

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

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YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

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21 November 2019

Submission to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry on Victorian wetlands

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee public inquiry into the response to an Auditor-General's report on Victoria's wetlands.

We appreciate this inquiry is targeted to how Victoria is meeting its obligations to protect wetlands under the International Ramsar Convention. This submission supports the renewed focus on the two Ramsar wetlands important to the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners – Corner Inlet, and Gippsland Lakes.

The Gunaikurnai people are recognised as Traditional Owners over about 1.33 million hectares in Gippsland – spanning from Warragul in the west, to the Snowy River in the east, and from the Great Divide in the north to the coast in the south, including 200 metres of offshore sea territory.

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) is the prescribed body corporate on behalf of the Gunaikurnai people, for the purposes of the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth) and is a Registered Aboriginal Party for the purposes of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Victoria). The State of Victoria has also entered into Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the Gunaikurnai people. The Recognition and Settlement Agreement, executed under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, affords Gunaikurnai people rights relating to the use of public land within their Agreement area.

The boundaries determined in the 2010 Federal Court Native Title decision and State Government Recognition and Settlement Agreement encompass parts of the Corner Inlet Ramsar site, and all of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site. GLaWAC also has Joint Management over several parks adjoining the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site.

Gunaikurnai people have occupied, used and managed coastal land and sea environments for many thousands of years. Wetlands were among the most densely populated parts of Gunaikurnai Country, providing resource-rich places for living, hunting and fishing.

While the Ramsar Convention doesn't mandate incorporating the cultural and spiritual values of wetlands, and traditional owner knowledge in Ramsar wetland management, it does encourage it.

GLaWAC considers that the clear focus following the Victorian Auditor-General's inquiry into meeting the obligations to protect Ramsar wetlands (2016) has been of benefit.

The prioritisation and resourcing provided to improve coordination and implement priority actions has helped clarify roles and responsibilities, and we have appreciated the opportunity to be involved through our strong partnerships with environmental agencies in Gippsland.

Specifically, the incorporation of GLaWAC in the coordinating committees for Gippsland Lakes and Corner Inlet, the Gippsland Lakes delivery managers group and partnership in delivering a number of on the ground projects has been of benefit.

We would hope the coordination of environmental managers, including partners such as GLaWAC, and the funding of priority projects will move to a long term commitment to meeting the ecological objectives of these sites of international significance.

From GLaWAC's perspective, we would be confident that an appropriate and lasting focus on these wetlands would also result in the cultural and Traditional Owner ecological knowledge being better integrated into the Ramsar site management, with benefits for the environment as has been proven in other Ramsar sites¹.

This would, GLaWAC believes, help manage the Ramsar sites more from a landscape perspective, which we would pose would have greater benefits including for the targeted species.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Roger Fenwick GLaWAC Chief Executive Officer
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¹ Ramsar and World Heritage Conventions: Converging towards success, Robert McInnes, Mariam Kenza Ali and Dave Pritchard, Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2017.