



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage

Dr Peter Bridgewater
Secretary General
Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland
SWITZERLAND

**ARTICLE 3.2 NOTIFICATION: CHANGES IN ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER AT THE COORONG
AND LAKES ALEXANDRINA AND ALBERT RAMSAR SITE (RAMSAR SITE 321)**


Dear Dr Bridgewater

I am writing to inform you, in accordance with Article 3.2 of the Ramsar Convention, of changes in the ecological character of The Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert "The Coorong" Ramsar Site (Ramsar site number 321, designated under the Convention on 1 November 1985).

An ecological character description report (ECDR) for The Coorong Ramsar Site has been prepared as an input into the process for updating the site's Ramsar Information Sheet and management plan. I have enclosed a disk containing a copy of this report for your information.

While detailed quantitative data describing the 1985 listing condition are not available for many ecological components, processes, or services/benefits, the ECDR's authors concluded that the site has been declining for at least 20-30 years prior to listing, with the rate of decline exacerbated by Australia's recent drought conditions. Nearly half of 53 key functions and values are described as being 'of alarm' and a further third are 'of serious concern'.

The report notes that while the site was changing prior to listing, it has further declined since its listing in 1985. The reasons for these changes are complex, but include human-induced influences, such as alterations to the water flows into and within the site. Importantly, despite these changes the site continues to meet eight of the Ramsar Convention's site nomination criteria.

Australian governments recognise the need to improve the ecological health of The Coorong Ramsar site and have a range of major projects in place to address this issue. I have outlined some of these below. We are confident that collectively these actions will improve the environmental condition of these important wetlands. It is also worth bearing in mind that the ecological character of the site is protected under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and also as part of a national park under the South Australian *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

GPO Box 787 Canberra ACT 2601 Telephone 02 6274 1111 Facsimile 02 6274 1666

Internet: www.deh.gov.au



INTERNATIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



MEMBER

The most significant action is the Living Murray Initiative. Under this project, in excess of AUD\$850 million has been committed to achieve specific environmental objectives for six 'icon sites' along the Murray River. One of these icon sites is the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth, which is largely equivalent to The Coorong Ramsar Site. Information about the Living Murray Initiative and the asset environmental management plan for this site can be found at <http://www.thelivingmurray.mdbc.gov.au/>.

Two other significant initiatives to improve the health of the Coorong and Lakes include:

- An AUD\$5.3 million project (over three years) to evaluate and improve water management options for the area. Partners in the project include the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, University of Adelaide, Flinders University and South Australian Research and Development Institute <http://www.csiro.au/csiro/content/standard/psjj.html>; and
- Funding support through the two major national natural resource management funding programmes. This includes AUD\$0.4–0.5 million per annum over the past three financial years to support site monitoring, Ramsar management planning, on-ground works and Indigenous community involvement in site management.

The Australian and South Australian Governments will continue to work together to take action to improve the health of this important Ramsar site including the development of a revised management plan for the site, which will draw on the findings of The Coorong ECDR.

I would appreciate your advising Mr Tony Slatyer of any future reporting requirements that will arise as a result of the Australian Government informing you of this matter.

Yours sincerely



Mr Charlie Zammit
A/g First Assistant Secretary
Land, Water and Coasts Division
A/g Australian Ramsar National Focal Point

/ 3 December 2006