

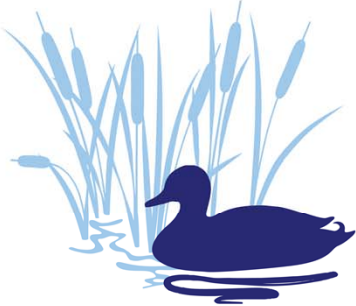
Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands

Tabled 14 September 2016

This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands*.

About Ramsar wetlands

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- Wetlands of international importance
- Recognised under the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental treaty

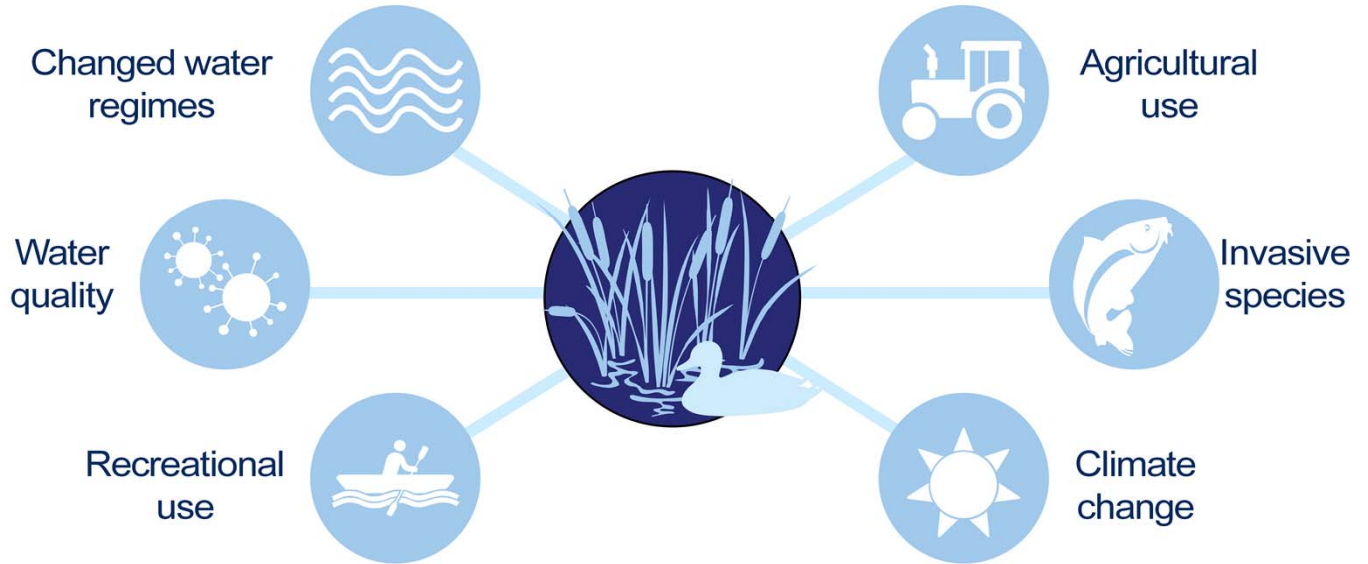
2 222 Ramsar sites
worldwide

65 in Australia

11 in Victoria

Wetlands are a vital part of the natural environment. They provide refuge, breeding sites and food to animals and plants and are an important part of the landscape. Ramsar wetlands are recognised as having international importance under the *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat*, known as the Ramsar Convention. It is one of the first intergovernmental treaties for the conservation of natural resources. Victoria currently has 11 Ramsar listed sites.

Threats to Ramsar wetlands



Globally, there has been a loss of wetlands since European settlement, and Victoria is no exception. As well as threats relating to hydrology, invasive plants or animals, activities and recreational use, the impact of climate change is also an emerging threat to wetlands' ecological character. Effectively managing these threats is critical to maintaining the character of Victoria's Ramsar wetlands.

What we looked at

How effectively
are Victoria's
Ramsar wetlands
being managed?

Department of Environment,
Land, Water & Planning
(DELWP)

Primary site managers:

- Parks Victoria
- Melbourne Water

Catchment management
authorities

This audit assessed how effectively Victoria's Ramsar wetlands are being managed. In doing so, it looked at the role of the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) and the primary site managers—Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water—as well as the catchment management authorities (CMA) which also have a key management role.

What we found



Some good on-ground management outcomes



not clearly linked to management plan actions or risks

Areas for improvement



governance



coordination



oversight

I found that, while there are a number of effective on-ground management outcomes, these are not clearly linked to management plan actions or risks. Overall, the governance, coordination and oversight of the management of Ramsar sites must improve for Victoria to effectively meet its obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

Monitoring Ramsar sites

Monitoring and reporting focuses on

implementation of actions

rather than

effectiveness of actions

- Short-term
- Focus on outputs

- Long-term
- Focus on outcomes

Monitoring of Ramsar sites also requires improvement. Some short-term output-focused monitoring takes place, but there is limited ongoing monitoring with a focus on outcomes. As a result, management effectiveness is not systematically monitored, reviewed or evaluated. Failing to maintain the ecological character of these sites risks breaching Australia's international obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

Systemic issues in environmental management

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Complicated and poorly coordinated governance arrangements



Data limitations



Lack of oversight and accountability



Poor evaluation

Issues identified in previous audits

Some of the issues in this audit have been highlighted in previous performance audits in the environment and natural resource management area. These audits have also found complicated and poorly coordinated governance arrangements, a lack of oversight and accountability and poor evaluation, compromised by limitations in data. These systemic issues still need addressing, and all environmental or natural resource management agencies should have close regard to these recurring issues.

Recommendations

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- 1 Robust governance arrangements for managing Ramsar sites
- 2 Oversight of management plans
- 3 Statewide monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework

Nevertheless, it is encouraging that, as a result of the emerging findings from this audit, DELWP is considering establishing a Victorian Ramsar forum that would bring together staff from DELWP, CMAs, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water to share information, communicate issues and national updates, and to progress issues at a site and statewide level. This should also allow better understanding of roles and responsibilities, and the development of a shared understanding of priority values and threats at each site, as well as helping to track progress in implementing site management plans.

All the agencies accepted the recommendations.

For further information, please view the full report on
our website: www.audit.vic.gov.au

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