

# 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:

1998

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

## 2. Country:

Australia

## 3. Name of wetland:

Ord River Floodplain, Western Australia

## 4. Geographical coordinates:

Latitude: (approx.) 14° 51'S to 15° 39'S; Longitude: (approx.) 128° 12'E to 128° 33'E

## 5. Altitude:

Sea level

## 6. Area:

Approximately 102 000 ha.

## 7. Overview:

A large system of river, tidal mudflat and floodplain wetlands that supports extensive stands of mangroves, large numbers of waterbirds and significant numbers of Salt-water Crocodiles.

## 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:

Department of Conservation and Land Management  
Locked Bag 104  
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983

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

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### 13. General location:

Cambridge Gulf, Kimberley, Western Australia

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### 14. Physical features:

The seasonal wetlands south of the river are fresh and sometimes fringed by low shrubs or trees. They are surrounded by a flat, grass-covered plain. The mud flats along the river and the eastern side of Cambridge Gulf support patches of *Sporobolus* grassland and samphire. They are incised by numerous creeks and channels, along which mangroves grow. Mangroves also grow along the Ord River and the seaward side of the mudflats.

The grassland around the seasonal wetlands is dominated by cane-grass *Oryza australiense*. Parry Lagoons is surrounded by mudflats containing the samphires *Halosarcia indica leiostachya* and *Tecticornia verrucosa* and grasses. At the edge of the water the sedge *Eleocharis brassii* and a low shrub *Aeschynomene indica* occur. In the water a taller shrub, *Sesbania cannabina*, grows seasonally and a variety of water lilies and other aquatics occur, including *Ipomoea diamantinensis*, *Nymphaea gigantea*, *Nymphoides* sp., *Utricularia* sp. and *Ceratophyllum* sp. A few *Terminalia* sp. trees grow in some areas. Seasonal wetlands occurring on black soil plains, including Jobalong Flat, are dominated by sedges, principally *Eleocharis* sp. However, in some cases *Terminalia* sp. trees also occur, together with low shrubs, water lilies (*Nymphaea gigantea*, *Nymphoides indica* and *Nymphoides crenata*) and other aquatics.

Permanent waterholes are fringed with a variety of trees, including *Barringtonia acutangula*, *Melaleuca argentea* and *Terminalia platyphylla*. *Pandanus spiralis* occurs around Palm Spring.

In the northern part of the Ramsar site zonation is evident in the mangrove community fronting onto Cambridge Gulf. Mangrove species in the seaward zone, a woodland about 8 m high, include *Sonneratia alba*, *Avicennia marina* and *Aegiceras corniculatum*. Behind this, in a woodland 10 m high, grow *Bruauiera parviflora*, *Avicennia marina* and *Aegiceras corniculatum*, then there is a belt of *Rhizophora stylosa* 12-15 m high. On the landward edge is a 4 m high thicket of *Avicennia marina*, *Ceriops tagal* and *Aegialitis annulata*. Patches of *Sporobolus virginicus* grassland and samphire grow on the mudflats behind the mangroves.

Other species of mangrove occur occasionally in the northern section or along the creeks and the Ord River. These include: *Xylocarpus moluccensis*, *Excoecaria gallocha* and *Camptostemon schultzi*.

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### 15. Hydrological values:

The principal hydrological value of the wetland are those of floodplain wetlands and mangrove areas.

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### 16. Ecological features:

The seasonal wetlands on the Ord River floodplain support large numbers of waterbirds: totals of 13 000 in May 1979; 20 000 in March 1980; 15 000 in January 1981 and 27 000 in May 1986 have been recorded. They regularly contain more than 10 000 ducks: in May 1986 18 400 ducks were recorded there, including 6 500 Hardheads *Aythya australis* and 6 000 Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons*, and in November 1968 15 000 Plumed Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni* were seen in the Parry Lagoons. The lagoons are also an important site for waders: several thousand Little Curlews *Numenius minutus* and Oriental Pratincoles *Glareola maldivarum* and hundreds of Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* have been counted. The Parry Lagoons are probably the most important site in Australia for Wood Sandpipers and Marsh Sandpipers *Tringa stagnatilis*. In years when local rainfall is good the lagoons and other seasonal wetlands constitute one of the major breeding areas for waterbirds in the Kimberley and an enormous number and diversity can be seen. Fifty-four species were recorded in May 1986.

The eastern side of Cambridge Gulf has some of the best areas of mangroves in the Kimberley in terms of species diversity, structural complexity, and massiveness of the stands. Besides being of great conservation value in their own right, the mangroves contain a number of species of terrestrial bird which are restricted to this type of habitat or rainforest: the Black Butcherbird *Cracticus quoyi* is an example whose population in the Kimberley is limited to the area around Cambridge Gulf. The mangroves

support at least six species of insectivorous bat, Black Flying-foxes *Pteropus alecto* and an undescribed species of mozaic-tailed rat *Melomys*.

The lower Ord River contains a high density of Salt-water Crocodiles *Crocodylus porosus*, a species declared "in need of special protection" under the Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act, and the surrounding grasslands form the only area in Western Australia where Zitting Cisticolas *Cisticola iuncidis* occur.

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**17. Noteworthy flora:**

See ECOLOGICAL FEATURES.

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**18. Noteworthy fauna:**

See ECOLOGICAL FEATURES.

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**19. Social and cultural values:**

The major social value is tourism although there is a possibility that mining for alluvial diamonds will occur. Mining may, or may not, be compatible with maintaining the ecological character of the wetland.

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**20. Land tenure/ownership:**

The wetland area consists of Nature Reserves 30866, 1058, 1059, 31636, 3197 and the proposed northwards extension of 3197, which will include the False Mouths of the Ord. The reserves are vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority of Western Australia and managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

There is a small freehold area around Twenty-mile Lagoon, within Nature Reserve 31636, which is not included in the Ramsar site.

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**21. Current land use:**

The seasonal wetlands are visited regularly by tourists from Wyndham, which is about 15 km west of Parry Lagoons. The remainder of the reserve area attracts little human usage but the surrounding land is leased for the grazing of cattle, which frequently stray onto the reserves and cause great damage to the seasonal wetlands, especially in 1059.

Mining tenements are held over the majority of the area and exploration for alluvial diamonds is in progress.

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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:**

Continuing efforts must be made to ensure cattle do not stray into the wetland area and that infestations of Nugurra Burr *Xanthium pungens*, an exotic plant, do not spread. These efforts constitute part of the normal management of nature reserves by the Department of Conservation and Land Management. Trees of *Parkinsonia* sp., another exotic plant, occur around some wetlands near Wild Goose Creek and will need to be eradicated. Exploration for diamonds will be allowed to continue, subject to environmental constraints imposed to minimise disturbance and to maintain wetland ecology and habitat. The question of mining will be assessed by the appropriate State authorities in the event of the discovery of commercial diamonds.

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**23. Conservation measures taken:**

Reserves 30866, 1058, 1059, 31636, 3197 have been declared in the southern half of the wetland area.

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**24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

A northern extension of 3197, to cover the northern half of the wetland area, has been proposed.

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**25. Current scientific research and facilities:**

None.

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**26. Current conservation education:**

None.

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**27. Current recreation and tourism:**

There is a low level of tourist use, especially of Parry Lagoons.

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**28. Jurisdiction:**

Government of Western Australia

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**29. Management authority:**

Department of Conservation and Land Management, PO Box 104, Como WA 6152.

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**30. Bibliographical references:**

Burbidge, A.A. and Messel, H. (1979). The status of the Salt-water Crocodile in the Glenelg, Prince Regent and Ord River Systems, Kimberley, Western Australia. Western Australian Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Report 34, 1-38.

Jaensch, R.P. and Vervest, R.M. (1990). Waterbirds at remote wetlands in Western Australia, 1986-88. Part Two : Lake MacLeod, Shark Bay, Camballin Floodplain and Parry Floodplain. Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Report 69, 1-40.

Johnstone, R.E. (1990). Mangroves and mangrove birds of Western Australia. Records of the Western Australian Museum supplement 32, 1-120.

Thom, B.L., Wright, L.D. and Coleman, J.M. (1975). Mangrove ecology and deltaic-estuarine geomorphology: Cambridge Gulf - Ord River, Western Australia. Journal of Ecology 63, 203-232.

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