

Tattler

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& Australian Shorebird Monitoring

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Ramsar Anniversary
1971–2021



Roebuck Bay Ramsar Site/Flyway Network Site EAAF111

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Editorial

In this, the 50th Anniversary year of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, we look at the years leading up to the signing of the convention in the town of Ramsar in Iran, and changes to the convention during the triennial Conference of the Contracting Parties since.

During the next 50 years it is suggested that some changes to the approach to wetlands conservation other than just listing new sites, in particular the monitoring and effective management of the existing site network. We also look at the East Asian Australasian Waterbird Flyway Network Sites that are also Ramsar listed and the need of establishing a site manager network as well as facilitating site manager training programs. Such a setup is well established in other flyways such as the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Waterbird Agreement including a special comprehensive Training Kit for site managers.

Ramsar wetlands are recognised as a matter of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act. Consequently, an action that has,

will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland must be referred to the Minister and undergo an environmental assessment and approval process.

There are/have been several proposed actions that are likely to have a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland. Two of these that have been referred to the minister and subsequently protected under the EPBC Act are mentioned in this issue of Tattler. One was triggered under the Act by a proposal by AGL for a floating storage regasification unit in Westernport Bay in Victoria, which required half a billion litres of seawater every day which would be chlorinated and then dumped back into the bay. As reported by Julia Stockigt, of Save Westernport, the community involvement campaigning against the giant gas processing plant were delighted when the project was rejected on environmental grounds, protecting the Westernport Ramsar site, which is also listed as East Asian Australasian Flyway Network Site! The other was the refusal the Turtle Cove Development in Queensland after submissions by 24 local community members, NGOs and state and local governments. The development would have resulted in a significant impact on

the ecological character of the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site as it would have resulted in the habitat and lifecycle of native species dependent upon the wetland (specifically, the Eastern Curlew) being seriously affected. This based on long term data collected by the Queensland Wader Study Group.

It is quite clear that the involvement by NGOs and informed community plays a crucial role in monitoring and taking action to protect important Ramsar, and EAA Flyway Network Sites. However let's not forget the hundreds of non-listed wetlands that appear in the release of the long awaited Australian National Directory of Important Shorebird Habitat produced by BirdLife Australia from the Shorebirds 2020/Australian Shorebird Monitoring Program database going back to the 1980s, with government funding, will be a great asset in rapidly identifying important shorebird sites from across Australia for researchers, government agencies and conservation bodies.

Also included are articles on the First EAA Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting. A great success despite being held over internet due to COVID19.

Philip Straw, Editor

Contributions are welcome and should be sent to: tattler@awsg.org.au

The 50th Anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. How it all started!

Dr Luc Hoffmann (1923–2016) was a Swiss philanthropist, as well as ornithologist and conservationist. He is probably best known as the 'founding father' of the Ramsar Convention and for the establishment of the 'Tour du Valat biological research station' on a large estate he had purchased to create a wetland reserve in the Camargue, in the south of France.

In 1960 I was fortunate to be invited by Luc Hoffmann to work at the Tour du Valat to assist with his research on migratory waterbirds as well as with the management of wetlands across the region as waterbird habitat. This turned into an opportunity to become heavily involved in wetlands management and conservation across the Camargue as well as opening up access to

many other wetland ecologists who trained at Tour du Valat. More than 60 PhDs have been awarded for research conducted at Tour du Valat by students enrolled at universities in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom. Needless to say my time in the Camargue was a steep learning curve!

The significance of the MAR Conference

On World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2021, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat officially celebrated the 50th anniversary of its signing in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar.

This was ten years after an international Convention was conceived in 1960 when IUCN received and approved a proposal from Dr Luc Hoffmann which called for an international programme on the conservation and management of marshes, bogs and other wetlands. It was designated as 'Project MAR' since these are the first three letters of the word for wetlands in several languages – MARshes, MARecages, MARismas, etc. IUCN recommended that the International Council for Bird Protection (later BirdLife International) as well as the IWRB (later Wetlands International) should be asked to participate, and appointed Dr Hoffmann as Coordinator. At the beginning of 1962 he became the honorary Director of IWRB, which from then onwards played a central role in waterbird research and habitat conservation.

Hoffmann organized a MAR Conference at the town of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue in November 1962. This was attended by some 80 experts from 12 European countries and from Australia, Canada, Morocco and the United States. Nearly 60 papers were presented on economic, scientific and moral considerations; the criteria for defining wetland areas and reserves; legal and administrative devices; the management, use and restoration of wetlands; the role of man-made aquatic habitats; and the international efforts needed for the conservation of wetlands and their fauna. The impressive proceedings of this meeting appeared in 1964, in English and French.

The participants of the conference, well aware that the conference proceedings, however

seminal, tend to gather dust on library shelves, made recommendations for action. The first was “that IUCN publish an educational leaflet in which the educational, scientific, economic, recreational and other values of wetlands are clearly set out and further recommends that UNESCO or other appropriate international agency be requested to help finance this leaflet for mass circulation in order to present, in unequivocal terms, the values of wetlands to mankind”. Such a leaflet ‘Liquid Assets’ was published in 1964 by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge in the UK, in a large, horizontal format, 30.5 cm wide by 22.5 cm deep, chosen as one unlikely to be overlooked in an administrator’s filing tray! The result was that 14,000 copies were distributed through national conservation agencies.

It took just over eight years of conferences, technical meetings and behind-the-scenes discussions to develop a convention text that had any hope of being accepted widely in the political climate of the time.

Signing of the Ramsar Convention 1971

The convention was held in the city of Ramsar, Iran, in February 1971 and was originally contracted by seven countries. Australia designated the world’s first Ramsar site, Cobourg Peninsula, in the Northern Territory, in 1974. The Convention came into force on 21 December 1975. As of October 2019 there are 171 contracting parties and over 2,000 designated sites covering over 200,000,000 hectares (490,000,000 acres). Every contracting country has at least one Ramsar site, and 31 of the contracting countries have only one site. The country with the most sites is the United Kingdom with 170. To become a Ramsar site, a site must be nominated by a contracting country, meet at least one of nine criteria, and undergo scientific review.

The Ramsar Convention is the oldest multilateral international conservation convention and the only one to deal with one habitat or ecosystem type, wetlands. The convention’s headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland, and it works closely with the IUCN.

50th Anniversary of the Convention – is this a cause for celebration?

There are concerns about the way the Ramsar Convention is heading today as noted by Peter Bridgewater (Bridgewater & Kim Nature Ecology & Evolution 2021) in February this year.

He suggests that “the Ramsar Convention is often praised for its near-universal membership (171 parties), large number of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites), and a successful outreach programme linked to the private sector. Yet the state of the world’s wetlands tells a rather different, grim, story. As noted in its own ‘Global Wetland Outlook’ publication, approximately 35% of wetlands globally have been lost over the convention’s life, with larger numbers reported by other authoritative global assessments. The relevant question, then, is not so much whether the convention has been complied with by its parties, but whether the convention in its current form will prove to have sufficient impact in the long term.”

50 years on, our wetlands face greater threats than ever before despite the efforts by those pioneers dedicated to wetlands conservation in the lead up to the establishment of the Ramsar Convention and since its ratification, over 60 years in all. It will take a mammoth effort by us all to turn back the tide on the loss and degradation of the world’s wetlands, given today’s political climate where environmental conservation sits at or near the bottom of the list of priorities of some of our wealthiest nations, while our poorest nations depend on water and wetlands for their livelihoods like never before.

Bridgewater & Kim suggest that “Ramsar’s site-based approach is a major flaw”. Much of the activity during the convention’s development has been dominated by Ramsar site listing. There are currently 2,413 Ramsar sites listed, covering over 255 million hectares, which is an impressive achievement, at least on paper. Clearly, expanding the Ramsar list has not been sufficient to improve the conservation status of wetlands although its absence may well have produced even worse results for wetland conservation. Why is this, and will it likely change in the future?”

Site management, so that Ramsar sites do not suffer change in 'ecological character' is left to the discretion of the parties with an absence of any meaningful penalties or incentives, apart from the practice of a 'naming and shaming' resolution debated during the triennial Conferences of the Parties. In 1990, the Fourth Conference of the Parties held in Montreux, Switzerland, resolved to develop a record of non-performing sites, with a view to helping parties who recorded such sites undertake actions to restore them (rather like the 'in danger' listing for World Heritage sites). This 'Montreux Record', however, has made little material difference to site quality globally. In December 2020, 21 parties have 47 sites on the Montreux Record, but 36 of those sites were listed before 1993 and remain on the record.

A more successful second 50 years in a changing world?

Under the three pillars of the Convention, the Contracting Parties commit to:

- work towards the wise use of all their wetlands through national plans, policies and legislation, management actions and public education. The Convention defines the wise use of wetlands as "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development". Wise use can thus be seen as the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and all the services they provide, for the benefit of people and nature. There are many examples of how we, as humans, can live, work and play in wetlands without having a damaging effect. In fact, in many cases, making wetland more relevant to humans will improve their chances of recognition and protection. After all, who wants to protect something they don't know about and can't experience?
- designate suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands of International Importance (the "Ramsar List") and ensure their effective management. With nearly 2,500 wetlands designated as Ramsar sites, this provides a great network of protected areas. In some countries with no or little existing designation

framework, this can be a great addition to conservationists when it comes to protecting wetland sites. However, the protection is not legally enforceable, and reporting on the state of these wetlands may not always be up to date or accurate.

- cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands. There are many examples of rivers, coastal wetlands or other wetland systems that are shared by more than one country, and cooperation is essential if the wetland and its species are to be effectively protected. International sharing of good practice, data and scientific outcomes is an extremely valuable outcome of the convention.

In the next 50 years, the Ramsar Convention needs to refocus on developing ways and means for managing wetlands under rapid, unpredictable change. This implies a departure from the existing focus on adding new Ramsar sites. There needs to be more emphasis on monitoring and managing the existing site network, with renewed focus on the wise use of all wetlands in the parties' territories. It also requires greater understanding of the ecological character of sites so that their values can be properly managed. This suggestion reflects an urgent need for support in monitoring and management of Ramsar sites (as well as flyway network sites) to site managers via parties/partners, as well as support and partnerships between site managers. This would benefit from a 'site manager network'. Currently managers receive little or no training and support across some of our flyways and lack site manager networks to share successful (or failed) site management practices, approaches and ideas.

Better Networking for Site Managers of Ramsar Sites and Flyway Network Sites

The message from Bridgewater & Kim is that we must focus on better management of all Ramsar sites with better communication aimed at strengthening networks of people to understand and implement the flyway approach to conservation and interconnection of wetlands.

Some of the existing Ramsar sites are part of large networks of critical sites, often referred to as Flyways, upon which waders and other water birds depend at various stages of their migration.

African-Eurasian Flyway

Perhaps the most successful example of a Flyway Network is through the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), a treaty signed in 1995. An important product of the project has been the WOW Training Kit.

See: <https://www.wetlands.org/publications/wings-over-wetlands-wow-project-flyway-training-kit-ftk/>

Another key product of WOW is the online Critical Site Network tool (<http://critical-sites.wetlands.org/en>), that provides access to overviews of critical sites in the AEWA region, to waterbird population boundaries and estimates, site and species information. Once the data that are needed are available from other flyways, this tool could in principle be having global coverage. Networks of sites are featured as a key priority area under Goal 2 of the 2016-2024 Strategic Plan for the Convention, which aims to “effectively conserve and manage the Ramsar site network”.



The overall purpose of the WOW Training Kit is to strengthen networks of people who understand and implement the flyway approach to conservation throughout the AEWA region and beyond. It is designed for anyone who is closely involved in wetland and waterbird conservation or management. It has been aimed essentially at the level of a site manager and researcher, but should be useful to a variety of target groups, especially:

- Wetland and protected area managers
- Wetland and protected area researchers
- International Waterbird Census and Important Bird Area coordinators
- Environment/conservation NGOs
- Government agencies, e.g., Ramsar/AEWA focal points National Park authorities, wetland and water authorities, Environment departments etc.
- Academic institutions, e.g., universities, higher level training (natural resource management, ecology, conservation and development)
- Ornithological and wetland research centres
- Community leaders
- Interested individuals engaged in wetland and waterbird conservation.

Flyway projects in the AEWA region, building on the CSN tool and the Training Kit, are currently ongoing (Climate Resilient Flyways project – funded by the German International Climate Initiative) or are under development (a large project focusing on the East-Atlantic Flyway, one of the flyways in the AEWA region, which includes the strengthening of a network of site managers).

Hopefully the AEWA will influence similar actions in other major migratory flyways in other parts of the world, which in our region is the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

The Americas Flyway

Since 1992 another major ‘flyway network’ model has been formed in the ‘Americas Flyway’. In a similar fashion to the AEWA, resources for Flyway Site Managers have reached a milestone with the completion of the 2021 Shorebird Management Manual, by Manomet*, in the USA.



It was developed by Manomet with guidance from a steering Committee of shorebird experts, contributing authors, and the cumulative work of hundreds of conservation scientists, ornithologists, and land managers.

The Manual serves as the base curriculum for regional workshops delivered by Manomet to conservation practitioners and stakeholders throughout north America, Central America, the Caribbean, and south America. This Manual is also a stand-alone resource to help guide habitat improvements that benefit shorebirds, and a support document for planning efforts at the flyway, national, regional, and local levels. The authors provide an overview of management actions designed to reduce the impacts of threats to shorebirds, with hope that these can be adapted and applied wherever shorebirds fly.

The Manual provides information about shorebird ecology, major threats, conservation needs, and suggested approaches to implementing management actions to ensure that the habitat needs of shorebirds are met throughout their extraordinary migrations. “This information can help site managers recognize local habitat values, understand the stressors or threats to the birds using those habitats, and identify applicable management strategies”.

The essential structure of the manual includes thirteen case studies in habitat management across the Americas, and eleven appendices summarising a variety of information that land managers and biologists indicated would be useful. The hope is that this Shorebird Management Manual provides a good foundation of information about shorebirds and overview of management actions that can reduce the impacts of threats to shorebirds, with hope that these can be adapted and applied wherever shorebirds fly.

* Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, at Manomet, a coastal village in New England.

East Asian-Australasian Flyway

<https://www.eaaflyway.net>

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), launched on 6 November 2006, is the most recently established major flyway partnership. It faces the biggest challenges of any of the world’s major flyways. It spans 22 countries from the Arctic to Australia and New Zealand, has almost half the world’s human population, and is the most threatened flyway among the nine migratory bird corridors in the world, with habitat loss and climate change, the main drivers of the plummeting migratory waterbird population.

At least 33 Globally Threatened and Near Threatened waterbird species occur in the EAAF, more than twice as many as in any other flyway. This includes 24 species which are heavily dependent on the intertidal zone. Tidal flats are amongst the most productive ecosystems on earth, and their loss is also impacting on the livelihoods of millions of people. Over 60% of tidal flats have been lost in the Yellow Sea, a vital staging sites for many migratory waterbird species.

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway (the Flyway) is home to over 50 million migratory waterbirds – including shorebirds, Anatidae (ducks, geese and swans), cranes, and seabirds (for example divers, cormorants, gulls, shearwaters, and auks) – from over 250 different populations.

There are currently 39 Partners in the Flyway including 19 national governments, 6 intergovernmental agencies, 13 international NGOs, 1 international organisation and 1 international private enterprise. Partners have agreed to endorse the text and support the objectives and actions under



this Partnership, which aims to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitats and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them.

The 5 objectives of the EAAFP are:

- **Objective 1** - Development of the Network of sites of international importance for the conservation of migratory waterbirds along the East Asian- Australasian Flyway;
- **Objective 2** - Enhance communication, education and public awareness of the values of migratory waterbirds and their habitats;
- **Objective 3** - Enhance flyway research and monitoring activities, build knowledge and promote exchange of information on waterbirds and their habitats;
- **Objective 4** - Build the habitat and waterbird management capacity of natural resource managers, decision-makers and local stakeholders;
- **Objective 5** - Develop, especially for priority species and habitats, flyway wide approaches to enhance the conservation status of migratory waterbirds.

The Partnership provides a flyway-wide framework to promote dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between a range of stakeholders to conserve migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the Flyway. Stakeholders include all levels of governments, site managers, multilateral environment agreements, technical institutions,

UN agencies, development agencies, industrial and private sector, academe, non-government organisations, community groups and local people.

There are currently 900 sites recognised as internationally important to migratory waterbirds along the flyway.

The EAAF Site Network today:

- Number of Flyway Network Sites: 149
- Number of Countries within Flyway Site Network: 19

(Russia 10, USA 2, Mongolia 11, China 19, Democratic People's Republic Korea 2, Republic of Korea 16, Japan 33, Bangladesh 6, Myanmar 6, Philippines 4, Thailand 3, Vietnam 1, Malaysia 1, Singapore 1, Indonesia 2, Papua New Guinea 1, Australia 24, New Zealand 4, Cambodia 1)

- The total surface area of designated sites (hectares): 23,069,411

Phil Straw, East Asian Australasian Flyway Liaison Officer, Australasian Wader Studies Group

Community Triumphs over Industry to protect Ramsar Wetlands

Last month a community that spent three years campaigning against a giant gas processing plant in Victoria's Westernport Bay were delighted when the project was rejected on environmental grounds.

Planning Minister Richard Wynne announced that plans by AGL to import and process LNG would not be approved, stating "It's very clear to me that this project would cause unacceptable impacts on the Western Port environment and the Ramsar wetlands – it's important that these areas are protected."

While it's encouraging to see environmental protection laws working as intended, the decision led many to wonder how such a fragile marine ecosystem could ever be considered an appropriate site for a project that would clearly threaten its unique ecology.

The Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) proposed by AGL required half a billion litres of seawater every day for a heat exchange used to process the LNG. The seawater would be chlorinated to kill all biota and entrained marine life before being used and then dumped back into the bay. In 2018 the Victorian government ruled that an Environment Effects Statement (EES) was required, a process that resulted in over 10,000 submissions from members of the public stating why the project must not go ahead.

In their EES report, the proponent claimed the chlorine levels were acceptable and all marine impacts were manageable.

However, during a ten-week hearing, expert witnesses on behalf of local group Save Westernport, Environment Victoria and Victorian National Parks Association presented evidence that found fault with the proponent's reports on chlorine toxicity and other impacts. Matt Edmunds presented evidence on chlorine toxicity, stating that AGL's reports had failed to account for bio accumulation in the food chain, greatly underestimating impacts on the marine ecosystem, including Penguins, dolphins, and shorebirds that forage in Westernport Bay.

Drs Blount and Lincoln-Smith outlined other significant errors in the EES reports, including omissions, and data that relied on flawed modelling and inadequate survey efforts.

Dr Lincoln Smith found that data on the marine environment relied on data from just a single year. He said the sampling was not replicated and did not provide month to month data to allow for seasonal variability.

Dr Blount detailed the likely impacts on migratory shorebirds and described the limited effort in shorebird surveys, emphasising that both primary as well as secondary feeding habitats must be prioritised, because every area in a Ramsar wetland is important.

Submissions against the proposal from individuals, local indigenous and environmental groups emphasised that Victoria's Westernport Bay is listed as an internationally significant wetland under the international Ramsar Convention. It forms a significant part of the UNESCO Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve. Large areas of French Island form one of three Marine National Parks within Westernport's boundaries, and the Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary lies just outside its western entrance.

The internationally renowned Little Penguin rookery, and Australia's largest fur seal colony are unique to Phillip Island. Southern Right Whales and vulnerable Humpback Whales have been sighted in record numbers in recent seasons, and pods of dolphins can regularly be seen trawling for fish along the shorelines of our local beaches.



Seagrass beds (*Heterozostera tasmanica*) within the Ramsar site are known to provide important nursery habitat for a number of fish species, including commercially significant species.

The marine and intertidal waters of the Bay also support a rich marine invertebrate fauna. More than 1,350 species have been recorded, between three and four times greater than the number recorded in nearby Port Phillip Bay. Westernport's combination of warm shallow waters and fast flowing tidal channels support an extraordinary diversity of habitats and an unusual combination of species.

In addition to its marine ecosystems and their flora and fauna, including phytoplankton, marine mammals, seagrass meadows and other marine life, Westernport encompasses remnant coastal ecosystems that are rare and have a particularly high conservation value, including mangroves (*Avicennia marina*) and critically endangered listed saltmarsh communities. Westernport is a particularly good example of a natural wetland marine embayment with extensive intertidal flats and a saltmarsh-mangrove-seagrass wetland system. Mangrove beds in Westernport are among the most southerly examples in the world at the latitude of 38°35'.

The flora and fauna of Westernport includes numerous threatened and endangered species and communities, and many species of listed migratory shorebirds, including the Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew, Great Knot and Curlew Sandpiper, Endangered Red Knot and Lesser Sand Plover and Vulnerable Greater Sand Plover.

Ramsar site specific criteria based on waterbirds include:

Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds. Westernport supports up to 25,000 waterbirds.

Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

Westernport supports more than 1% of 12 species of migratory shorebirds including the Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper.

The result of repeated threats to the local environment have brought about an appreciation of Westernport Bay as a listed Ramsar site of significance since 1982. This listing confirmed its extraordinary conservation value, with seven of the nine possible environmental criteria being fulfilled for its Ramsar accreditation.

The Bay is also part of the UNESCO-recognised Mornington Peninsula and Westernport Biosphere Reserve. In addition to its Ramsar listing, the Bay is a significant site that confers Australia's obligations under a suite of international conservation treaties and agreements including:

- Bonn Convention for wildlife conservation
- China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
- Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
- Republic of Korea-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement.

Westernport Bay is also part of the Shorebird Reserve Network for the East Asian- Australasian flyway and a global network of Birdlife International's important bird areas. Most of the important roosting sites in Westernport for shorebirds are listed as Sites of National Zoological Significance.

Despite the Bay's enormous value, in past decades the Bay's ecology has been compromised, undervalued and exploited by environmental mismanagement, inappropriate development and local heavy industries, resulting in habitat alteration and significant impacts on biodiversity.

Existing environmental laws have consistently failed to protect Westernport from the loss produced by these incursions. The essential ecosystem services that Westernport provides are critical for underpinning the sustainable growth of its surrounding communities. For example, Westernport's extensive intertidal zones of significant mangrove beds, mudflats and critically endangered coastal saltmarsh provide our best defences against the effects of coastal inundation and sea level rise, as well as providing a significant natural sink for carbon capture. Such important natural assets must be fully protected now and for the future.



Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew

In its report on the Westernport Catchment the Victorian EPA states that the combination of its unique ecology and past failings have resulted in “a local community that is eager to protect the environs of Western Port and its catchment.”

The strong local recognition that Westernport’s valuable natural attributes must be protected from inappropriate industrial activity meant that this threat that risked polluting the water, air and land in and around the Bay was fought with an uncompromising determination by the community. The growing awareness of the accelerating impacts of climate emergency has also led people to action.

All local councils also opposed the AGL threat, joining the community in contributing vast resources in time, money and expertise to fight the proposal during the EES.

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council took the bold step in 2019 of declaring a Climate Emergency and has since developed a comprehensive plan with ambitious emissions reductions goals. Neighbouring Bass Coast Shire Council not only joined MPSC in voting unanimously to oppose AGL they have also taken action on climate, progressing a step further with a 2019 Motion to oppose further fossil fuel developments in Victoria, and the further industrialisation of Western Port to transport them.

In 1971 the Westernport Peninsula Protection Council was formed to promote the conservation and protection of Westernport Bay. The group’s activities reflected growing community concerns about the collaboration of government and big

business on ambitious and often unsound plans to industrialise Westernport. Over the decades, the group has achieved varying degrees of success against repeated attempts to establish new industrial projects in Westernport, including plans for a Nuclear Power Plant on French Island, a Bitumen Plant and a Urea depot, all within the boundary of Westernport’s Ramsar wetland.

In early 2018 local residents who deeply valued Westernport’s ecology and significant Ramsar wetlands reformed Save Westernport in response to the threat of AGL’s new inappropriate industrial proposal in Westernport Bay. Save Westernport has grown significantly to represent the views and concerns of thousands of local residents and other Victorians intent on protecting Westernport’s sensitive marine and coastal ecosystems and the communities that surround it from further heavy industrialisation.

Last year the Commonwealth Environmental Grants program awarded funding to Save Westernport for our project to monitor for signs of marine pest species at key sites in the Bay. Invasive marine pests are identified in the Ramsar Site Management Report (2017) as one of the most significant threats to the Westernport Ramsar Site. Unless identified early, infestation eventually results in desertification of the underwater environment. The impacts are devastating to marine ecosystems, decimating local fisheries and the numerous marine mammal and bird species that depend on them for food.

Fundamental principles of intergenerational equity and environmental protection guide and inform the decisions and voluntary work of Save Westernport and its members. Its primary goals have always been community engagement and ensuring that the ecological balance of the natural world is safeguarded for the benefit of subsequent generations and species.

It’s certain that the level of community engagement and opposition influenced the Minister’s decision.

When the AGL project was ruled as a Controlled Action in 2018, due to its likely impacts on species listed in the federal Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act, it meant that federal Environment minister would also be required to rule.



After the Planning Minister recommended against the project, AGL strategically withdrew their EPA and EPBC applications. Unfortunately, this means the Environment minister's ruling and the EPA's report on the implications of releasing chlorine into the marine environment will now never see the light of day. This disappointing result in an otherwise positive outcome will have implications on similar projects that are now under consideration.

There is no doubt that the precautionary principle that underpins the environmental protection laws must be used in the assessment of the too frequent encroachment into ecologically valuable wetlands.

In their EES submission against AGL's gas import proposal local groups Save Westernport said, "Protection must be at the highest level in order to ensure that this Ramsar site will never be subject to further activities and threats that could compromise its nationally significant and internationally recognised ecosystems."

"For our natural environment, the time for risk assessments and attempts to 'balance competing interests' is long gone. Either we protect our Ramsar wetlands, or we don't. Trying to decide the level of threat they can withstand misses the point entirely. Let's not threaten them at all."

Julia Stockigt, Save Westernport

The First East Asian Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting – a great success despite all odds!

The First East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Science Meeting was scheduled to be held at the National Institute of Ecology, Seocheon-gun, Chungcheongnam-do, Republic of Korea on May 5-8, 2020. The aim of the meeting was to

support international efforts to study, monitor, and conserve migratory shorebirds.

Shorebird biologists, wetland ecologists, researchers, practitioners, students, land managers and other professionals working on shorebird conservation from across the EAA Flyway were invited to participate in this meeting, allowing interchange and collaboration among shorebird scientists and conservationists across the flyway.

However, due to the global outbreak of Covid19 the meeting was rescheduled to November 3-6, 2020 and work continued to call for papers, led by Prof. Richard Fuller at Queensland University. It eventually became obvious that there would be no face-to-face meeting as Covid19 was here to stay well beyond this date.

The scientific program was to include three days of plenary lectures, symposia sessions, oral and poster presentations, species- or issue-specific workshops and side meetings.

The decision to go ahead with the meeting, but as an online meeting, was a brave move as nothing of this scale had been attempted before. Despite this the Shorebird Science Meeting proved to be a great success with over 400 people from 39 countries/regions registered for the 1st East Asian-Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Virtual Meeting (EAAFSSM). Participants joined live online discussions, workshops, 5 keynote talks and 80 presentations across 18 sessions that addressed a myriad of topics on shorebird research and conservation. Almost 100 experts and students showcased their activities within the flyway.

To help prepare for the event and to handle the transition to an online environment, the Organizing Committee had 22 online meetings over 18 months. The Organizing Committee developed an information package and program schedule for participants, five newsletters, instructions for chairs, and designated moderators and IT staff for each session to help ensure the event ran smoothly. The meeting was co-hosted by National Institute of Ecology (NIE) from the Republic of Korea, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Parks Board in Singapore, the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna's International Secretariat (CAFF),

and the University of Queensland. Sponsorship was received from the Ministry of Environment in Republic of Korea, Lotek Wireless, Migrate Technology Ltd., and Druid Technology Co. Ltd.

To sum it up in the words of Professor Richard Fuller:

“We had a very exciting line up of shorebird science over the three days of the meeting. There were contributions from almost 100 speakers on every aspect of shorebird science from evolution, behaviour, ecology, and conservation. We had elegant ecological studies on shorebirds such as Irin Sultana’s study of wintering shorebirds in Bangladesh, new data on the migration of Latham’s snipe from Birgita Hansen, and a whole raft of new information from the breeding grounds of the Nordmann’s Greenshank from Vladimir Pronkevich.

Technology is driving ever more sophisticated studies of migration, and we were introduced to exciting new tracking data on Far Eastern Curlew, Asian Dowitcher, Red Knots, Black-tailed Godwits and Oriental Pratincoles, and multi-species studies from Mongolia and Singapore. We saw the results of large scale, long term studies of shorebird population trends such as national analysis from China, India and Japan, regional assessments from Russia, Korea and Bangladesh. And projects from Taiwan, Australia, Hong Kong, Philippines and mainland China showed the power of citizen science to collect data at a scale that would otherwise be impossible.

The threats impacting shorebirds are increasingly well understood, and there were entire sessions focusing on threats, such as hunting, habitat loss and climate change. The sheer quality of the science underpinning these sessions showed that we are getting ever closer to a full understanding of why a number of species are in such rapid decline. We had species-specific sessions on dunlin, spoon-billed sandpiper and Nordmann’s greenshank, which really allowed for a deep dive into the multiple interacting threats operating on those species. Since every species’ ecology and migration is different, ultimately such single-species studies will be needed to truly understand the conservation needs of all migratory shorebirds in the EAAF. And in terms of

the conservation response, the sessions showed clearly that our science is steadily growing in quality and impact. We heard conservation success stories from many places, including Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan, China, and Australia, as well as case studies from Europe and North America from which we might learn.

In his plenary address, Theunis Piersma distinguished two kinds of science – reactive and proactive. The content of this meeting shows we are getting very good at both. The spoon-billed sandpiper research is conservation fire-fighting as its finest – where emergency action has helped, at least in part, to stem declines of that Critically Endangered species. Our underlying “sentinel” knowledge base is also going from strength to strength – and progressing both kinds of science puts us in the strongest possible position for the future. I encourage us all to continue this focus on conducting science that can be used to guide and inform conservation management.

The last few days have shown me that voice of female scientists is now being heard loud and clear in our flyway, and female representation in flyway science has increased enormously over the last 10 years. While the senior ranks of scientists in this field remain significantly male-biased, something we all must work to address, we are also seeing a rapidly growing movement of outstanding young female scientists. Thank you all for overcoming significant barriers to get to where you are today.

The meeting was also characterised by a wonderful mix of folks from a variety of different kinds of organisations. While there were many from academic institutions, a substantial number of folks represented environmental NGOs of various kinds, many of whom are running inspiring citizen science projects from Bangladesh to China, from Indonesia to Mongolia. We also had a number of representatives from government departments, and it is heartening to see a meeting that is focused on science and evidence promoting these discussions among such a wide range of people.”

Other events:

The event also had a video competition to celebrate the flyway's shorebirds. The best video award went to Javica Faye Canage for her video entitled "My EAAF Winged Friends". She received a \$200 prize from Lotek Wireless. Ying Chi (Ginny) Chan was awarded the best student presentation for her talk entitled "Applications of satellite tracking of shorebirds in coastal conservation", while Sayam Chowdhury won the second best presentation for his talk entitled "Promoting alternative livelihoods in Myanmar and Bangladesh to reduce hunting pressure on Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other shorebird species". They received \$200 and \$100 prizes, respectively, from Lotek Wireless.

For those who registered and attended the meeting, we encourage you to fill in the post-meeting survey that can be found at <https://form.jotform.com/203303034175038>. This will help us know how to improve the next meeting that all of us on the local organizing committee are committed to holding in 2022. If any organization is willing to host the next meeting, please contact Rick Lanctot, Chair, EAAF Shorebird Working Group, at Richard_lanctot@fws.gov

Organizing Committee of the EAAF Shorebird Science Meeting:

Sung-Ryong (Jackie) Kang, General Manager of Dept. of International Cooperation, National Institute of Ecology, Republic of Korea

Joungwon Kim, EAAF Shorebird Science Meeting Coordinator, National Institute of Ecology, Republic of Korea

Courtney Price, Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative's Overall Coordinator, Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna

Rick Lanctot, Alaska Shorebird Coordinator, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Chair of the EAAF Partnership's Shorebird Working Group

David Li, Conservation Manager, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, National Parks Board Singapore, and Monitoring Coordinator of the EAAF Partnership's Shorebird Working Group

Richard Fuller, Professor, University of Queensland, Australia

Sponsors provided opportunities for a variety of competitions. Tracking devices from Migrate Technology Ltd. were awarded to Drs. Cheng Yachang, Song Zitan, and Liu Yang to quantify the migratory behaviour and identify critical habitats for the White-faced Plover. Similarly, tracking devices from Druid Technology Co. Ltd were awarded to Philipp Maleko, Dr. Vladimir Pronkevich, and Dr. Konstantin Maslovsky to investigate the breeding and migratory ecology of Nordmann's Greenshank.

Rick Lanctot, Chair, EAAFP Shorebird Working Group

Guidelines for Managing High Tide Coastal Shorebird Habitat

One of the outcomes of the First East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Science Meeting (EAAFSSM) will be the publication of Guidelines for Managing High Tide Coastal Shorebird Habitat, one of the workshops held during the EAAFSSM and recently closed subsequent input post event by attendees and other researchers.

The publication of these guidelines fills the needs of site managers in the EAA Flyway as well as Ramsar site managers in our flyway and elsewhere.

Funding from the Australasian Wader Studies Group will make it possible to translate the guideline in five of the most common languages, other than English, across the EAAF. These include Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian and Thai.

Phil Straw, Editor, Tattler

Engaging NGOs and Civil Society with Ramsar and Migratory Flyway Networks

NGOs play a huge role in the monitoring and management of Ramsar Sites (as well as Flyway Network Sites). Without their help, many more sites would face the demise than is currently the case.

NGOs' role in site management include:

- Helping with on ground site management, especially when there is a lack of resources to allow effective site management by site managers (e.g. sites of international importance to migratory shorebirds).
- Site monitoring where this is lacking due to lack of personnel, resources and expertise.
- Public awareness and education.
- Campaigning where sites are under threat from development, degradation or other threats.

Many NGOs working with the Ramsar Convention had, until 2008, little opportunity to engage in the Ramsar Conference of the Parties, or their actions be recognised by Ramsar's formal process. In 2008 the World Wetland Network (WWN) was set up to help engage more NGOs with the Ramsar Convention, raise awareness of the role of local people in wetland conservation, support their active involvement and build their capacity to deliver effective wetland conservation. The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT, UK) helped to support the establishment of the WWN alongside many NGOs and CSOs at Ramsar COP10 in Changwon, and offered to chair the newly formed network.

WWN works to engage and support NGOs during the COP, including Pre-COP meetings, opening and closing statements of civil society groups. This included the participation of the Youth Engaged in Wetlands movement at COP 13 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in October 2018), and supporting the coordination of draft resolutions.

WWN also ran three rounds of Wetland Globe awards, identifying both good and ineffective practice in wetland management. WWN gave awards to wetlands that stood out in either a good or bad way. These were very successful in supporting local active civil society groups despite a mixed reception by national governments!

WWN Key achievements include:

- Raised awareness of Civil Society achievements in delivering wetland conservation, particularly within the Ramsar Convention
- Supported local citizen science groups to deliver campaigns and tangible wetland conservation outputs
- Initiating the Wetland Globe Awards
- Bringing wetland NGOs to Ramsar COPs and coordinating their input
- Maintaining global and regional WWN committee activities
- Carried out global citizen science survey (2017) with WWT and the Society of Wetland Scientists.

Major environmental laws by China to protect the Yangtze River

China has passed a law at a Standing Committee session of the National People's Congress (NPC) to protect the Yangtze River. The law is formulated to "strengthen the protection and restoration of the ecological environment in the Yangtze River basin to facilitate the effective and rational use of resources, safeguard ecological security and ensure harmony between human and nature.

Stretching for more than 6,300 km, the Yangtze boasts a rich biodiversity and mineral and water



resources in its basin. However, long-time overfishing and pollution have threatened its aquatic life and depleted fish stocks.

A report on the legislation unveiled in December 2019 explained the urgent need for protection of the river. Drought is not uncommon at some of the lakes. Some of the regions along the river are rife with desertification of lands and soil pollution, while polluting industries are moving upstream.

A coordination mechanism will be set up by the State to make overall plans to coordinate, guide and supervise the Yangtze protection work, implemented by State Council departments and provincial-level governments along the river. The law stipulates legal responsibilities and penalties in an entire chapter to give it teeth. Lawbreakers will be fined, or even face criminal penalties if their violations constitute crimes.

Fishing Ban Enshrined

In January, China implemented a full fishing ban in 332 conservation areas in the Yangtze River basin, which will be expanded to a 10-year moratorium for all natural waterways of the country's longest river, including its major tributaries and lakes and designated areas of the Yangtze estuary.

Agricultural and rural affairs authorities of the State Council will work with other related State Council departments and provincial-level governments of regions along the Yangtze to strengthen the enforcement of the fishing ban, according to the law.

Governments at or above county level along the river are required to adopt compensation policies for fishermen moving ashore, guide them in finding new jobs, and ensure social security services. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said earlier this month that 231,000 fishermen had relinquished their nets in 10 provincial-level regions along the river. While local governments have provided 218,000 fishermen with social security services and helped 165,000 fishermen moving ashore find new jobs, said the ministry.

Source: Xinhua News

Coorong restoration project – a win for the shorebirds!

The Coorong in South Australia is a unique coastal ecosystem, of great cultural significance to the Ngarrindjeri Nation and First Nations of the South East. Many members of the broader public are familiar with its vast beaches, sand dunes and bird life through the popular film *Storm Boy*, while shorebird enthusiasts may know it as a Ramsar site of international importance to waterbirds. It is also well-known that deterioration in the natural values of the Coorong has occurred as a result of reduced flows from the Murray-Darling river system, agricultural water extraction and sustained drought (most recently the Millennium Drought).

The “Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin” initiative is a \$70 million project aimed at restoring a healthy Coorong, and was announced by the Australian and South Australian governments in December 2018. It includes Coorong infrastructure investigations, management tools, research, scientific trials and investigations, and community engagement between 2019 and 2022 all aimed at restoring the health of the Coorong system.

The scientific trials and investigations part of the project is being delivered in partnership with the Goyder Institute for Water Research, and aims to address scientific knowledge gaps and provide the scientific evidence-base to inform what management actions could help to improve the ecological health of the Coorong.

As part of the scientific trials and investigations, researchers at the University of Adelaide are leading a research program aimed at maintaining viable waterbird population in the Coorong. The project will build on the large body of existing knowledge to investigate aspects of habitat use within the Coorong and the broader landscape, using various modelling approaches and undertaking tracking of multiple waterbird species. The project will have a focus on the South Lagoon of the Coorong, which has been characterised by sustained hypersalinity and eutrophication over the last several decades. We look forward to sharing the results of this research over the next several years.

Micha Jackson, University of Adelaide

Australian National Directory of Important Migratory Shorebird Habitat

It's finally out: On 21 April, World Curlew Day, the Australian National Directory of Important Migratory Shorebird Habitat ('Directory') was officially launched.

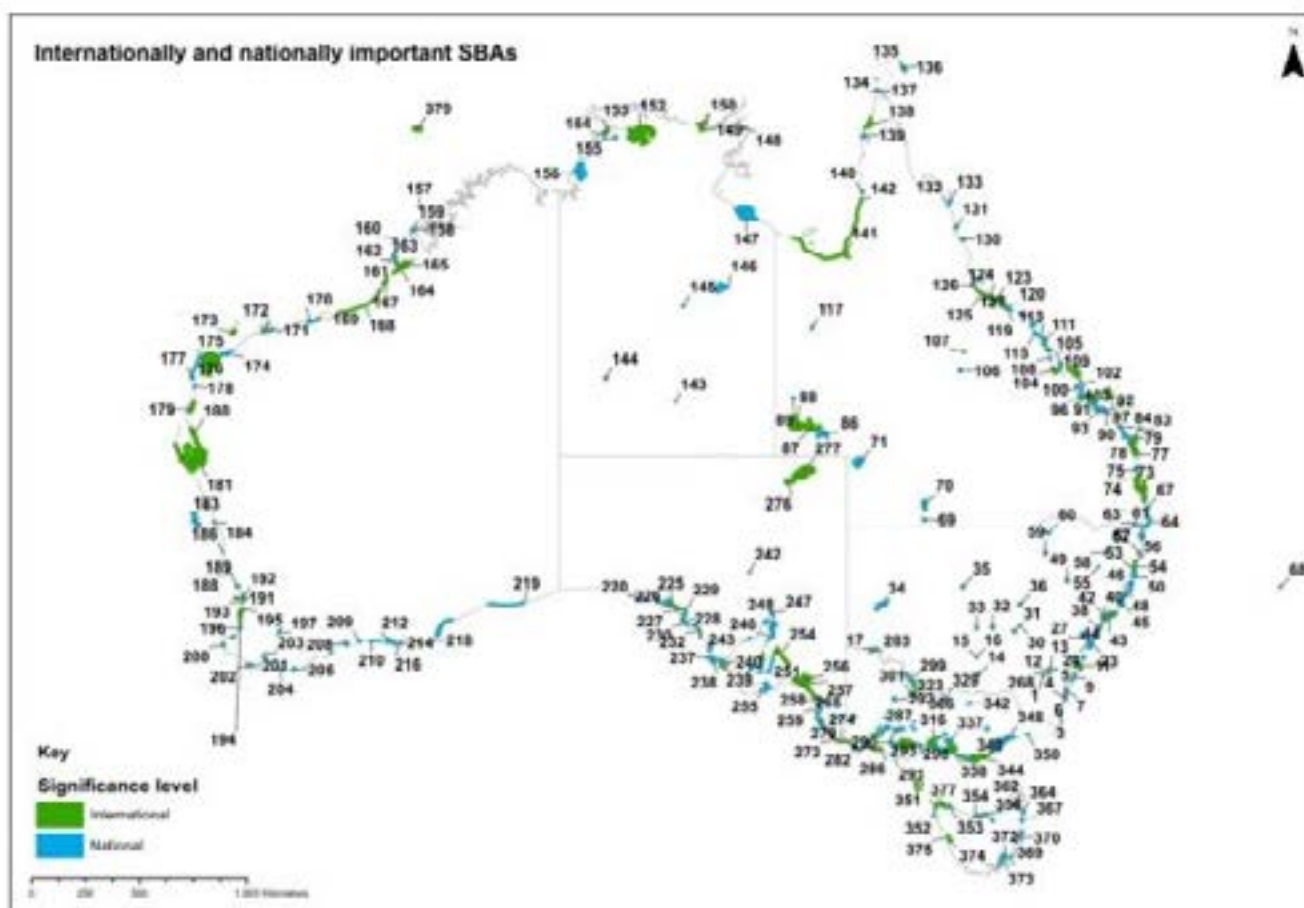
A milestone of research based on tens of thousands of shorebird surveys done in the years 2005-2017, the Directory identifies key sites for shorebirds right around the country – from Darwin to the Derwent, and from Shark Bay to the Hunter Estuary – and provides vital information for local communities, land managers and scientists who are working to protect the long-distance travellers amongst our shorebirds.

It uses rigorous methodology to identify the sites, thus providing useful and objective guidance for investment into the protection and restoration of important migratory shorebird habitat around Australia. In addition, the Directory builds community awareness and indigenous knowledge, helps achieve the goals of the Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds and contributes to the implementation of Australia's international

obligations to the conservation and management of migratory shorebirds. It also constitutes an important step in the implementation of Australia's Conservation Action Plan for Migratory Shorebirds, which BirdLife Australia is coordinating.

Habitat is key: Populations of many species of migratory shorebirds have undergone substantial decline over recent and extended periods of time. Halting this decline and reversing the current trend is without alternative if threatened species are to avoid extinction and continue to contribute as an integral component of our nation's biodiversity to the functioning of Australia's ecosystems. Actions and processes threatening migratory shorebird habitat have to be effectively recognized and mitigated. In order to achieve this, decision-makers and stakeholders around Australia need to be able to easily access information on the importance of sites for migratory shorebirds. The directory provides this crucial link which has not previously been available.

The Directory also provides a starting point for a more comprehensive assessment of the current state of the habitat listed, a prioritization



of sites according to current or future threats experienced and more targeted conservation action. This directly addresses and supports some of the priority actions in the Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds across the main objectives: protection of important habitat, anthropogenic threat minimization or elimination and knowledge gap identification. While a number of high priority projects are already in the process of being implemented, the Directory makes those more effective and targeted.

While the Directory is an important step towards effective migratory shorebird habitat protection around Australia, revision of conservation and management plans for many sites may now be necessary to reflect their importance. Specific site action plans detailing conservation measures to be taken for migratory shorebirds at a single site can be developed as a follow-up action. The directory thus also represents a key resource underpinning further conservation measures under Australia's migratory shorebird conservation frameworks. It is intended to review the Directory every 5–10 years to reflect changes in shorebird flyway populations but also in area use.

The contributions of thousands of volunteers who undertook a vast number of surveys over two decades, making this effort possible, by committees and experts from all States and Territories and by the Australian Government, which provided funding for this scientific project, are gratefully acknowledged.

The document is available for download only in *.pdf format from www.birdlife.org.au/directory.

Download the complete Directory (one file or, due to file size, chapters separately) from our download folder. We advise to always read the Introduction and Discussion alongside the chapter you need.

Overview of chapters:

Introduction and Methods

Chapter 1 - External Territories

Chapter 2 - New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory

Chapter 3 - Northern Territory

Chapter 4 - Queensland

Chapter 5 - South Australia

Chapter 6 - Tasmania

Chapter 7 - Victoria

Chapter 8 - Western Australia

Chapter 9 - Species accounts (listing of sites by species, not by site)

Discussion and Appendices

Due to the large size of the document (1287 pages), there are *no paper copies* available.

Feedback on the Directory is very welcome, and if you have additional data to contribute to a potential future revision, please write to directory.feedback@birdlife.org.au.

Steve Klose, Migratory Shorebird Program Manager, BirdLife Australia

Turtle Cove Development Approval Refused

In late 2013, a proposal to construct and operate a retirement village, golf course and other infrastructure facilities at River Heads, Queensland was referred to the Minister for the Environment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the **EPBC Act**). River Heads is located about 18 km south of Hervey Bay in the Great Sandy Strait, a Ramsar site. It is worth noting the highest astronomical tide runs through the proposed action area.

Submissions on the referral were made by 24 local community members, non-government organisations and state and local governments. All of these submissions opposed the proposed action. Concerns raised included the impacts of the proposed action on the Ramsar site and on listed threatened and migratory species.

The Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG) made a submission, part of which states as follows:

“Monitoring data show that the large claypan in Turtle Cove situated directly adjacent to the proposed development, is the most numerically important high tide roost site for Far Eastern Curlew within the Great Sandy Strait. In 2005, 1182 Far Eastern Curlew were observed roosting on the Turtle Cove claypan, representing more than 3% of the global population and an all-time high count for the species at this site. Since 1995 when QWSG began conducting strait-wide censuses of the population, the average count of Far Eastern Curlew occupying the Turtle Cove claypan is 553, corresponding to 1.6% of the global population. As such, the claypan at Turtle Cove alone consistently meets the numerical criterion for international importance (1% of the flyway population) and far exceeds the criterion for a site of national importance (0.1% of the flyway population).

The numbers presented clearly signal the regional, national, and global importance of the Turtle Cove claypan roost site for the Critically Endangered Far Eastern Curlew.”

By decision dated 27 August 2020, the Minister refused to approve the proposed action stating the proposed action is likely to have:

- a. “a significant impact on the ecological character of the GSS Ramsar site because it would result in the habitat and lifecycle of native species dependent upon the wetland (specifically, the Eastern Curlew) being seriously affected”; and
- b. “a significant and unacceptable impact on the Eastern Curlew because it would seriously disrupt the lifecycle of an ecologically significant proportion of the population of the species by causing frequent and ongoing disturbance that would reduce their capacity to migrate and breed”.

The Minister’s decision is to be applauded and sets a precedent to be followed in the case of the abhorrent proposal to build retail and residential complexes over internationally recognised intertidal wetlands at Toondah Harbour, Moreton Bay, Queensland.

Australasian Shorebird Conference 2021 postponed



The QWSG and AWSG are joint organisers of the Australasian Shorebird Conference and plans were to hold the Conference after the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership Meeting of Partners in March this year. However, this was postponed owing to the COVID19 pandemic and closure of borders to international travelers in Australia.

The QWSG and AWSG Organising Committee have been reviewing potential dates and arrangements for the Conference and in view of the current COVID pandemic and uncertainty about travel and border closures it has been proposed that the conference should be delayed until Feb/March or Oct/Nov 2022.

We will continue to provide information to update on the Conference.

David Edwards, Chair QWSG and Alison Russell-French OAM Chair AWSG

Mason Park Wetlands

Mason Park is approximately twelve hectares in size and is located 15 kilometres west of the Sydney CBD. The wetland consists of a saltmarsh, mangrove forest and a small freshwater area. The park lies in a triangle formed by the arms of two canalised creeks, Saleyards and Powells Creeks, which drain north into Homebush Bay. Directly to the north is Bicentennial Park and Olympic Park, site of the year 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. The park is surrounded by established residential and

industrial land and is managed by Strathfield Council. The site is tidal.

In the past Mason Park held significant numbers of migratory shorebirds such as Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and the Critically Endangered Curlew Sandpiper and was a hotspot for birders in the Parramatta River area. Today the wetland does not hold any migratory shorebirds though they are still found in the area.

Two factors have caused this deterioration. Firstly, the wetland had been allowed to become dry for long periods and secondly the mangrove forest expanded to almost take over the site. The drying of the mudflats caused the invertebrate food source to disappear or become unavailable to shorter-billed shorebirds. The mangroves changed the habitat significantly, so that without expanses of clear mudflats it was no longer attractive to shorebirds. In addition, with shorebird numbers globally now reduced they favour the most suitable sites and ignore marginal habitat.

Regular shorebird surveys, ongoing for many years on the Parramatta River, have documented Mason Park's deterioration as an important site.

BirdLife Southern NSW (BLSNSW), concerned about the situation, approached Strathfield Council in 2020 to discuss the possibility of collaborating on restoring the wetland. Coincidentally Council, in its recently completed Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2030, had identified Mason Park Wetland as a priority area, and agreed to support volunteer working bees organised by BLSNSW.

Removal of Mangroves

BirdLife volunteers under the coordination of Elisabeth Dark (Conservation Officer BLSNSW) and supervision of Council staff held six "working bee" mornings from August to November 2020, removing smaller mangroves. This required a licence from Department of Primary Industries-Fisheries, which Council obtained. A small group of approximately fifteen volunteers offered their services on the project, with an average of ten attending each session plus Council staff. Short progress reports, documenting the work, were provided to Council.

Council has also obtained a grant to engage a contractor to remove larger mangroves. This work is expected to be completed before July 2021. A small amount of mangrove forest will be retained as habitat for terrestrial birds.

Work will continue to remove all juvenile mangroves from sections of the wetland to maximise suitable wader habitat. Further working bees will be held in 2021, once a Memorandum of Understanding has been finalised between the two organisations. While ever there are mangroves remaining in the wetland it will be essential that several removal sessions be scheduled annually to prevent them once again becoming dominant.

Water Flow into the Wetland

The tidal water flow is currently coming into the site through a small sluice gate which is controlled manually. In the past this inlet has often been left closed causing the wetland to dry out except during very high tides. Strathfield Council has now applied for funding for a state-of-the-art sluice gate which can be programmed to manage the water levels with a view to making the habitat more suitable for shorebirds. The water management of the site is critical to the survival of the wetland and this initiative is most welcome.

Benthic Sampling

In addition, volunteers have been undertaking benthic sampling which involves taking mud samples and counting the small invertebrates which constitute the food that shorebirds need for survival. Staff from Sydney Olympic Park are assisting with analysis of the findings. Early samples suggested that the numbers of invertebrates was small, possibly due to the wetland having dried out for several years. The situation today is that the food supply continues to improve due to better management of water inflows.

Summary

Mason Park is a good news story. The wetland had deteriorated and dried out over several years. As a consequence, the site did not hold many shorebirds, in stark contrast to the situation only 10 to 12 years ago when many shorebirds were present. The Mason Park story is interesting in that it shows what can be accomplished through voluntary action and good will. BirdLife volunteers approached the land manager (Strathfield Council) with a definite plan of action which was welcomed and resulted in a positive response. BirdLife Southern NSW is appreciative of Council's recognition of the importance of the wetland and commitment to its restoration. Sydney Olympic Park Authority helped with specialist expertise in setting up the benthic sampling and analysis. Our volunteers generously help in the physical work of removing mangroves and in doing the benthic sampling.

A short YouTube video is being prepared by our volunteers to document the progress to date.

Trump Actions Threaten Alaskan Arctic Wilderness

The Trump administration auctioned off oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. (Juliet Eilperin & Steven Mufson, The Washington Post Jan. 7, 2021)

Trump administration officials auctioned off oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge capping Republicans' decades-long quest to drill in one of the nation's most vast unspoiled wild places. The move marks one of the most significant environmental rollbacks the president accomplished in his term. But with lacklustre oil prices and an increasing number of banks saying they would not finance Arctic energy projects, major oil companies did not try to buy the leases. That left the state agency, Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, as the main bidder. The agency put up all but two of the winning bids, which went to a couple of small energy firms.

The sale of 11 tracts on just over 550,000 acres netted \$14.4 million, a tiny fraction of what

Republicans initially predicted it would yield. Only two of the bids were competitive, so nearly all of the land sold for the minimum price of \$25 an acre.

While a 2017 law compels the government to auction another several hundred thousand acres by the end of 2024, the incoming administration may be able to overturn that requirement now that Democrats have won control of the Senate in the wake of the runoff elections in Georgia.

The sale marks the culmination of President Trump's push to expand oil and gas drilling across the country, including in some of its most ecologically sensitive areas. On Monday, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) opened up an additional 7 million acres for leasing on the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, home to a critical calving area for tens of thousands of caribou and migratory feeding ground for hundreds of thousands of birds.

Trump officials predict that extracting oil from the relatively pristine refuge, which supports 270 species, will require as many as four airstrips and major well pads, 175 miles of roads, vertical supports for pipelines, a seawater treatment plant and a barge landing and storage site. Drilling operations could last for nearly a half-century.

The BLM withdrew nearly 475,000 acres from the auction, citing public concerns about drilling's impact on the caribou herd. However Gleason ruled the auction could go forward because the Gwich'in and other plaintiffs – including the National Audubon Society and Natural Resources Defense Council “have not established that they are likely to suffer imminent irreparable harm” since drilling is not expected to commence immediately.

“In their push to sell off our lands to the fossil fuel industry, the Trump administration has engaged in a corrupt process and disrespected and dismissed the Indigenous people,” said Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee. “We will continue to fight this illegal sale in court, and we call on President-elect Biden to act immediately to protect our lands from destructive drilling once and for all.”

Opponents have also launched a public campaign to deter major financial institutions and energy firms from investing in such a project. America's six largest banks and Canada's five biggest banks have all pledged not to back energy exploration on the refuge.

It remains unclear how much Biden can restrict drilling given the legal mandate to hold another auction by the end of 2024, though Democrats may be able to overturn this provision now that they have won both of Georgia's Senate seats.

Drew Caputo, Earthjustice's vice president of litigation for lands, wildlife and oceans, noted that the Bureau of Land Management is supposed to hold quarterly auctions on its lands but can defer them repeatedly. "The 2017 tax law is way more prescriptive than BLM rules that cover oil and gas lease sales," Caputo said, adding Biden will have "a binding obligation" to conduct a lease sale on the refuge by the end of his first term "unless the law is changed before then. That mandate is not an excuse for other legal violations, like inadequate environmental analysis."

There are four separate lawsuits challenging the administration's environmental analysis of the proposed drilling program. Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of policy, economics and regulatory affairs for the American Petroleum Institute, said in an email that the environmental review at issue "confirmed the potential to develop the area safely, and any company that chooses to invest will be held to the world's highest environmental standards. Our members are laser-focused on continuing safe and environmentally sound energy production, and we will work with the Biden administration to support policies that balance U.S. energy leadership," Macchiarola said.

Vale Ken Rogers



My father, Ken Rogers, died in his sleep on 18th February. He was 81.

Dad made a very substantial contribution to Australian shorebird studies over the years. He was a regular participant in the VWSG field program in the 1980's (along with the rest of the Rogers family). From 2003 to 2006 he was editor of *Stilt*, his period at the helm culminating in *Stilt 50*, a bumper edition (325 pages) which provided a broad (and sobering) overview of shorebird status throughout the flyway. It is still a very useful publication, and it played a role in the increasing emphasis on international shorebird conservation by the AWSG.

Dad's greatest contribution was less visible. He was a statistical modeller in his working life, and he brought these skills to the Australasian shorebird scene at a time when shorebirds were not a focus of Australian academia. Analysing and publishing the already enormous datasets of the AWSG fell on the shoulders of amateurs, and it was a serious challenge in those days. Dad's ability to design and carry out rigorous analyses made a huge difference. Moreover, he was very generous with his time, and great fun to work with. He wrote or co-authored quite a lot of papers in the 1990s and 2000's. There were many more papers in which Dad's work was done behind the scenes, helping others to get their work to publication standard.

Danny Rogers

Vale Brian Gilligan



Brian Gilligan the environmental educator and protector died on 11 December 2021 due to lung cancer. He was aged 72.

Brian received the diagnosis of inoperable lung cancer on the previous Christmas Eve, after visiting his GP for a check-up in preparation for a hiking holiday in Tasmania. The non-smoker and active bushwalker, admitted “It’s a big bolt from the blue” after, during an interview commented, “A cancer diagnosis is, in one sense, a horrid thing,” he says. “In another sense, it’s a gift, in that you’ve at least got some time ahead to do some reflection.”

So that’s what Brian Gilligan had been doing. Only he has been reflecting not just on his own life. As well as looking inward and back, Brian Gilligan has been gazing out and forward. He’s been thinking about the state of the world.

He turned words and views into action. He joined the high-powered Emergency Leaders for Climate Action group, urging governments to do more to combat growing environmental and community threats, such as bushfires. While his own future looked challenging as he underwent cancer treatment, Brian Gilligan concentrated on trying to do something about the world’s future. He did as he had always done; he set out to make a difference.

The landscape of his childhood has been dramatically changed, with the incursion of mining in the Upper Hunter. Brian Gilligan has played a role in reshaping some of that land. Between 2011 and 2017, he was a state planning

assessment commissioner, helping review and make determinations on major projects, including about 20 coal mine proposals. When asked he reflected: “When I sat on the Planning Assessment Commission, we did our best to identify the issues and to deal with them as much as we could. But we always had to make calls in the context of the law as it sits, and the government policy as it sits. And so we finished up having to approve things I certainly didn’t feel comfortable with. But I had to satisfy myself with having to put as many practical conditions on as I could.”

When asked how he feels about driving up the valley these days, Gilligan replies,

“I lament the lack of a government strategy on coal mining. The government has basically left the location and the timing of mines pretty well entirely to the market, to the private sector. To me, that’s irresponsible.”

A brief history of his working life:

After working briefly as an exploration geologist in New Guinea and Queensland, Mr Gilligan used his training in science to become a high school teacher. He quickly specialised in environmental education. Yet he wasn’t constrained by the classroom. Brian Gilligan took students out into the environment, opening their eyes to the world around them, when he founded the Awabakal Field Study Centre at Dudley in 1976. “It was more a case of [students] taking in their surroundings and just being aware and being sensitive to them,” Mr Gilligan told the Newcastle Herald on a return visit to the education centre in February this year. Brian Gilligan’s journey through the wilderness took him beyond Dudley, around the globe and into the highest offices in the country, as he helped formulate policies and views on land management and conservation. He also remained connected to environmental education, through the University of Newcastle and in everyday life.

He was a founding director of the Shortland Wetlands Centre, a far-sighted vision of the late Professor Max Maddock. He later worked in senior management at the NSW Environment Protection Authority, and, from 1998 to 2003, he headed the NSW National Parks and Wildlife

Service. In that time, he was also a member of the NSW Marine Parks Authority.

After retiring from the NPWS, Mr Gilligan worked for a range of land management and environmental authorities around the nation, including the NSW Natural Resources Commission and the state's Planning Assessment Commission.

The Deputy Secretary of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Atticus Fleming, described Mr Gilligan as a "champion for conservation".

"It's a very sad day for conservation, particularly for the National Parks family," Dr Fleming said. "His legacy is not just in the land he helped protect, but in the organisation he helped build. Even broader than that, it's the influence he's had across Australia and around the world." Yet the public official was also a cherished family man. He was a husband to Micheala, a father of three, with two daughters, Kate and Conor, and a son, Adam, who has followed his father's path and works in a senior role in the EPA. And he was a grandfather to five, with a sixth grandchild due in April.

Ramsar vs Flyway Network Sites

Better Networking for Site Managers of Ramsar Sites and Flyway Network Sites (FNS) are mentioned on page 5. But what is the difference between a Ramsar site and a Flyway Network Site?

Ramsar Convention sites started with an emphasis on 'Wildfowl habitat', whereas migratory waterbird network sites were formed as linkages for 'migratory waterbirds' along migratory flyways. This involved countries as Partners along the various 'flyway networks' with a common interest in the protection of migratory waterbirds passing through some or all countries involved in any one of the nine global flyway routes.

The threats to migratory waterbirds vary depending on the situation, and protective measures in place on breeding grounds, along migration routes (in particular staging sites where birds may recoup after long flights), and non-breeding grounds where many species may spend up to six or seven months of the year.

To protect migratory waterbird network sites partnerships have been created to include most, if not all, countries responsible for one or more sites of international importance for migratory waterbirds.

Many FNSs are also Ramsar sites, but listed at different times. Unlike FNSs, Ramsar sites may be listed on the basis of 9 Criterion of mutual benefit. Of particular interest to migratory waterbirds is Group B of the Criteria: *Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity (Criterion 2 – 4); and Specific criteria based on waterbirds (Criterion 5, 6).*

A table of Ramsar sites and EAA Flyway Network Sites can be viewed at the AWSG website under Publications > East Asia-Australasian Flyway and Ramsar:
https://awsg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/List-of-EAAF-Ramsar-SITES_WEB-1.pdf