

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

Ms Natalie Kopas

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

The creation of The RAMSAR convention and the significant protection it affords migratory birds was a win for preserving eco-systems and promoting a continuing healthy and robust biodiversity in our environment. Yet many people, even those who are in fields designated to protect and maintain these important regions, or whom live close or even adjacent to RAMSAR wetlands appear to have little or no understanding of just how important these sites are and why.

The recommendations made by the Auditor-General are positive steps as they address some of the factors that have contributed to this disconnect, disinterest and mismanagement, but they are quite broad and considering how long this review process has already taken, do not appear to do enough to address the creation of a specific, targeted plan of action, within a timely period.

It is clear from reading the report that time has been spent by groups such as Parks Victoria and DELWP to identify issues, yet little has actually changed. Our RAMSAR sites are not treated any differently to our many other wetlands and waterways, and whilst ALL are ecologically important, there should be some recognition of what sets RAMSAR sites apart. Instead we allow the water to be polluted via run off from agriculture, oil from boats and decomposing birds and shotgun shells and rubbish left behind by hunters. Inappropriate development is allowed to proceed without adequate environmental management strategies, despite warnings of the impact on nearby RAMSAR sites (as happened at Armstrong Creek in Geelong) and then 10 years later we consider attempting to reverse the impact. pH and salinity and water quality are not tested regularly, nor acted upon when they are tested. And there are no repercussions except for the birds who call these sites home or at least holiday homes and who are unable to use these wetlands as the changed environment no longer meets their needs.

There needs to be a clear set of goals for what is needed for RAMSAR sites, followed by a management plan with reasonable time frames that will allow this to be achieved. The roles of groups such as Parks Vic and DELWP need to be clearly defined, or there needs to be an organisation with representatives from all responsible groups who will oversee the implementation of the management plan. The creation of the plan needs to address the ways in which we humans interact with RAMSAR sites; these areas are there to provide safe habitat for wildlife, allowing recreational hunting and fishing especially of native waterbirds during which there are many other rare and endangered migratory birds wounded and killed, the destruction of surrounding bushland and vegetation to build hides and commercial eel fishing within RAMSAR wetlands is not conducive to creating a safe haven for wildlife. Allowing quail and rabbit hunting and the litter produced by these activities including the use of lead shot to wash into our RAMSAR wetlands is also clearly the antithesis of protecting our wetlands. And allowing groups with a clear vested interest in these activities to manage areas within and around RAMSAR sites is laughable.

In conclusion, the first and most important priority for the Government to better align themselves with the RAMSAR convention is to ban all forms of recreational shooting, specifically the shooting of native waterbirds at RAMSAR sites.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Signature:
Natalie Kopas