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Victorian Legislative Assembly

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

SUBMISSION from GREENING AUSTRALIA

Level 3, 349 Collins St, Melbourne, VIC 3000

Submission contact:

Alistair Phillips, National Head of State Government Relations
[REDACTED]

Introduction

Thank you for inviting Greening Australia to make a submission to the Victorian Government *Inquiry into Auditor General Report No.202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)*, Our submission is presented and structured on the three key topic areas set out in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry. Greening Australia welcomes further questions and discussion arising from our submission.

1. Governance

develop and implement robust governance arrangements for managing Ramsar sites, including clarifying roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for planning, management and reporting

One of Greening Australia's key strengths is in the design and delivery of projects that deliver on the priorities and objective of our regional catchment planning. It is recognized within Greening Australia that the strategic planning and partnership model that exists around the Gippsland Lakes provides a clear and strategic direction on priorities for action.

The Gippsland Lakes Priorities Plan is our guiding plan that highlights key priorities for improving the health of the Gippsland Lakes drawing from the priorities outlined in the following strategies;

- Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site Management Plan
- WGCMA and EGCMA Climate Change Strategy
- WGCMA and EGCMA Regional Catchment Strategy
- WGCMA and EGCMA Regional Waterway Strategy

These plans and their implementation are coordinated by the Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee (GLCC) that includes all relevant land and waterway managers involved in the governance structure of the Ramsar site. We are included, as are the approximate 40 other partnering community groups and agencies with this committee in the strategic, program and project level input to assist all in the delivery and planning of on ground works to ensure we are all targeting priority values for the health of the Gippsland Lakes.

2. Delivery

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. implement arrangements to oversee how management plans are put into effect.

Greening Australia have been actively involved in the delivery of projects aimed at the improvement of the health of important wetland habitats around the Gippsland Lakes for the past 20 years. We are currently working on over 2000ha of priority fringing wetlands assisting vegetation recovery for the wetland to function optimally for the health of the lakes system along with providing important habitat for migratory shore birds and endangered frog species.

One of the highlights of this work has been undertaking a Fringing Wetland Prioritisation planning and modelling Project with all GLCC delivery agencies. This project has developed a mapping tool that is assisting us all to prioritize wetland management for climate change adaptation and target fauna species requirements to the approximate 30,000ha of fringing wetlands that surround the Gippsland Lakes.

This wetland prioritizing project has all partnering agencies working together to deliver wetland outcomes for the future health of the lakes together, with the same guiding principles and priorities as outlined in our key plans to ensure that the best value and coordinated efforts are being maximized for the long-term health of these important wetlands.

This project itself is an excellent example of how the partnership model of the EGCMA and delivery governance by the GLCC are working together targeting priority values as guided by our Gippsland lakes Ramsar Site Management Plan.

Our project sites are prioritized using our guided model and in discussions with key delivery agencies and land managers such as Parks Victoria and DELWP. Groups such as Land Care and Agriculture Victoria are partnered with to understand private landholder local issues and concerns and our Traditional Owners the Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporation and partnered with to ensure cultural values and protocols are supported and enacted.

On site we have these same traditional owners, DELWP and CMA staff expertise, Birdlife and field naturalists on site working within the same priority sites to work towards the best outcomes for the long-term health of the sites involved. Experts in specific fields are also engaged such as DELWPS wetland science team of Arthur Rylah Institute, Deakin Universities Blue Carbon Lab for saltmarsh restoration and the National Bell Frog recovery team and PHD students looking at how to improve our habitat responses for the endangered Growling and Golden Bell Frogs.

Thanks to the funding provided by the Victorian Government, through the EGCMA, targeted coordinated priority actions have been able to be implemented by over 40 partnering community and agency groups over the past 8 years. We have been able to also create and implement as discussed priority planning for the vast number of fringing wetlands that surround the Gippsland lakes and worked collaboratively and effectively across the most important sites in the lakes. But this is only the beginning of the amount of work that could be achieved with this funding being only a very small amount in consideration of the nature of the ecological priorities and actions that have been determined in the before mentioned strategic and management plans.

3. Monitoring

a statewide approach to monitoring the ecological character of Ramsar sites, through a specific monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework.

Increasing the wetland habitat availability for threatened frog species, action on the next highest priority wetlands of the Gippsland lakes, improving migratory bird habitat and engaging community in on ground actions to help the Love of our Lakes. These are but a few of the works that Greening Australia, the GLCC and the East Gippsland Catchment Authority are working towards now and into the future by proven experience and well managed and guided governance.

Our success is based on not only the outputs of wetland health and changing land management practices. Our success is measured by the clear and guided targets that are written in our guiding management plans such as the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site Management Plan. Directly working in partnership with multiple agencies under the key priorities and targeted outcomes of this plan is ensuring that the best value of investment is being reached along with occurring within the most important asset values of our lakes system.

Summary

The management of the Gippsland Lakes is complex, with many management plans, strategies and agencies working together to achieve positive outcomes for the environment, community and business. The Gippsland Lakes priorities plan as developed by the GLCC is maximising environmental outcomes for the Lakes by identifying the highest priority management actions for its five years outlook (2016 – 2021) and provides a transparent framework for allocation of funding. This process and structure are integrated into Greening Australia's strategic planning for the Gippsland Lakes and are strongly supported to be further implemented into the future.