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# Frankston line rail trenches could damage unique wetlands



By [Adam Carey](#)

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The only globally important wetland in suburban Melbourne is at "significant" risk of major and long-term environmental damage from the removal of two level crossings on the Frankston line, a report for the Andrews government has warned.

The Edithvale-Seafood wetlands in Melbourne's south-east are a refuge for about 100 threatened or migratory bird species from Siberia, Japan and Alaska. Surrounded by suburban houses, they are the last remnant of a large swamp that once stretched from Frankston to Mordialloc.

*Robin Clarey, vice president of Friends of Edithvale-Seafood Wetlands, and Ian Williams.*

*Photo: Simon Schluter*

Though small and heavily marked by urban encroachment, the Edithvale-Seafood wetlands have been classified as one of the world's significant wetlands for the richness and diversity of the wildlife they support, and are protected under an international treaty.

Threatened species found at the wetlands include the Australasian bittern, curlew sandpiper and swift parrot.

But a plan by the Andrews government to dig two rail trenches nearby could degrade the wetlands' ecosystem to the point that it would become uninhabitable for some of the birds that live or migrate there.

A report for the government's Level Crossing Removal Authority found the twin trenches could create a barrier to natural water flows from the wetlands, raise the water table by 10 centimetres and activate acid sulfate in the soil.

"The permanency of the trench structures is likely to result in impacts to groundwater that are likely to be long term and irreversible in nature," the report, by consultants AECOM and GHD, states.

"Any change to the hydrological regime at the Edithvale-Seafood wetlands is highly likely to impact the use of the site by waterbirds."

The government announced last month that it would remove the level crossings at Edithvale Road and Bondi Road on the Frankston line by putting the rail line under the road, in each case digging a trench about one kilometre long and up to eight metres deep.

It also said an environment effects statement would be required, due to the project's potential impact on the wetlands.

There is a risk the government's preferred rail-under-road design could be rejected if it is found its environmental impacts would be too severe.

The project was referred to federal Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg on Friday and state Planning Minister Richard Wynne on Wednesday for assessment. Both ministers have the power to decide the environmental impact is unacceptable and that it should not proceed.

Robin Clarey is vice-president of the Friends of Edithvale-Seafood Wetlands volunteer group and said the Andrews government should have waited until the full impact of digging the rail trenches was known before making its decision to go with rail under road.

"The wetlands just have so much importance for huge numbers of birds that come in here," Ms Clarey said.

Ms Clarey said she shared the widespread local disapproval of elevating the rail line over the road, but not if it meant damaging the wetlands.

Cameron Howe is founder of the Carrum and Patterson Lakes Forum, a community group, and said locals overwhelmingly voiced their preference for putting the rail line under the road.

"The community has been very vocal in their rejection of a skyrail design and they would be truly disappointed if they were to hear that that design was to be overturned," he said.