



28 November 2019

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn MP  
Chair, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee  
Parliament of Victoria  
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Level 31 / 35 Collins Street  
Melbourne Vic 3000

T 03 8601 7000  
[enquiries@audit.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@audit.vic.gov.au)  
[www.audit.vic.gov.au](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au)

File no.: O19/418

Dear Ms Blandthorn

### **Parliamentary Inquiry into Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands**

Thank you for your invitation to provide a submission to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into Auditor-General's Report No. 202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands.

In addition to the terms of reference you have requested:

- a high-level overview of VAGO's audit into Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands
- information on any significant developments that have occurred subsequent to the audit
- an update on the Government's response to VAGO's recommendations
- key areas of risk the Committee should examine in its inquiry into VAGO's report.

#### **Overview of audit**

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. In designating a Ramsar site, countries agree to set up and oversee a management framework aimed at conserving and maintaining the wetland and its ecological character. At the time of the audit there were 11 Ramsar sites in Victoria.

The audit assessed how effectively Victoria's Ramsar wetlands were being managed. It included the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) and the primary site managers—Parks Victoria (PV) and Melbourne Water (MW)—as well as the Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) who also have a key management role.

We found limited evidence that all Ramsar sites were being effectively managed and protected from decline. We concluded that the governance, coordination and oversight of the management of Ramsar sites needed to improve for Victoria to effectively meet its obligations. We found monitoring of the implementation of management plans also required improvement, as there was limited ongoing monitoring of plan implementation or whether actions were achieving the intended outcomes.

Many of the issues in this audit stem from unclear roles and responsibilities, limited oversight and a lack of accountability for implementation of Ramsar management plans and outcomes. The committee may wish to explore these aspects in undertaking its inquiry.

### Significant developments post tabling

We are aware of several developments and work related to Ramsar sites undertaken since the audit report was tabled, based on publicly available information. We have not verified or audited this information.

#### *Ramsar Site Management Plans*

A new Western Port Ramsar Site Management Plan was released in March 2017, replacing the 2003 Western Port Ramsar Site Strategic Management Plan ([https://www.water.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/66270/Western-Port-Ramsar-Site-Management-Plan\\_revised.pdf](https://www.water.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/66270/Western-Port-Ramsar-Site-Management-Plan_revised.pdf)).

The Port Phillip (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site management plan was released in May 2018 ([https://www.water.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/203360/PPBWS-and-BP-Ramsar-Site-Management-Plan.pdf](https://www.water.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/203360/PPBWS-and-BP-Ramsar-Site-Management-Plan.pdf)).

The finalisation of these plans addresses recommendation 2 (first dot point) from our report. VAGO has not assessed these plans.

#### *New Victorian Ramsar site*

A new Ramsar site was listed in 2018, the Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar site. This site is situated approximately 340 kilometres west of Melbourne on the border with South Australia. There are now 12 Ramsar sites in Victoria. (<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/wetlands/significant-wetlands>)

#### *Victorian wetland inventory*

Part 1.1.2 of our tabled report noted that DEWLP maintains the Victorian wetland inventory.

A 2017 update is reported to have improved the accuracy of the inventory by updating wetland mapping and attributes in the Melbourne area and for alpine bogs and fens in East and West Gippsland catchment regions. It also involved correcting inaccurate classification attributes and correcting wetland polygons for individual wetlands based on new data and feedback from wetland inventory users. (<https://discover.data.vic.gov.au/dataset/victorian-wetland-inventory-current>)

#### *Australia's National Report to the 13th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, October 2018*

This report highlights numerous activities and projects undertaken in Victoria (refer <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/australias-national-report-13th-conference-contracting-parties-ramsar-convention>). I note in particular that report includes reference to VAGO's audit:

'The Victorian Auditor General's Office audit Meeting obligations to protect Ramsar wetlands was tabled in the Victorian Parliament in September 2016. The audit report drew attention to potential changes in ecological character at some Victorian Ramsar sites and recommended improved monitoring and adaptive management. The Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning responded by developing a management action plan to address the recommendations. This was tabled in Appendix C of the audit report. Funding has been obtained to support implementation of the plan over the next three years. The plan focuses on improving management coordination at Ramsar sites between site managers and other agencies, establishing and implementing a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and

improvement framework and improving the standard of management plans. All actions are being progressed. The plan will result in further improvements to adaptive management at Victoria's Ramsar sites.'

We have provided a summary in Attachment 1 to this submission of the references from the COP13 report made to actions undertaken by Victoria.

### **The status of recommendations**

DELWP provided my Office with an update on the status of actions taken in response to our recommendations as part of our follow-up survey that closed in December 2018.

DELWP reported that all actions undertaken to implement the recommendations are complete. We have had regard to DELWP's reported actions in preparing this submission and highlight reported actions the Committee may wish to explore further as part of its Inquiry.

We have provided a summary in Attachment 2 to this submission of DELWP responses to my survey.

### **Key areas of risk to examine**

#### *The development and implementation of robust governance, coordination and oversight arrangements for Victorian Ramsar sites*

The audit found there was not a robust governance framework or procedures to help implement Ramsar management plans in a risk-based, prioritised manner. There was little evidence that plans were effectively implemented.

DELWP had limited oversight of how plans for all 11 sites were being implemented and evaluated. We also that found PV's oversight of the implementation of management plans for the 10 sites it manages was poor.

The report noted that similar related governance and oversight issues had been highlighted in past performance audits in the environment and natural resource management area. These audits had also found complicated and poorly coordinated governance arrangements, a lack of oversight and accountability and poor evaluation, compromised by limitations in data.

Several environment audits undertaken since the Ramsar audit, including Protecting Victoria's Coastal Assets (March 2018), Managing the Environmental Impacts of Domestic Wastewater (September 2018) and Recovering and Reprocessing Resources from Waste (June 2019) have found similar systemic issues persist in this portfolio.

DELWP has advised that a number of actions have been completed in relation to recommendation 1 (first dot point) including the establishment of an inter-agency governance group, the appointment of site coordinators and establishment of site coordinating committees.

The Committee may wish seek a range of different stakeholder views (such as DELWP, PV, MW, CMA's, traditional owners, community groups and experts) on whether they believe roles and responsibilities for each Ramsar site are now clear, and whether there is improved site management and accountability for the implementation of Ramsar management plans.

#### *Planning, management and reporting arrangements in relation to Victorian Ramsar sites*

The audit found that there was limited accountability for implementation and monitoring the effectiveness of management plans.

DELWP has advised in relation to recommendation 1 (second dot point) that Site Coordination Committees now develop annual action plans that identify priority actions (informed by monitoring data) to be undertaken each year, and that this ensures that timeframes and resourcing are identified, and actions are timely. DELWP also reports it has developed an online Ramsar management system that enables tracking of management plan implementation.

In relation to recommendation 2 (third dot point) DELWP has reported that it has improved the tracking of management plan implementation for Ramsar sites in Victoria. Management plan activities have been entered into a database and progress against each activity has been recorded. DELWP advises that Ramsar state-wide coordinators and site managers have a tool to track how management plans are being put into effect.

The Committee may wish to ask DELWP to provide evidence that action plans identify priority actions and resourcing requirements, and related responsibilities, funding and timelines for implementation. It may also be useful to seek a demonstration of the online Ramsar management system and to obtain an update of the status of all management plan actions.

Our report identified that CMA's were to report to DELWP on the progress of their Regional Waterway Strategy actions (where Ramsar management plans are embedded) in 2018.

Part 3.3.2 of our tabled report notes 'DELWP has advised that, in 2018, it will fund each CMA to conduct an internal review to assess its progress in implementing the management activities outlined in its Regional Waterway Strategies, including activities associated with Ramsar sites. As a result of this, CMAs may adapt their management activities for the remaining years of the Regional Waterway Strategies'.

The Committee may wish to seek clarification from CMA's on the status of these planned activities:

- did all CMA's review and assess their progress in implementing management activities report to DELWP in 2018 as intended?
- request any CMA review and assessment reports, including any reporting to DELWP, and ask CMA's to provide an overview of the status of actions in Regional Waterway Strategies related to Ramsar site activities.
- have CMA's made any changes to their management activities as a result of this work?

Part 2.4 (text immediately below figure 2D) of our tabled report notes that in 2015, PV introduced a new approach to improve its planning, governance and oversight processes for public parks and reserves, which includes Ramsar sites. This approach involved preparing management plans for 16 areas with similar landscapes. At the time of the audit, no plan that covers a Ramsar site had been completed, so this process was not advanced enough to assess how well Ramsar sites will be catered for. The River Red Gums landscape plan, which was in the early stages of development, includes four Ramsar sites—Barmah Forest, Gunbower Forest, Kerang Wetlands and Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes.

The Committee may wish to ask that DELWP and PV provide an update on this work and how the River Red Gum plan (and any others subsequently developed) link to the relevant Regional Waterway Strategies for these sites, which include Ramsar management plans.

#### *Monitoring any changes to the character of Ramsar wetlands*

We found monitoring and reporting of Ramsar site management plans was focused on the implementation of actions rather than on their effectiveness.

In part 3.4 of our report we noted the first 'Ramsar Rolling Review' was undertaken in 2011 and aimed to identify changes in ecological character at Ramsar sites. This was a nationally funded

program coordinated by the Australian Government. A second state-funded review took place in 2014–15 and 2015–16 and found that some 'levels of acceptable change' (LAC) were not met and, in several instances, LACs could not be assessed due to a lack of data.

At the time of the audit, DELWP had not reported a change in the ecological character of Ramsar wetlands since the sites were listed. However, the draft results of the 2014–15 Ramsar Rolling Review indicated a potential change in ecological character at some Victorian sites. DELWP advised that this would be reported to the Australian Government.

The Committee may wish to ask DELWP if these potential changes were reported to the Commonwealth; and if there have since been any further changes, and if so, have these been reported. It may also be useful for the Committee to understand whether any new LACs have been established, given that only 5 of the 11 Ramsar sites had LACs for all of their identified critical ecological elements at the time of the audit.

In relation to recommendation 3, DELWP has advised that actions are complete, although implementation of its Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework will occur over multiple years and will be integrated into routine practice. DELWP has reported that the development of a MERI framework for Ramsar sites has resulted in a number of improvements.

Our tabled report noted that DELWP was to complete a project by 30 November 2016 aimed at improving monitoring at Ramsar sites, including addressing data gaps and deficiencies and improving the link between monitoring and Ramsar site management planning. Part 3.4 lists the following improvements the project was to result in:

- an addendum to the published Ecological Character Descriptions for Victoria's Ramsar sites where DELWP and the Commonwealth Government agree that changes are warranted
- a final published Ecological Character Description for the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar site
- a monitoring schedule covering the needs of all of Victoria's Ramsar sites
- an analysis of current gaps in monitoring
- a monitoring tool to help plan and oversee a monitoring program for Ramsar sites.

The development of an online Ramsar management system appears to have addressed the last dot point listed above and DELWP advises it now provides managers with a tool to track how management plans are implemented.

The Committee may wish to ask DELWP to provide an update on how this tool is used, the status of the other actions it was to undertake that are listed above, and how this work informed the development of DELWP's MERI framework.

In relation to the MERI framework the Committee may wish to seek clarification from DELWP on several matters:

- does this replace the previous three-yearly Ramsar rolling reviews?
- what adaptive management has occurred at Victoria's Ramsar sites as a result of monitoring results?
- what public reporting is there on the ecological character of Ramsar sites?
- State and federal funding arrangements for monitoring Victorian Ramsar sites.

*Resourcing arrangements for managing Victorian Ramsar sites*

We found that inadequate ongoing resourcing arrangements were a major hurdle to the effective management of Ramsar sites in Victoria. Not all management plan actions were funded, so responsible agencies relied on grants. We noted that, despite this, agencies should know what resources are required to manage Ramsar sites to avoid any changes in ecological character.

Recommendation 2 (second dot point) required DELWP to work with catchment management authorities and site managers to develop and assess options for the direct funding of management plan activities, focused on high-priority threats that impact on the ecological character of Ramsar sites. DELWP has reported that key components of action undertaken in relation to this recommendation are the alignment of agency funding and ensuring that high priority threats that impact the ecological character are targeted for management. DELWP advised that agency funding from all sources is considered by the site coordinating committee when planning annual implementation activities at each site.

DELWP's response is not clear with regard to what options for direct funding of management plan activities it developed and assessed. The Committee may wish to ask DELWP to explain what options were considered, and how these were assessed.

We note that in section 2.5 of the tabled report that PV was not able to identify what resources it required to manage its 10 Ramsar sites. PV was aware of this issue and intended to collect this information as it introduced its new landscape planning process noted above. The Committee may wish to ask PV to outline what work was undertaken to determine its Ramsar site resourcing requirements as it implemented its new planning process.

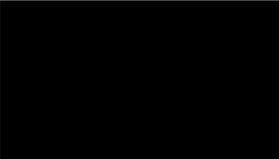
The Committee may also find it useful to ask DELWP to provide a complete breakdown of funding to each Ramsar site (or a selection including both PV and MW sites) specifying:

- funding allocated to individual actions
- the funding source and period of funding.

The Committee may also wish to seek clarification from DELWP on:

- the proportion of funding from state budget/line agencies versus funding from state and Commonwealth grants
- whether the reliance on grants to undertake Ramsar site management activities has reduced.

DELWP also reports that all sites except Gippsland Lakes received additional implementation funds in early 2018. Site proposals were developed and then reviewed by DELWP using site program logic to ensure that proposals targeted threats to ecological character. All projects were expected to be completed by June 2020 with six monthly progress reporting. The Committee may wish to ask DELWP what future arrangements are in place for funding any projects that will be completed by June 2020, to the extent that they relate to activities are of an ongoing nature.



ANDREW GREAVES  
AUDITOR-GENERAL

att.

Australia's National Report the RAMSAR Convention (extracts that reference Victoria), October 2018

Follow up survey: DELWP response – Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands, September 2016

## Australia's National Report the RAMSAR Convention (extracts that reference Victoria), October 2018

(Source: <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/australias-national-report-13th-conference-contracting-parties-ramsar-convention>)

2.4 The Victorian Environmental Water Holder develops seasonal watering plans (<http://www.vewh.vic.gov.au/watering-program/seasonal-watering-plan>). The seasonal watering plan is a statewide plan that guides environmental watering decisions in Victoria. The annual seasonal watering plan is based on proposals developed by catchment management authorities and Melbourne Water (a water statutory authority), drawing from scientific river and wetland studies and community engagement. Each year, waterway managers scope potential environmental watering for their regions for the coming year in seasonal watering proposals. The proposals draw on environmental flow studies, and longer term plans such as environmental water management plans and regional waterway strategies. The proposals also incorporate information and advice from local communities. The seasonal watering plan is a collated summary of the proposals

2.9 This is widespread, with constructed wetlands being used for both stormwater and wastewater treatment. The Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar site includes the Western Treatment Plant which uses constructed wetlands to treat sewage and stormwater from half of Melbourne (a city of 4.4 million people). The plant treats sewage using a series of large ponds using anaerobic and aerobic lagoons. Once the process is complete the cleaned water is either discharged to Port Phillip Bay or recycled after further treatment. The aerobic ponds and former treatment ponds which are no longer required for sewage treatment provide habitat for large numbers of waterbirds.

4.1 Victoria has undertaken a project to identify priority wetland weeds in the state and their impacts ([https://www.water.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/69322/Knowledge-document-of-the-impact-ofpriority-wetland-weeds-Part-1-16-June-2017.pdf](https://www.water.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/69322/Knowledge-document-of-the-impact-ofpriority-wetland-weeds-Part-1-16-June-2017.pdf) and [https://www.water.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/69323/Knowledge-document-of-the-impact-ofpriority-wetland-weeds-Part-2-16-June-2017.pdf](https://www.water.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/69323/Knowledge-document-of-the-impact-ofpriority-wetland-weeds-Part-2-16-June-2017.pdf)). The first report documents how 28 weeds were selected as priority wetland weeds from an initial list of 174 species. The second describes the impacts of the 30 priority weeds on wetland values, including information about knowledge gaps.

5.6 All wetland management plans in Australia are based on available scientific information and research, including completed Ecological Character Descriptions (ECDs). Plans identify values, threats and appropriate management responses. Implementation of plans is monitored, and plans are regularly reviewed.

The **Victorian Auditor General's Office** audit *Meeting obligations to protect Ramsar wetlands* was tabled in the Victorian Parliament in September 2016. The audit report drew attention to potential changes in ecological character at some Victorian Ramsar sites and recommended improved monitoring and adaptive management. The Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning responded by developing a management action plan to address the recommendations. This was tabled in Appendix C of the audit report. Funding has been obtained to support implementation of the plan over the next three years. The plan focuses on improving management coordination at Ramsar sites between site managers and other agencies, establishing and implementing a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework and improving the standard of

management plans. All actions are being progressed. The plan will result in further improvements to adaptive management at Victoria's Ramsar sites.

8.1 Victoria maintains the comprehensive Victorian Wetlands Inventory (<https://www.data.vic.gov.au/data/dataset/victorian-wetland-inventory-current>) and an edit tool (<http://essolutions.com.au/wetlandeditool>) to allow individuals to contribute to the improvement of the inventory by registering and suggesting changes to the attributes of wetlands included in the Victorian Wetland Inventory. Updates to the inventory are undertaken annually.

9.1 A number of jurisdictions have wetland policies in place. In Victoria, these include *Water for Victoria 2016* and the *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy 2013* (<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-andcatchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/strategies-and-planning>). The Victorian Government reiterated its long term commitment to protecting and improving waterway health in *Water for Victoria*, released in 2016, building on the direction outlined in the 2013 *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy*. The Government has invested \$130 million in protecting and improving the community values of rivers, wetlands and estuaries (waterways) for the period 2016-17 – 2020-21:

- \$90 million to implement regional waterway strategies and improve waterway health
- \$30 million to implement the Riparian Action Plan
- \$10 million to deliver onground environmental works and community engagement for the Gippsland Lakes (*Water for Victoria* – [https://www.water.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0030/58827/Water-Plan-strategy2.pdf](https://www.water.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0030/58827/Water-Plan-strategy2.pdf))

9.5 The Victorian Government has undertaken projects to assist wetland managers in understanding and addressing the impacts on wetlands from climate change.

- A decision support framework has been developed to assist natural resource managers in understanding the potential impacts of climate change on coastal wetlands, identifying their adaptive capacity and in setting realistic objectives and planning for their future management. The Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptive Capacity of Coastal Wetlands Decision Support Framework is available on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning website: <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/water/rivers-estuaries-andwetlands/wetlands>.
- Assessment of the resilience of two Ramsar sites to the future predicted impacts of large-scale drivers of change, including climate change. The assessments will inform policy for managing change and future actions to mitigate climate change impacts at these Ramsar sites

10.2 *Water for Victoria* sets out policies and actions for recognising and managing for Aboriginal values. This includes building capacity to increase Aboriginal participation in Water Management and including Aboriginal values and traditional ecological knowledge in water planning (<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-values>) eg the Barapa Water for Country project is partnership project between the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and Barapa Barapa Traditional Owners. The project centres around Barapa Cultural Team members identifying, mapping and recording the cultural values of the Lower Gunbower Forest to improve the management of environmental water.

10.4 The Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site forms the largest coastal lagoon system in Australia. A partnership between Greening Australia and the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation has resulted in cultural and conservation outcomes for private land located between

the Avon and Latrobe Rivers. Fifteen new sites have been registered as culturally significant since 2012, including old campsites and the pathways that connected them. The emerging cultural land map conveys the importance of these wetlands to the Gunaikurnai people and how they form part of the creation story of the Dreaming. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is applied in combination with Western science knowledge across the Indigenous Protected Areas and the Indigenous Rangers programs. The strengthening of TEK in Indigenous land and sea management, including wetlands, is an objective in both programs.

11.3 In Victoria, regional waterway strategies set out an eight year program of actions to protect and improve rivers, wetlands and estuaries. Priorities for actions take account of the environmental, cultural, social and economic values of waterways. For example, see the West Gippsland Waterway Strategy at: <http://www.wqcma.vic.gov.au/our-region/waterways/waterway-strategy>

11.4 In Victoria, catchment management authorities (CMA) are developing regional waterway strategies which set out the regional management program for rivers, wetlands and estuaries over an eight year timeframe. The CMAs use the state-wide standardised risk assessment method based on waterway values which encompasses environmental, social, cultural and economic values.

12.2 In Victoria, a decommissioned water storage, Lake Mokoan, has been restored guided by the Winton Wetlands Restoration and Monitoring Strategic Plan 2011 (<https://wintonwetlands.org.au/>).

Victoria published a resource summarising the ecological understanding of vegetation recovery in wetlands in 2017. A decision support tool to allow natural resource managers to assess the feasibility of wetland vegetation recovery is also planned for release late in 2017. (see links at: <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/wetlands/managingwetlands>)

## Follow up survey: DELWP response – Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands, September 2016

**Recommendation 1 (first dot point):** That the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, in conjunction with Parks Victoria and catchment management authorities, develop and implement robust governance arrangements for managing Ramsar sites, including clarifying roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for planning, management and reporting.

DELWP response from Management Action Plan in tabled report	Date to be completed	DELWP reported action taken to implement the recommendation	DELWP reported key improvements and outcomes resulting from implementing the audit recommendations
<p>Recommendation accepted. DELWP, catchment management authorities (CMAs), Parks Victoria (PV) and Melbourne Water will convene a high-level inter-agency governance group to agree on roles and responsibilities and oversee the implementation of agreed roles and responsibilities for Victoria's Ramsar sites within each agency. The governance framework will be established by June 2017. DELWP, CMAs, PV and Melbourne Water will ensure that coordination arrangements are in place for managing each individual Ramsar site by June 2017. Other stakeholders, including Traditional Owners, will be involved as appropriate.</p>	01/06/2017	<p>Completed 01/06/2017. Interagency governance group has been established and Terms of Reference and roles and responsibilities agreed. Regular meetings are underway with actions being tracked. The group will meet again in Feb 2019 to align with planning for the Environmental Contribution tranche 5 business case. Site coordinators have been appointed for each site. All 12 Ramsar sites have either appropriate governance structures in place or have newly established a site coordinating committee.</p>	<p>The formation of the Ramsar inter-agency governance group and development of agreed roles and responsibilities has led to improved understanding and acknowledgement of agency responsibilities for protecting Ramsar sites.</p>

**Recommendation 1 (second dot point): That the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, in conjunction with Parks Victoria and catchment management authorities, strengthen management plans to include time frames and resourcing to ensure that actions are carried out effectively and in a timely way.**

Agency Action	Date to be completed	DELWP reported action taken to implement the recommendation	DELWP reported key improvements and outcomes resulting from implementing the audit recommendations
<p>Recommendation accepted.</p> <p>DELWP, via the Ramsar site inter-agency governance group, will oversee the development of a framework for management plan implementation that will specify timeframes and resourcing by June 2018.</p>	01/06/2018	<p>Completed 01/06/2018.</p> <p>Ongoing management plan implementation tracking is part of the on-line Ramsar Management System, developed as a component of the Ramsar MERI framework. The Ramsar Management System is in use, improvements are currently being made in response to user feedback. This system will allow state-wide oversight of management plan implementation and monitoring of the timeliness of management actions.</p>	<p>The annual action plans developed by site coordination committees identify priority actions (informed by monitoring data) to be undertaken each year to implement the site management plan. This ensures that timeframes and resourcing are identified, and actions are timely. The monitoring of site management plan implementation is enabled by the online Ramsar management system, the efficiency (effectiveness) of management actions is monitored as per the site MERI plan.</p>

**Recommendation 2 (first dot point): that the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning oversee the development of a finalised Ramsar management plan for the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula and Western Port sites.**

Agency Action	Date to be completed	DELWP reported action you have taken to implement the recommendation	DELWP reported key improvements and outcomes resulting from implementing the audit recommendations
<p>Recommendation accepted.</p> <p>DELWP will finalise the Western Port Ramsar Management Plan by December 2016.</p> <p>DELWP will oversee the renewal of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsular Ramsar Site Management Plan (to be led by Corangamite CMA). The Plan will be completed by December 2017.</p>	01/12/2017	<p>Completed 01/12/2017.</p> <p>The Western Port Ramsar Site Management Plan has been approved and launched by the Minister for Water. Has been published to the DELWP website. The Port Phillip (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site Management Plan has been approved and launched by the Minister for Water (18 May 2018). Plan has been published to the DELWP website: <a href="https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/wetlands/significant-wetlands">https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/wetlands/significant-wetlands</a></p>	<p>These two Ramsar sites now have current management plans that: - Set a clear direction for management of the sites over the next 7 years. - Set out the critical values to be managed and protected to maintain or improve ecological character. - Identify priority threats for management. - Identify key knowledge gaps in our understanding of the sites</p>

**Recommendation 2 (second dot point): That the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning work with catchment management authorities and site managers to develop and assess options for the direct funding of management plan activities focused on high-priority threats that impact on the ecological character of Ramsar sites.**

Agency Action	Date to be completed	DELWP reported action taken to implement the recommendation	DELWP key improvements and outcomes resulting from implementing the audit recommendations
<p>Recommendation accepted.</p> <p>Where relevant, the regional investment process ('roundtables') delivered under the Our Catchments Our Communities strategy will include consideration of the priority Ramsar site management actions identified by individual Ramsar site coordination groups and align agency investment in Ramsar site actions.</p>	<p>None specified.</p>	<p>Completion date not specified.</p> <p>Key components of this action are the alignment of agency funding and ensuring that high priority threats that impact the ecological character are targeted for management. Agency funding from all sources is considered by the site coordinating committee when planning annual implementation activities at each site. This approach is set out in the Coordination Committee Terms of Reference. Priority actions for each site are identified using site MERI plan program logic, ensuring that actions target threats to the critical components, processes and services that make up the site ecological character. All sites except Gippsland Lakes received additional implementation funds in early 2018. Site proposals were developed and then reviewed by DELWP using site program logics to ensure that proposals targeted threats to ecological character. All projects will be completed by June 2020 with six monthly progress reporting.</p>	<p>The site coordination committees, in developing the annual action plans, ensure alignment of agency funding. Agency funding from all sources is considered by the site coordinating committee when planning annual implementation activities at each site. Priority actions for each site are identified using site MERI plan program logic - ensuring that actions target threats to ecological character.</p>

**Recommendation 2 (third dot point): That the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning implement arrangements to oversee how management plans are put into effect.**

<b>Agency Action</b>	<b>Date to be completed</b>	<b>DELWP reported action taken to implement the recommendation</b>	<b>DELWP reported key improvements and outcomes resulting from implementing the audit recommendations</b>
<p>Recommendation accepted.</p> <p>DELWP will improve tracking of management plan implementation for each Ramsar site by June 2017.</p>	01/06/2017	<p>Completed 01/06/2017.</p> <p>DELWP has improved the tracking of management plan implementation for Ramsar sites in Victoria. Management plan activities have been entered into a database and progress against each activity has been recorded. Of the 281 management plan actions 6% have been completed, 63% are in progress and 31% have not commenced. Ramsar site management plans are two to three years into their implementation phase; the lifetime of the plans is from seven to eight years. This function has been incorporated into the Ramsar Management System (see action RN06-01) and will be used by the site coordination groups to track implementation of management plans and in developing annual action plans. It will be used by the state-wide coordinator to monitor implementation of site management plans.</p>	<p>The Ramsar state-wide coordinator and site managers now have a tool to track how management plans are being put into effect. This tool was developed in 2017 and is now incorporated into the Ramsar management system.</p>

**Recommendation 3: That the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning lead the development of a state-wide approach to monitoring the ecological character of Ramsar sites, through a specific monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework.**

Agency Action	Date Completed	DELWP reported action to implement the recommendation	DELWP reported key improvements and outcomes resulting from implementing the recommendations
<p>Recommendation accepted. DELWP will develop a state-wide Ramsar site monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement plan and oversee the implementation of the plan by each individual Ramsar Site coordinating group by December 2017.</p>	01/12/2017	<p>Completed 01/12/2017, but considered ongoing. The original management action plan included that DELWP would 'oversee the implementation of the plan by each individual Ramsar Site coordinating group by December 2017'. The monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework has been finalised and site MERI plans have been developed and are in process of being finalised, however the site MERI plan implementation will occur over multiple years and will be integrated into routine practice (i.e. will not be completed by Dec 2017). DELWP will maintain oversight as per agreed Ramsar roles and responsibilities. DELWP will maintain oversight as per agreed Ramsar roles and responsibilities, but for the purposes of this recommendation, the action is considered to be completed.</p>	<p>The development of a MERI framework for Ramsar sites has resulted in a no. of improvements: Individual site MERI plans ensure that ecological character status is routinely monitored and reported &amp; that understanding of management effectiveness is improved over time; Program logic in the site MERI plans make clear links between mgmt interventions, threats, intermediate &amp; long term outcomes &amp; objectives for ecological character, ensuring that priority actions are identified for funding; Ramsar site coordinators &amp; managers have a clear understanding of site ecological character &amp; critical components, processes and services &amp; therefore can better target these for management &amp; monitoring; State-wide coordination &amp; oversight is better able to be achieved via the online Ramsar management system, which allows priority monitoring activities to be viewed &amp; implementation to be monitored. The monitoring prioritisation tool &amp; MERI plan program logics have been used to inform investment decisions.</p>