

Eminent scientists sound alarm on the Lakes

A group of eminent Australian scientists, alongside the Gippsland Environment Group, has taken the unusual step of escalating concerns about the future of the Gippsland Lakes to an international wetlands body.

They warn that the Gippsland Lakes system may be experiencing cumulative ecological change that is not being adequately captured by current management frameworks.

The collective — which includes Professor Max Finlayson, Professor Peter Gell, and Professor Bruce Thom AM — has submitted a request to the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, asking it to consider whether formal reporting obligations under Article 3.2 of the Convention are now engaged for the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site in eastern Victoria.

The move reflects concern that one of

Australia's largest coastal lagoon systems may be shifting under the combined pressure of climate change, altered freshwater inflows, water extraction across the catchment and longer-term development pressures, including emerging demands linked to large-scale mine rehabilitation.

The Gippsland Lakes, listed under the Ramsar Convention in 1982, are internationally recognised for their ecological importance, supporting migratory waterbirds, fisheries and seagrass meadows. They are culturally significant landscapes for Gunai-kurnai Traditional Owners, as well as being vital for regional tourism and recreation.

However, the group behind the submission argues the primary concern is no longer individual pressures, but how they interact across the entire system.

A spokesperson for the collective said concern has been building for years, but is now reaching a point where international scrutiny is warranted.

"This is not about a single project or a single impact," the spokesperson said.

"It is about the combined effect of multiple pressures acting across the entire system, and whether the trajectory of change is being properly recognised."

The submission draws on scientific and technical evidence, including recent government ecological assessments and independent analyses.

It argues that the broader trajectory of change raises serious concern about the long-term integrity of the wetland.

Under Article 3.2 of the Ramsar Convention, signatory countries are required to report to the Secretariat when the ecological character of a listed wetland is changing or likely to change, enabling early international attention and coordination.

The group is asking the Secretariat to assess whether those reporting obligations



Shoreline erosion along the Gippsland Lakes underscores concerns regarding the long-term ecological health and stability of the region's iconic waterway system. (PS)

are now engaged, and to seek clarification from the Australian Government on how cumulative and emerging pressures are being assessed and managed under the Convention framework.

They also question whether current management arrangements are sufficient to account for interacting system-wide risks, rather than treating pressures in isolation.

The submission highlights particular concern about long-term water demand pressures, including those associated with catchment-scale rehabilitation projects linked to mining, which they argue could add further

stress to an already tightly balanced hydrological system.

The group says the aim is not confrontation, but timely intervention.

"The Ramsar Convention exists to identify change now, before it becomes irreversible," the spokesperson said.

"That is what we are asking for here — recognition of risk while there is still time to respond."

The Ramsar Secretariat has been contacted for comment. Australian government agencies have not yet publicly responded to the submission.

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