

## RAMSAR CRITERIA

**Group A of the Criteria.** *Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types*

▶ **Criterion 1:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographical region.

**Group B of the Criteria.** *Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity*  
*Criteria based on species and ecological communities*

▶ **Criterion 2:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

▶ **Criterion 3:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographical region.

▶ **Criterion 4:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

### Specific criteria based on water birds

▶ **Criterion 5:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more water birds.

▶ **Criterion 6:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of water bird.

### Specific criteria based on fish

▶ **Criterion 7:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.

▶ **Criterion 8:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.

### Specific criteria based on other taxa

▶ **Criterion 9:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.

**\*Wise Use** The term “wise use” relates to the sustainable utilisation of wetlands for the benefits of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of natural properties of the ecosystem.

There are presently 158 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1828 wetland sites, totalling 168 million hectares designated for inclusion on the Ramsar list.



# Ramsar

## The Convention on Wetlands





The Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust (AHEIT) is seeking to register the Avon-Heathcote Estuary on the *Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance*. [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

The *Convention on Wetlands* is an intergovernmental treaty adopted on 2 February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. Although now commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, it is the first of the intergovernmental treaties on the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

The name of the treaty, *The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat*, reflects the original emphasis in the 1970's upon the conservation and wise use of wetlands primarily as habitat for water birds. Over the years, however, the Convention has broadened its scope of implementation to cover **all aspects** of wetland conservation and **wise use\***, recognising wetlands as ecosystems that are extremely important for biodiversity conservation and for the well-being of human communities.

There are nine criteria to be considered when applying for registration on the list. (The criteria are listed over the page). The Trust believes that the Estuary meets the criteria and intends to apply for Ramsar status once sufficient improvements have been made to the health of the Estuary as a result of the commissioning of the city's ocean outfall.

The Trust has a goal to list the Estuary as a "Wetland of International Importance" because we believe it will bring about increased understanding and prestige for this important wetland area. This in turn will increase both the government's and the community's support for the conservation and sustainable use of the Estuary into the future.

The Ramsar Convention, whilst not providing legal protection in itself (and has no punitive sanctions for violations of or defaulting upon treaty commitments), does constitute a solemn treaty and is binding in international law in that sense. New Zealand is currently a contracting party to the Convention and there are currently six Ramsar registered sites: Waituna Lagoon, (Southland), Farewell Spit, Whangamarino, (Waikato), Kopuatai Peat Dome (Waikato), The Firth of Thames, Manawatu River Mouth and Estuary.

#### **What does registration involve?**

The organisation applying for registration must complete an application form describing every feature of the estuary in detail; its ecology, botany, zoology, limnology, hydrology and so forth. It also must also consult all landowners neighbouring the site and with iwi, territorial local authorities, regional councils, Fish and Game Council and other relevant NGO and local interest groups. All issues raised during consultation must be identified and recorded as to how they were resolved/actioned. Additionally, the application must identify the factors to be addressed in an operational management plan which includes future site monitoring and reporting. This documentation is processed by the Department of Conservation and signed off by the Minister of Conservation. The application

then goes to Switzerland, to the Ramsar Secretariat for approval.

#### **Registering the Estuary as a Ramsar Site would:**

- ▶ endorse the principles that the Convention represents
- ▶ increase international and national prestige and recognition
- ▶ encourage national and international cooperation on wetland issues
- ▶ increase publicity and prestige for the wetland
- ▶ increase the potential for eco-tourism and education
- ▶ increase the possibility of support for conservation and wise use measures
- ▶ bring access to the latest information and advice such as guidelines on applications of the wise use concept, and guidelines on management planning in wetlands
- ▶ provide an impetus to improve the water quality in the rivers and Estuary and to recognise all the values the Estuary has

#### **Plan of Action**

Over the next few months AHEIT will be talking with all the groups and organisations involved and gather the information necessary to complete the registration. We will be holding two public meetings in February to discuss this exciting idea with local communities.

If, in the meantime, you would like to know more about Ramsar please check the following:

Ramsar web site [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)  
AHEIT website [www.estuary.org.nz](http://www.estuary.org.nz)

Alternatively email [coordinator@estuary.org.nz](mailto:coordinator@estuary.org.nz)  
or phone **384-2160**.