

Hon Peter Garrett
Minister for Environment
Commonwealth of Australia
Canberra ACT

Dear Mr Garrett,

Given the critically threatened state of the world renowned Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Wetland, we request:

- 1) its nomination by the Commonwealth of Australia for inclusion on the Montreux Record
- 2) its listing under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biological Diversity Act as a critically endangered ecological community.

The wetland has critical ecological significance and high conservation value. It was nominated by Australia for recognition as a Ramsar site in 1985. Since that time a steady decline in its ecological health has been described in many scientific reports. Wader bird population numbers have declined by more than 90% compared to what they were in the 1960s. Rising salinity is progressively destroying habitats. Ecosystems are either changed or in transition.

Over extraction in the Murray-Darling Basin has reduced inflows into the Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Wetland, leaving less opportunity for breeding, and diminished food resources for a wide range of species. This sustained man-made drought has now been exacerbated by the worst natural drought in Australia's history.

In section 3.1 of its "Guidelines for Operation of the Montreux Record (Resolution VI.1, Brisbane 1996, Annex, section 3)", the Ramsar Convention describes the Montreux Record as

. ... the principal tool of the Convention for highlighting those sites where an adverse change in ecological character has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur, and which are therefore in need of priority conservation attention. It shall be maintained as part of the Ramsar Database and shall be subject to continuous review.

There can be no better example of a site undergoing an adverse change in ecological character than the Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Wetland. This wetland is in need of priority conservation attention. The site provides vital habitat for bird species from Siberia, the Arctic, Japan and China. Australia's migratory bird agreements with China and Japan recognise the critical importance of this region and our global responsibility to protect a wide range of bird species.

For Australia to ignore convention and refuse to place the region on the The Montreux Record is damaging to the international standing of our country. To ignore the obvious and to refuse to recognise that the Wetland is critically endangered is culpable neglect. Failure to act opens our nation and its leaders to justifiable international censure.

Your faithfully