

Hunter Estuary Wetlands (Kooragang Component) Formal Assessment

Next Steps

Background

The Hunter Estuary Wetlands (Kooragang Component) Formal Assessment found that:

- There is insufficient information to determine whether there has been a change in ecological character due to chemical contamination from PFAS or other chemicals historically used near the site. It remains possible that chemical contamination may lead to a future determination of change in ecological character.
- Critical components of the site's ecological character most likely to be affected by chemical contamination are shorebirds and the green and golden bell frog.
- It is considered likely that some chemicals are bioaccumulating in migratory shorebirds foraging in the intertidal mudflats particularly in the Fullerton Cove area and Stockton Sandspit. Based on an analysis of the data available, the chemicals of primary concern at the Kooragang component of the Ramsar site were identified as lead and PFOS.
- Despite the significant data gaps that exist, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the site has been potentially impacted by a number of contaminants. Collection of additional site data for all potential contaminants that includes contaminant levels in waterbird resources (e.g. invertebrates, food sources, habitat), would be required to determine whether chemical impacts have resulted in a change in the ecological character of the Ramsar site.

Further information on the findings of the report is contained in the [Executive Summary](#).

Next Steps

The report recommended a watching brief be commenced that includes development of an action plan with relevant stakeholders. This plan will focus on addressing knowledge gaps around changes to ecological character, the causes of these changes and options for their management.

The Steering Committee that oversaw development of the Formal Assessment (which comprised of representatives from the Australian Government Ramsar Administrative Authority (within the Department of the Environment and Energy), Department of Defence, New South Wales Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, and New South Wales Environment Protection Authority) will oversee the preparation and implementation of an action plan. The action plan will be prepared by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment as the managers of the Ramsar site by mid 2020. It will then be implemented over a three year period. The plan will include:

- Identification of additional targeted monitoring to assess the extent of chemical contamination within the Ramsar site and the impacts of these chemicals on:
 - Bird resources (e.g. food and foraging habitat)
 - Green and golden bell frog (breeding, general health, food resources)
 - Migratory and resident shorebirds

- Identification of any hydrodynamic modelling required to underpin or supplement the targeted monitoring.
- Requirements for the evaluation of the additional monitoring / modelling and identification potential management responses to address any impacts on ecological character.

The site will be monitored and assessed over a three year period, with additional data being collected and analysed. At the conclusion of this period, a further report relating to any impact on the ecological character of the site will be developed for the Steering Committee's consideration to determine further steps. Should monitoring and analysis of data suggest action is appropriate within the three year period, the Steering Committee will act appropriately.