan (7500), Coot (10,900), Pink-eared Duck (2410). Other interesting species include Plumed Whistling Duck and Brolga. 200 Freckled Duck were seen in 1981.

### Lake Colongulac

Large numbers of waterbirds including 200 Freckled Duck, 1008 Blue-billed Duck, 2070 Grey Teal, 2055 Blue-winged Shoveller, 7413 Eurasian Coot, 2000 Great Crested Grebe, 5786 Black Swans.

The lake had the highest number of Eurasian Coot (7300 birds) of any wetland surveyed in the annual Victorian waterfowl count of 1988.

### Lake Corangamite

The notable birds of the lake are Australian Shelduck and Chestnut Teal which roost and moult in large numbers on the lake. Lake Corangamite had the highest count of Australian Shelduck of any wetland surveyed in the annual Victorian Waterfowl Counts of 1988 (22,950 birds) and 1990

(16,934). The lake also had the second highest count of Black Swan (5360) in 1988. Large to significant numbers of other species, e.g. Freckled Duck (up to 500), Double-banded Plover, and Banded Stilt (up to 6000).

Several sites, e.g. Wool Wool and Vaughan Island, held breeding colonies of such species as Pelicans, Straw-necked Ibis up to 10,000 nests), Sacred Ibis (up to 50 nest/100 nests) and other species.

Fish include Yarra Pygmy Perch (rare). There are also populations of the Common Galaxid, Short-finned Eel, Big-headed Gudgeon, Southern Pygmy Perch.

Important lizard species are found on the lake shore.

The amount of saltmarsh habitat indicates that large or significant numbers of migratory waders and possibly Orange-bellied Parrots could be found in the area.

#### Lake Cundare

Large numbers of Banded Stilts (2895) and Hoary-headed Grebe (1250) occur at times. The lake had the second highest count of (4340 birds) in the annual Victorian Waterfowl Count of 1988.

The Lake is also noted for brine shrimp growth.

#### Lake Gnarpurt

Large numbers and diversity of waterbirds including 14,705 Shelduck, 4385 Pink-eared Duck, 172 Great Crested Grebe, 32 Freckled Duck.

Lake Gnarpurt is closely linked to Lake Corangamite regarding waterbird movements and provides an important drought refuge.

#### Lake Milangil

A large diversity and number of waterbirds including good numbers of Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck, Musk Duck and Blue-winged Shoveller. Up to 1155 Grey Teal, 3850 Black Swans, 3500 Shelduck, 6000 Pink-eared Duck, 100 Double-banded Plovers. Brolgas (2+) are regularly sighted. Breeding Silver Gull (74 nests), breeding Gull-billed Tern (74 nests).

#### Lake Murdeduke

A very high diversity of waterbirds particularly duck species and migratory wading birds. Large numbers of duck included up to 730 Freckled Duck, 1910 Shelduck, 1900 Grey Teal. Also 10,000 Black Swans and 19,670 Coots. Extremely rare (vagrant) waders include Wilson's phalarope, White-rumped Sandpiper, Little Stint, Cox's Sandpiper etc. Unusual inland occurrences of several waders. Other interesting species include Gull-billed Tern, Spotless Crake, Brolga (13).

#### Lake Terangpom

Diversity of waterfowl and large flocks of several duck species. Some rare species such as Freckled Duck (50 in 1981), Blue-billed Duck, White-winged Tern and Little Curlew have been found.

Short-finned Eel are found in the lake. Their population is bolstered by flooding from adjacent wetlands. The lake is a significant drought refuge for waterfowl. It is an unusual freshwater playia (or lunette lake).

Other threatened birds include:

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) - restricted colonial breeding in Victoria

Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) - rare in Victoria

Letter-winged Kite (*Elanus scriptus*) - rare in Victoria

Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*) - rare in Victoria  
Nankeen Knight Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) - restricted colonial breeding in Victoria  
Plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) - vulnerable in Victoria  
Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) - restricted colonial breeding in Victoria  
Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) - restricted colonial breeding in Victoria  
Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) - insufficiently known  
Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) - insufficiently known

Other threatened fish include:

Mountain Galaxias (*Galaxias olidus*) - insufficiently known

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### 23. Social and cultural values:

a) Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g., fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values:

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning?

If Yes, tick the box ☐ and describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

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### 24. Land tenure/ownership:

a) within the Ramsar site:

Lakes Beeac, Bookar, Cundare, Milangil, Murdeduke and Terangpom are State Wildlife Reserves.  
Lakes Colongulac, Corangamite and Gnarpurt are Lake Reserves.

b) in the surrounding area:

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### 25. Current land (including water) use:

a) within the Ramsar site:

The lakes are used for native conservation and recreation including duck hunting.

Lake Cundare is grazed to the lake edge at some sites.

Lake Gnarpurt is used for eel fishing.

Lake Murdeduke is used by a commercial eel fishery, and is stocked with trout for recreational angling.

Lake Colongulac is used for waste water dispersal.

b) in the surroundings/catchment:



The bulk of the land is used for agriculture. Sheep and beef cattle grazing predominate. The fertile alluvium near Lake Corangamite supports mixed farming, including dairying and the production of peas, potatoes, and onions. Dairying is also important in the Terang-Glenormiston area. Cereal cropping is carried out throughout the whole area.

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**26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:**

**a) within the Ramsar site:**

There has been no significant change in the ecological character of the Ramsar site since the Ramsar information sheets were last updated in 1992.

Factors which affect the ecological character at selected locations include:

- activities and processes in the wetland catchments which contribute to increased salinity and high nutrient input leading to algal blooms,
- livestock grazing,
- waste water inflow,
- hydrological modification, and
- pest plants and animals.

**b) in the surrounding area:**

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**27. Conservation measures taken:**

**a) List national and/or international category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site:**

In particular, if the site is partly or wholly a World Heritage Site and/or a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, please give the names of the site under these designations.

Parts of the area have been reserved as State Wildlife Reserves for the conservation and management of wildlife and as Lake Reserves for the conservation of their natural values:

- Lakes Beeac, Bookar, Cundare, Milangil, Murdeduke and Terangpom are State Wildlife Reserves.
- Lakes Colongulac, Corangamite and Gnarpurt are Lake Reserves.

**b) If appropriate, list the IUCN (1994) protected areas category/ies which apply to the site (tick the box or boxes as appropriate):**

Ia ☐; Ib ☐; II ☐; III ☐; IV ☐; V ☐; VI ☐

**c) Does an officially approved management plan exist; and is it being implemented?:**

**d) Describe any other current management practices:**

- A feasibility study to address erosion problems has been undertaken at Lake Murdeduke.
- Box Thorn has been removed to aid pest control at Lake Milangil and Lake Cundare.
- The discharge of industrial effluent from a dairy produce factory into Lake Colongulac was diverted from the lake to land disposal in 1996. An abattoir which discharged waste water into the lake has also ceased operation. The water quality in the lake is expected to slowly improve, although treated sewage from Camperdown continues to be discharged into the lake.
- Action Statements under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 have been produced for the Plains Wanderer (1995) which has been recorded at the site. The statement outlines conservation measures for the species.

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**28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

Planned removal of grazing access to the margins of Lake Gnarpur.

A catchment management plan for Lake Beeac is being prepared to establish strategies for the improved protection of environmental values.

A nutrient management plan is being prepared for the Lake Corangamite catchment to establish strategies to improve the quality of run-off entering the lake.

In an integrated approach to planning at Ramsar sites, management strategies are being prepared for all Ramsar sites in Victoria, including the Western District Lakes, to provide general strategic direction and site specific strategies. The strategies will be completed by June 1999.

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**29. Current scientific research and facilities:**

e.g., details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Monitoring programs underway includes fauna surveys, regular waterbird counts and monitoring of breeding colonies and water quality.

Salinity monitoring is being undertaken for several Western District Lakes as part of a PhD project to determine the salinity tolerance of aquatic In an integrated approach to planning at Ramsar sites, management strategies are being prepared for all Ramsar sites in Victoria, including the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula site, to provide general strategic direction and site specific strategies. The strategies will be completed by June 1999.

Macro-invertebrates and vegetation, and their potential as biological indicators.

Biannual surveys examining aquatic invertebrates and water quality parameters are undertaken for Lake Corangamite.

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**30. Current communications, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:**

e.g. visitors' centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

Lake Bookar is used for school environmental programs, and it is also a site for a Landcare group, with works including wetland revegetation and rehabilitation.

Lakes Beeac and Corangamite are used as study sites by Monash University.

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**31. Current recreation and tourism:**

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

Duck hunting occurs at Lakes Bookar, Corangamite, Colongulac, Gnarpur and Murdeduke. Lake Murdeduke is also used for birdwatching and fishing. Lake Bookar is also used for picnicking, sailing and other boating, and it has a recreation reserve on its southwest side.

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**32. Jurisdiction:**

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Government of Victoria.

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**33. Management authority:**

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Managed under the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Parks Program by Parks  
Victoria - 32,898 ha (100%)

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**34. Bibliographical references:**

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

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Please return to: **Ramsar Convention Secretariat, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland**  
Telephone: +41 22 999 0170 • Fax: +41 22 999 0169 • e-mail: [ramsar@ramsar.org](mailto:ramsar@ramsar.org)