

Campaign to save the Macquarie Marshes

Macquarie Marshes is a vast wetland covering more than 220,000ha in north-west NSW. It is on the Macquarie River system rising above Bathurst and the Central Tablelands area. This Marsh is one of the largest semi-permanent wetlands in south-eastern Australia.

It is the largest nesting site in Australia for colonial nesting waterbirds such as egrets, ibis and herons. Macquarie Marshes has the greatest diversity of wetland bird species and the highest nest density rates in Australia.

The Marshes are home to 200 bird species including the threatened: brolga, Australasian bittern, blue-billed duck, painted snipe, magpie goose and freckled duck. Breeding sites are provided for the straw-necked ibis, glossy ibis, Australian white ibis, intermediate egret and rufous night heron.

The significance of the Macquarie Marshes is reflected by its listing by the Australian Heritage Commission on the *National Heritage Register*; and with the National Trust as a Landscape Conservation Area on the *National Trust Register*.

The Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, gazetted in 1900, covers 18,192ha of the Marshes and was listed as a Ramsar Wetland of International Significance in 1986. The Wilgara Wetland, located within the Marshes, is one of the five private Ramsar sites in NSW.

The Australian Government has signed migratory bird agreements with both China (CAMBA) and Japan (JAMBA) to assist in the conservation of birds, mostly waders that migrate between these countries and Australia. The Macquarie Marshes provides food and habitat for nine migratory bird species including: sandpipers, godwits and Japanese snipe and is an important wetland for the conservation of these species.

Flows to the Marshes have been severely impacted by the construction of Burrendong Dam above Wellington in the early 1960s and the development of a major irrigation industry downstream. Over a 60 year period annual average flows to the wetlands have dropped by 200,00ML. (ML = 1 million litres = Olympic size swimming pool).

The Macquarie-Cudgegong Water Sharing Plan developed under the NSW Water Management Act 2000 has identified 160,000ML for environmental flows below Burrendong Dam. All this water is only available when there is 100% allocation to water licences in the system.

The Macquarie has only a 50% reliability of having a full allocation available. During the driest period on record from 2000 to 2005 the Marshes have been significantly impacted.

Only 20,000ha of the Marshes, including 6,000ha of the Nature Reserve, have received adequate water since 2000. Healthy condition exists in only about 600ha of total Marsh area.

No successful colonial waterbird breeding has occurred in the Marshes since 2000 and 2,000ha of river redgums are dying. There has been increased incidence of bushfires since the early 1990s.

Impacts of climate change are a major long-term threat to the survival of the Marshes. More water is the only solution to keeping this significant inland icon alive. At least another 140,000ML are needed to secure the future of the Macquarie Marshes.

An allocation of 300,000ML environmental health water in the system will guarantee more water at the right time to assist bird and native fish breeding events, and a better recovery from prolonged dry periods.

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia has supported the campaign calling for more water to the Macquarie Marshes and giving a generous donation towards the project.

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