

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 243
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 4
Program: Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO)
Topic: Article 3.2
Hansard Page: 35
Question Date: 21 October 2016
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters, Larissa asked:

Senator WATERS: ... I will ask about that article 3.2 process: who initiated that particular process? Was it the Victorian government? Was it the feds? Was it a community group? Was it the convention secretariat?

Mr Papps: In terms of the formal process, it is the Victorian government through its agencies. Without going into excessive detail, the principal responsibilities around management and what flows from the management of the Ramsar site sit with the management agency and the government of the management agency. That is in nearly all cases.

Senator WATERS: Is that Parks Victoria or is that DELWP?

Mr Papps: It is a combination of both of those. Parks Victoria manages most of the site, but it sits within a Victorian government framework with the broader department who also have broader Ramsar responsibilities themselves.

Senator WATERS: The short version of that is: the Victorian government alerted the Ramsar secretariat and this article 3.2 process began. Is that right?

Mr Papps: They work through the Australian government, because it is the Australian—

Senator WATERS: Of course, the state party had made the representation.

Mr Papps: It is the state party, that is right.

Senator WATERS: When did that happen? How long has that been on foot for?

Mr Papps: I would have to take that on notice because I do not have the exact date.

Answer:

I wish to clarify that the Australian Government has not made an Article 3.2 notification to the Ramsar Secretariat of a change or likely change in the ecological character of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site.

In March 2009, the Gippsland Environment Group made a Third Party Notification to the Ramsar Secretary-General for the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site. The Group claimed that the ecological character of the site had changed as a result of alterations to water quality of the Lakes and the occurrence of an extensive marine algal bloom.

The Australian Government undertook a formal assessment in consultation with the then Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in 2012. Based on the available information and data at that time, the assessment found that the ecological character of the site had not changed since the time it was listed as a result of human induced impacts.

The assessment was published on the Department's website at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/database/pubs/21-art-3-2-assessment.pdf>

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority subsequently reviewed and released a comprehensive Ramsar Management Plan for the site on 22 October 2015.

The Department of the Environment and Energy has not received further notification from the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning of possible or likely change in the ecological character of this site.