

THREATENED HABITATS

Tasmania's wetlands

An important environment



Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania

DEPARTMENT of TOURISM, PARKS
HERITAGE and the ARTS

Wetlands are areas featuring permanent or temporary shallow open water. They include swamp marshes, creeks and even farm dams! Wetlands include saltwater environments such as saltmarshes and the intertidal zone of our coasts.

Wetlands are important

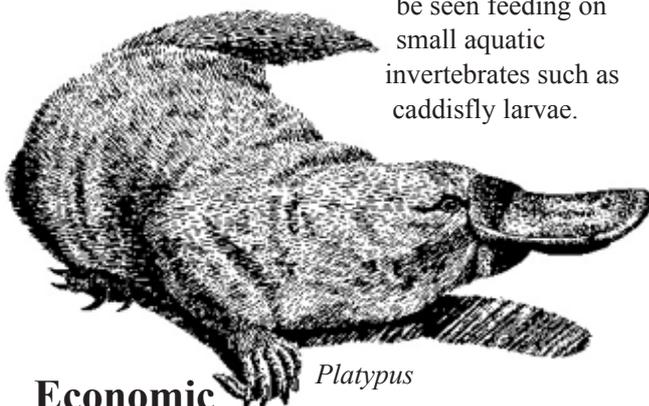
Wetlands act as "kidneys" for the land, trapping substances and contaminants that would otherwise reach the water. If waterways become polluted then we need to use complex and expensive mechanisms to clean the water for drinking.

Provide homes

Wetlands are an important habitat for many of our native animals and plants. Waterfowl such as Pacific black ducks, white-faced herons and grebes rely on wetlands as places to feed and breed. Our rivers and lakes are an important habitat for native galaxiid fish. Ten of our 15 species are endemic to Tasmania - only occur here.

The uniquely Australian platypus lives in many of Tasmania's wetland environments. This egg-laying mammal makes a burrow just above the water level where it rests during the day. At dawn and dusk it may

be seen feeding on small aquatic invertebrates such as caddisfly larvae.



Economic value

Properly managing wetlands adds both scenic and real estate value to your property. Retaining native vegetation around dams or along creek banks not only improves the look of your wetland area but, also saves you money and work in the longterm. This is because native vegetation acts as a buffer, reducing water contamination and soil erosion. It also prevents weeds, such as gorse and blackberries, from invading and spreading into surrounding paddocks effecting productivity.

Native vegetation provides homes for many native birds which can significantly reduce agricultural pests.

Threats to wetlands

Wetlands are threatened by the impact of people on the environment. Drainage of wetlands, contamination and damage are the major threats.



Litoria ewingi

Draining destroys homes

Wetlands have been drained to provide land for other purposes such as housing and agriculture. This affects all the plants and animals living and relying on that wetland. The green and gold bell frog is now listed under the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*, because its numbers have dramatically declined due to habitat loss. Drainage is a major threat to the dwarf galaxias.

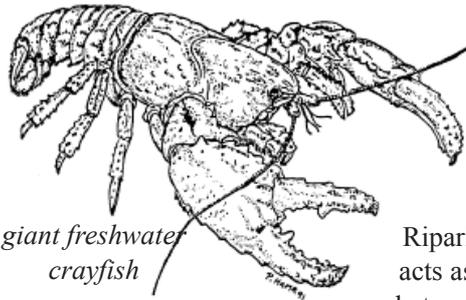
Pollution

Contamination is a major threat to wetlands. Polluted runoff becomes washed into waterways after rain. Products such as fertilisers, insecticide sprays, oil and litter are all of particular concern. Fertilisers and animal waste products are high in nitrogen and phosphorus both of which promote rapid algae growth. Algal blooms consume all available oxygen, killing thousands of freshwater creatures.

Vegetation loss

It is vital that we maintain wetland vegetation (riparian) to bind the soil and maintain clean, healthy waterways. Loss of vegetation through stock trampling, overgrazing or land clearing allows rain to wash surrounding soil and nutrients into waterways. This leads to eutrophication (high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus) and turbidity.

Turbid waters prevent light from reaching aquatic plants causing them to die. In turn, aquatic invertebrates and other plant-eating creatures can no longer survive.



giant freshwater crayfish

Riparian vegetation acts as a buffer between the land

and the wetlands, trapping soil and nutrients, preventing these problems.

Clearing of native vegetation allows weeds to invade. Swans are unable to nest in areas where thick gorse and other weeds have taken over the native vegetation. Native animals become excluded from these areas allowing introduced pest species to thrive.

Helping wetlands

There are a number of things you can do to help wetlands.

Fencing

The most effective way of protecting wetlands is to fence out stock and provide troughs for them to drink at. The outlay for fencing and water pumping will be quickly re-couped with increased productivity in your stock, reduced stock disease and improved water quality. Other benefits include healthier and more visually appealing waterways and less erosion



dwarf galaxias

problems. It may also be possible to obtain some assistance with fencing through groups such as Landcare and Save The Bush. Without grazing, vegetation should begin to grow back naturally.

Retaining a buffer zone

Erosion due to cropping can be a big problem to nearby wetlands. By providing a 50 metre grassland buffer between crops and the riparian wetland vegetation, water contamination will be reduced. The grassland acts as a filtering mechanism catching soil and nutrients which would otherwise be washed into waterways.

These grasslands become very productive and can be used for short-term grazing provided they are not denuded of grass.

Having a strip of native vegetation along or around wetlands is essential. This riparian strip protects the water quality of the wetland and provides homes for native species.

Where weed invasion has occurred they should be removed and native vegetation should be planted.

What are Ramsar sites?

Ramsar is an international convention on wetlands. There are ten Ramsar sites listed in Tasmania as wetlands of international significance, including Moulting Lagoon and Ringarooma River Flood Plains. The Ramsar convention also promotes the protection of and encourages the sustainable use of all wetlands worldwide.



long-finned eel

Contact

To find out more or become involved in wetlands contact one of the community groups listed below.

Waterwatch

(Mike Cassidy)
(03) 6336 5254

Tasmanian Landcare Association

(Jodie Epper)
(03) 6223 6377

Birds Tasmania

GPO Box 68, Hobart 7001.

Aust. Trust for Conservation Volunteers
(03) 6224 4911

Tasmanian Field Naturalists
(03) 6368 1313

Nature Conservation Branch
134 Macquarie Street,
Hobart. 7000
Phone: (03) 6233 6556
Fax: (03) 6233 3477



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FURTHER INFORMATION

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