

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th 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 the Ramsar site may be obtained from the Ecological Character Description (if completed) and other relevant sources.

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

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

May 1999

3. Country:

Australia

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.

Lake Albacutya, Victoria

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

Lake Albacutya, 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 ☒

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** ☐

**** 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:

Since the last update of the Ramsar information sheet in 1992, change in ecological character at the site has generally not been significant though some effects of long term changes persist. Also 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: 35° 46'S; Longitude: 141°58'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.

North-west Victoria, 14 kilometres north of Rainbow.

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

Approximately 80 metres.

11. Area: (in hectares)

5,731 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.

Lake Albacutya only receives water in exceptionally wet years (about every 20 years). It takes 3 or 4 years to dry 20 year cycle. When full it supports large numbers (10,000+) of ducks, swans and coots. Large numbers of Freckled Duck have also been recorded.

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)** and **Criterion 1(b)** under the Pre-1999 Criteria]:

Lake Albacutya is a good example of a terminal lake in the Murray-Darling Depression biogeographic region and in the wider Murray-Darling Basin.

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]:

When flooded, the lake is particularly important for supporting large numbers of ducks and Banded Stilt (see below).

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 lake, when flooded, has supported up to 20,000 Grey Teal, more than 10,000 Banded Stilts, 3,000 Pacific Black Duck, 3,000 Australian Shelduck, 2,000 Maned Duck and 3,000 Eurasian Coot (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]:

When flooded Lake Albacutya has been recorded as supporting in excess of 10% of the Victorian Freckled Duck population and 3.5% of the Australian population of the Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*). The lake has also supported internationally significant numbers of Banded Stilt (ANCA 1996)

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:

Murray-Darling Depression

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) Version 4.0 (Thackway and Cresswell 1995)

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 Wimmera River which flows from the highlands of western Victoria into Lake Hindmarsh, which in wet years, overflows into Outlet Creek which then carries water to Lake Albacutya. In most years the Wimmera River does not have sufficient flow to replace evaporative losses from Lake Hindmarsh, and so Lake Albacutya fills intermittently.

The longest dry period on record being 27 years (1929-1956). Lake Albacutya last filled in mid 1974 and has been dry since 1983.

Lake Albacutya abuts the Big Desert dune system which consists of irregular and parabolic dune chains and sand plains of the Lowan Sand. Heavy alluvial grey cracking clays of the Coonambidgal Formation occur along Outlet Creek, and these are partly overlain by grey and brown sands of variable depth. Lake Albacutya has a lunette of sandy material on its eastern side.

Average annual rainfall in the area is 360 mm.

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

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

18. Hydrological values:

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

Lake Albacutya has no operational function for water supply or water conservation and serves principally as a recreational area tourists and local residents, and as a natural wetland.

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 • O • P • Q • R • Sp • Ss • Tp • Ts • U • a •
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.

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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.

The vegetation along Outlet Creek and around Lake Albacutya differs considerably from that of the surrounding dry country. Red Gum woodlands fringe the lake, with Black Box and Cypress Pine woodlands on higher ground. There are also some small areas of buloke woodlands. Grey Mulga, Three-nerve Wattle, Small Cooba, Wallow, Lignum, and grasses grow beneath the woodlands. When the lake is dry, grasslands occupy the lake-bed.

The lake periodically supports in excess of 10,000 ducks and swans and 10,000 coots.

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.*

Threatened Species

Acacia trineura (Three-nerve Wattle) - vulnerable
Stenopetalum velutinum (Velvet Thread Petal) - vulnerable
Psoralea patens (Spreading Psoralea) - endangered
Austrostipa puberula (Fine-hairy Spear-grass) - rare
Myriophyllum porcatum (Ridged Water-milfoil) - vulnerable

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.*

Freckled Duck (*Sictonetta naevosa*) - rare in Victoria. There were 700 Freckled Duck on Lake Albacutya during February 1983. Extrapolations from counts made in Australia during January and February of 1983 (a drought year) suggested a total population of approx. 20,000 birds. Thus in 1983, Lake Albacutya held 3.5% of the total population of Freckled Duck.

Other threatened birds in Lake Albacutya Park are:

Blue-billed Duck (*Oxyura australis*) - rare
 White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) - rare
 Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) - rare
 Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) - insufficiently known
 Bush Thick-knee (*Burhinus magnirostris*) - vulnerable
 Pink Cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*) - indeterminate
 Regent Parrot (*Polytelis anthopeplus*) - rare
 Red-lored Whistler (*Pachycephala rufogularis*) - vulnerable
 Striated Grasswren (*Amytornis striatus*) - vulnerable
 Slender-billed Thornbill (*Acanthiza iredalei*) - rare
 Bush Stone Curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) - vulnerable
 Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*) - vulnerable

Fish:

Freshwater Catfish (*Tandanus tandanus*) - vulnerable

Reptiles:

The Tree Goanna (*Varanus varius*) which is a threatened species ('insufficiently known') has been collected at Lake Albacutya.

Mammals:

Mitchell's Hopping Mouse (*Notomys mitchelli*) - rare

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:

The Jakelbalek tribe occupied the land between Pine Plains and Lake Albacutya. The lake features in local aboriginal mythology as Nalbagadja, the place where Purra the kangaroo fed on bitter quandongs while fleeing from Wembulin the spider. Albacutya is derived from the aboriginal word 'nalbagadja' and means 'place of bitter quandongs'.

There are seven surface scatters around Lake Albacutya, which contain fireplaces, hearths, freshwater mussels, middens and other aboriginal cultural material. The area has not been adequately surveyed however, so it is likely that there are more archaeological sites to be discovered.

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:

24. Land tenure/ownership:

a) within the Ramsar site:

Reserved under Schedule 3 of the *National Parks Act* 1975 (Vic) as part of the Lake Albacutya Park.

b) in the surrounding area:

25. Current land (including water) use:

a) within the Ramsar site:

When holding water Lake Albacutya is a popular recreation area (i.e. for boating, fishing and shooting, as well as passive recreation).

With the drying out of the Lake, the lake-bed is colonised by plants taking advantage of the bare ground. Unfortunately, many of the plants best adapted to this colonisation process are introduced

weeds which are difficult to control. Lake-bed cropping and grazing licences are issued to local farmers to help reduce weeds and vermin.

More than 30 licensed commercial fishermen operate in the Mallee streams and lakes. Most of these fishermen operate on Lake Albacutya at some time when it contains water. The Lake is netted for Redfin and provides exceptional catches of yabbies.

b) in the surroundings/catchment:

Dryland farming, mainly wheat and wool.

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:

Over several decades, commitment of flows for agricultural and domestic purposes has reduced the frequency and extent of natural flooding in Lake Albacutya. Since the last update of the Ramsar information sheet in 1992, change in ecological character at the site has generally not been significant though some effects of long term changes persist.

Dieback of the River Red Gum and Black Box communities is continuing at Lake Albacutya. This is attributed to rising groundwater levels, increasingly saline groundwater and reduced occurrence of floodwaters and contributes to a loss of breeding habitat for threatened parrot species. Lakebed herbfields are being replaced by annual weeds as a result of infrequent flooding.

b) in the surrounding area:

Over the years there have been a number of proposals to increase water flow to the downstream end of the Wimmera River system, most recently by making water savings by piping stock and domestic diversions in the Wimmera-Mallee water-supply system to reduce transmission losses.

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.

The values at Lake Albacutya have been recognised through listing on the National Estate Register.

Reservation under Schedule 3 of the *National Parks Act 1975* provides for protection of natural values.

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?:

The Mallee Parks Management Plan 1996 and the Wimmera Heritage River Draft Management Plan 1997 outline strategies to protect the natural values at Lake Albacutya. Strategies relating to provision of water include processes for allocating water savings made as a result of an ongoing program to pipe stock and domestic supplies.

Action Statements under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* have been produced for the following fauna species that occur at the Ramsar site. They outline conservation measures for the species.

White-bellied Sea-eagle (1994)

Malleefowl (1994)

d) Describe any other current management practices:

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

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

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

A bulk water entitlement conversion process will be initiated for the Wimmera River system in 1998. However, while further long term reduction of flows will be prevented, there is unlikely to be a noticeable gain of environmental water for Lake Albacutya.

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

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

Monitoring of die-back of flood-dependent vegetation was initiated in 1993 with a baseline survey of the extent of River Red Gum dieback on the lower Wimmera River.

Pre duck season surveys are undertaken when the lake has water.

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.

There is a Visitor Information Centre located at the Park.

The Department of Conservation and Environment has produced a one page leaflet describing various aspects of the Park.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

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

When holding water, Lake Albacutya is used for boating, fishing, yabbying and water-skiing. There is a concrete boat launching ramp at Western Beach; at Yaapect Beach boats may be launched from the shore when the lake is full.

32. Jurisdiction:

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

Government of Victoria.

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 - 5,731 ha (100%)

34. Bibliographical references:

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

Beaglehole, A. C. (1979). The Distribution and Conservation of Native Vascular Plants in the Victorian Mallee. Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association, Portland.

Martindale, J. (1988). Waterfowl Count in Victoria, January 1987. RAOU Report No. 37. Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Moonee Ponds, Victoria.

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