

Inquiry into Auditor General Report No.202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)

Mr Bill Hampel

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Submission:

Ramsar Submission

The strongest protection of Victoria's Ramsar sites should be a lay-down misere.

As a member of the international community and signatory of a variety of conventions, we have a moral obligation to demonstrate our unequivocal support for the Ramsar convention and care of our own sites. Such support helps to show that we are a genuine international player (and who knows, it might encourage our support for other international conventions such as that on unlawful and inhumane deprivation of liberty in off-shore detention centres).

The impact of climate change on every aspect of our lives is obvious, and particularly so on the Murray-Darling Basin in which several of the Ramsar sites lie. Surface water is diminishing in quantity and as shown by my early experience fishing on the Murray River in the 1940s and subsequent recent visits, what remains has deteriorated in quality. The current enquiry into the Basin brings to front of mind our dependence on a healthy ecosystem.

Of course, this dependence is not limited to the supply of irrigation water. Support for the sites shows that we acknowledge the intangible benefits of our contact with nature. Most literate people know from daily experience – and there is a deal of research to support the view that contact with nature in some form, even a local creek or untouched wooded area – can have benefits for our sense of well-being. My own research in the early 1980s with 640 Year 10 students, also confirmed that early exposure to natural areas is correlated with greater environmental concern, knowledge and behaviour. There is no greater need for these attributes than now.

Proper administration of Ramsar sites has certain key obligations: the need to protect all their resident flora and fauna. It puzzles me greatly that, as the effects of climate change become more severe, and in the knowledge of decreasing surface water and declining duck breeding, we should still have a duck hunting season. Leaving aside disregard for animal welfare concerns which hardly does us proud, maintenance of such a season seems to contradict our commitment to the Ramsar convention.

Finally, although my 1987 PhD was in the social sciences and not biology or environmental science, I have been a concerned and active supporter for our natural systems for a long time. For my 2015 book, *Against the Grain*, I interviewed 13 farmers who accept the science of climate change and naturally, for this publication, I did extensive reading, including identifying climate changes many impacts.

I've had a more than distant contact with some Ramsar sites. I first visited the Hattah Lakes 70 years ago and have done so several times recently. I fished (very successfully) in a now Ramsar Kerang Lake one afternoon in 1961. Also, while working in Kerang, I visited Gunbower forest. I have visited the Barmah Forest on several occasions. During the 1980s I was very active as President of an environmental coalition

supporting the Edithvale Wetlands. I also read in some detail about the Ramsar convention years ago while preparing work for the ACF.

Bill Hampel

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

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