

SUBMISSION FROM A PRIVATE RAMSAR MANAGER

Mr Eric Fisher (OAM)

In submitting to your inquiry I would like to pose three recommendations to you which involve **triggers, threats and incentives** in regard to listing areas for conservation or National Parks as explained below.

I own and manage the “Wilgara” private Ramsar site, which is part of the Macquarie Marshes Ramsar site, in central western NSW. We have been successful in achieving a balance between conservation and management on our property for nearly 100 years.

I am also Chair of the NSW Ramsar Managers Network, which was formed in 2003 by a group of private Ramsar managers within New South Wales and with the support of The Minister for the Environment in this state. The reason being that the private landholders who had put their land under an international wetland agreement to which the State and Australian Government were signatories were not receiving any support in their attempts to maintain the ecological character of these listed lands. We have been successful in raising the awareness at most levels of government but still we have seen a decline in our Ramsar listed wetlands. The Gwydir and Wilgara Wetlands are both severely degraded by over allocation of water and up river development. Both sites support colonial waterbird nesting colonies, which are the largest in Australia. (Kingsford).

Government needs to consider the three principles **trigger, threats and incentives** so that they can involve more landholders in conserving their land.

Recommendation 1- Better strategies are needed to conserve our lands of high conservation value. (Triggers)

These strategies need to be strong enough to withstand highly organised lobby groups that do not have the best interest of conservation at heart. Clear guidelines (or triggers) must be in place and the needs and wants of an area as a whole must be considered before considering new National Parks or Conservation areas. A long term strategy must be in place for the future management and conservation of land signed under any agreement.

Recommendation 2- Governments must act with better planning, science local knowledge and long term commitments. (Threats)

There is too much at stake to wait till the damage is done before anything is started. Announcing a new park or conservation area without considering the threats, successful management, water needs, erosion needs etc. need not be a threatening process.

In my experience when I wanted to protect my special piece of land I discovered most covenants and listings had such strict rules, in most cases it was “lock up and keep out”. Having such strict conditions does not encourage people to list their property under conservation agreements and Australia is the loser in the end.

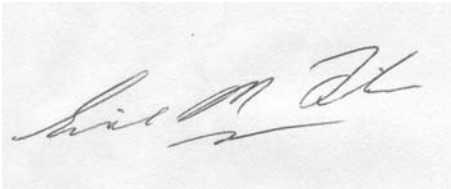
If we are going to let places such as the Internationally recognized Macquarie Marshes be totally destroyed then the signatories to these agreements should announce that they are not going to help and withdraw.

I chose Ramsar because of its principle of wise use to protect my land for future generations. My family has been on the property for close to a hundred years. In that time we have been able to maintain a bird colony of up to 30,000 breeding birds. Unfortunately we are losing this unique area due to matters beyond our control regarding water allocation.

Recommendation 3- There must be ways and means to encourage people to maintain their present practices and be assured that their area will be protected for future generations. (Incentives)

Australia has large areas of great environmental and conservation value. People are very reluctant to pursue conservation agreements because of the triggers and threats described above. Some of the types of incentives that could be utilized are tax stewardships, land use changes, better management tools, easy access to scientific data and cooperative planning.

I would very much like to address your committee and work through some of the problems associated with conservation protection as discussed above.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Eric Fisher", written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Mr Eric Fisher