

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

1. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

May 1999

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY.

DD	MM	YY

Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Country:

Australia

3. Name of wetland:

Lake Albacutya, Victoria

4. Geographical coordinates:

Latitude: 35° 46'S; Longitude: 141° 58'E

5. Altitude:

Approximately 80 metres.

6. Area:

5,731 ha.

Note: This is a revised area figure based on GIS Mapping (1995) and does not represent any change to the Ramsar Site boundary.

7. Overview:

Lake Albacutya only receives water in exceptionally wet years (about every 20 years). It takes 3 or 4 years to dry 20 year cycle. When full it supports large numbers (10000+) of ducks, swans and coots. Large numbers of Freckled Duck have also be recorded.

8. Wetland Type:

marine-coastal: A B C D E F G H I J K

inland: L M N O **P** Q R Sp Ss Tp Ts

U Va Vt W Xf Xp Y Zg Zk

man-made: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

9. Ramsar Criteria:

1a **1b** 1c 1d | 2a 2b 2c 2d | **3a** **3b** **3c** | 4a 4b

Please specify the most significant criterion applicable to the site:

10. Map of site included? Please tick *yes* -or- *no*.

11. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

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12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page.

1(a) The wetland is a particularly good representative example of a natural or near-natural wetland characteristic of the appropriate biogeographical region.

and

1(b) The wetland is a particularly good representative example of a natural or near-natural wetland common to more than one biogeographical region.

Lake Albacutya is a good example of a terminal lake in the Murray-Darling Depression biogeographic region and in the wider Murray-Darling Basin.

3(a) Regularly supports 20,000 waterfowl

The lake, when flooded, has supported up to 20,000 Grey Teal, more than 10,000 Banded Stilts, 3,000 Pacific Black Duck, 3,000 Australian Shelduck, 2,000 Maned Duck and 3,000 Eurasian Coot (ANCA 1996).

3(b) Regularly supports substantial numbers of waterfowl from particular groups

When flooded, the lake is particularly important for supporting large numbers of ducks and Banded Stilt (see above).

3(c) Regularly supports 1% on the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies

When flooded Lake Albacutya has been recorded as supporting in excess of 10% of the Victorian Freckled Duck population and 3.5% of the Australian population of the Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*). The lake has also supported internationally significant numbers of Banded Stilt (ANCA 1996)

13. General location:

North-west Victoria, 14 kilometres north of Rainbow.

14. Physical features:

The Wimmera River which flows from the highlands of western Victoria into Lake Hindmarsh, which in wet years, overflows into Outlet Creek which then carries water to Lake Albacutya. In most years the Wimmera River does not have sufficient flow to replace evaporative losses from Lake Hindmarsh, and so Lake Albacutya fills intermittently.

The longest dry period on record being 27 years (1929-1956). Lake Albacutya last filled in mid 1974 and has been dry since 1983.

Lake Albacutya abuts the Big Desert dune system which consists of irregular and parabolic dune chains and sand plains of the Lowan Sand. Heavy alluvial grey cracking clays of the Coonambidgal Formation occur along Outlet Creek, and these are partly overlain by grey and brown sands of variable depth. Lake Albacutya has a lunette of sandy material on its eastern side.

Average annual rainfall in the area is 360 mm.

15. Hydrological values:

Lake Albacutya has no operational function for water supply or water conservation and serves principally as a recreational area tourists and local residents, and as a natural wetland.

16. Ecological features:

The vegetation along Outlet Creek and around Lake Albacutya differs considerably from that of the surrounding dry country. Red Gum woodlands fringe the lake, with Black Box and Cypress Pine woodlands on higher ground. There are also some small areas of buloke woodlands. Grey Mulga, Three-nerve Wattle, Small Cooba, Wallow, Lignum, and grasses grow beneath the woodlands. When the lake is dry, grasslands occupy the lake-bed.

The lake periodically supports in excess of 10 000 ducks and swans and 10 000 coots.

17. Noteworthy flora:

Threatened Species

Acacia trineura (Three-nerve Wattle) - vulnerable
Stenopetalum velutinum (Velvet Thread Petal) - vulnerable
Psoralea patens (Spreading Psoralea) - endangered
Austrostipa puberula (Fine-hairy Spear-grass) - rare
Myriophyllum porcatum (Ridged Water-milfoil) - vulnerable

18. Noteworthy fauna:

Freckled Duck (*Sictonetta naevosa*) - rare in Victoria. There were 700 Freckled Duck on Lake Albacutya during February 1983. Extrapolations from counts made in Australia during January and February of 1983 (a drought year) suggested a total population of approx. 20,000 birds. Thus in 1983, Lake Albacutya held 3.5% of the total population of Freckled Duck.

Other threatened birds in Lake Albacutya Park are:

Blue-billed Duck (*Oxyura australis*) - rare
White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) - rare
Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) - rare
Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) - insufficiently known
Bush Thick-knee (*Burhinus magnirostris*) - vulnerable
Pink Cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*) - indeterminate
Regent Parrot (*Polytelis anthopeplus*) - rare
Red-lored Whistler (*Pachycephala rufogularis*) - vulnerable
Striated Grasswren (*Amytornis striatus*) - vulnerable
Slender-billed Thornbill (*Acanthiza iredalei*) - rare
Bush Stone Curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) - vulnerable
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*) - vulnerable

Fish:

Freshwater Catfish (*Tandanus tandanus*) - vulnerable

Reptiles:

The Tree Goanna (*Varanus varius*) which is a threatened species ('insufficiently known') has been collected at Lake Albacutya.

Mammals:

Mitchell's Hopping Mouse (*Notomys mitchelli*) - rare

19. Social and cultural values:

The Jakelbalek tribe occupied the land between Pine Plains and Lake Albacutya. The lake features in local aboriginal mythology as Nalbagadja, the place where Purra the kangaroo fed on bitter quandongs while fleeing from Wembulin the spider. Albacutya is derived from the aboriginal word 'nalbagadja' and means 'place of bitter quandongs'.

There are seven surface scatters around Lake Albacutya, which contain fireplaces, hearths, freshwater mussels, middens and other aboriginal cultural material. The area has not been adequately surveyed however, so it is likely that there are more archaeological sites to be discovered.

20. Land tenure/ownership:

Reserved under Schedule 3 of the *National Parks Act 1975* (Vic) as part of the Lake Albacutya Park.

21. Current land use:

- (a) **On site:** When holding water Lake Albacutya is a popular recreation area (i.e. for boating, fishing and shooting, as well as passive recreation).

With the drying out of the Lake, the lake-bed is colonised by plants taking advantage of the bare ground. Unfortunately, many of the plants best adapted to this colonisation process are introduced weeds which are difficult to control. Lake-bed cropping and grazing licences are issued to local farmers to help reduce weeds and vermin.

More than 30 licensed commercial fishermen operate in the Mallee streams and lakes. Most of these fishermen operate on Lake Albacutya at some time when it contains water. The Lake is netted for Redfin and provides exceptional catches of yabbies.

- (b) **The surroundings/catchment:** Dryland farming, mainly wheat and wool.
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22. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:

Over several decades, commitment of flows for agricultural and domestic purposes has reduced the frequency and extent of natural flooding in Lake Albacutya. Since the last update of the Ramsar information sheet in 1992, change in ecological character at the site has generally not been significant though some effects of long term changes persist.

Dieback of the River Red Gum and Black Box communities is continuing at Lake Albacutya. This is attributed to rising groundwater levels, increasingly saline groundwater and reduced occurrence of floodwaters and contributes to a loss of breeding habitat for threatened parrot species. Lakebed herbfields are being replaced by annual weeds as a result of infrequent flooding.

Over the years there have been a number of proposals to increase water flow to the downstream end of the Wimmera River system, most recently by making water savings by piping stock and domestic diversions in the Wimmera-Mallee water-supply system to reduce transmission losses.

23. Conservation measures taken:

The values at Lake Albacutya have been recognised through listing on the National Estate Register.

Reservation under Schedule 3 of the *National Parks Act 1975* provides for protection of natural values.

The Mallee Parks Management Plan 1996 and the Wimmera Heritage River Draft Management Plan 1997 outline strategies to protect the natural values at Lake Albacutya. Strategies relating to provision of water include processes for allocating water savings made as a result of an ongoing program to pipe stock and domestic supplies.

Action Statements under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 have been produced for the following fauna species that occur at the Ramsar site. They outline conservation measures for the species.

- White-bellied Sea-eagle (1994)
 - Malleefowl (1994)
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24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

In an integrated approach to planning at Ramsar sites, management strategies are being prepared for all Ramsar sites in Victoria, including Lake Albacutya, to provide general strategic direction and site specific strategies. The strategies will be completed by June 1999.

A bulk water entitlement conversion process will be initiated for the Wimmera River system in 1998. However, while further long term reduction of flows will be prevented, there is unlikely to be a noticeable gain of environmental water for Lake Albacutya.

25. Current scientific research and facilities:

Monitoring of die-back of flood-dependent vegetation was initiated in 1993 with a baseline survey of the extent of River Red Gum dieback on the lower Wimmera River.

Pre duck season surveys are undertaken when the lake has water.

26. Current conservation education:

There is a Visitor Information Centre located at the Park.

The Department of Conservation and Environment has produced a one page leaflet describing various aspects of the Park.

27. Current recreation and tourism:

When holding water, Lake Albacutya is used for boating, fishing, yabbing and water-skiing. There is a concrete boat launching ramp at Western Beach; at Yaapect Beach boats may be launched from the shore when the lake is full.

28. Jurisdiction:

Government of Victoria.

29. Management authority:

Managed under the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Parks Program by Parks Victoria - 5,731 ha (100%)

30. Bibliographical references:

Beaglehole, A. C. (1979). The Distribution and Conservation of Native Vascular Plants in the Victorian Mallee. Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association, Portland.

Martindale, J. (1988). Waterfowl Count in Victoria, January 1987. RAOU Report No. 37. Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Moonee Ponds, Victoria.
