

Macquarie Marshes

Murray-Darling Basin, southeastern Australia

March 2009



Site: The Macquarie Marshes, a wetland supplied by the Macquarie River, are best known for its large concentrations (more than 80,000 breeding pairs) of colonial waterbirds, possibly once the most important site in Australia. These include straw-necked ibis, intermediate egrets and the endangered Australasian bittern.

It also has complex communities of vegetation: reed beds, river red gums, wetland plan and water couch.

The Macquarie Marshes are partly protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and other conservation laws for protected areas; about 70% of the Macquarie Marshes are used by pastoralists reliant of the flooding for grazing their cattle.

The Marshes and their biodiversity are threatened by river regulation through dams and subsequent extraction of water, primarily for irrigation upstream, reducing the frequency and extent of flooding. Floods may have originally flooded a million hectares but are now seldom greater than 200,000 ha. This has affected floodplain vegetation and reduced the diversity and abundance of waterbirds as well as contributing to declines in breeding frequency and extent.

Project: The project focuses on the environmental flow management to keep the Macquarie Marshes as an important site for colonial water birds, other rare species and as an increasingly important site for tourists, fishers, education groups, pastoralists and conservationists.

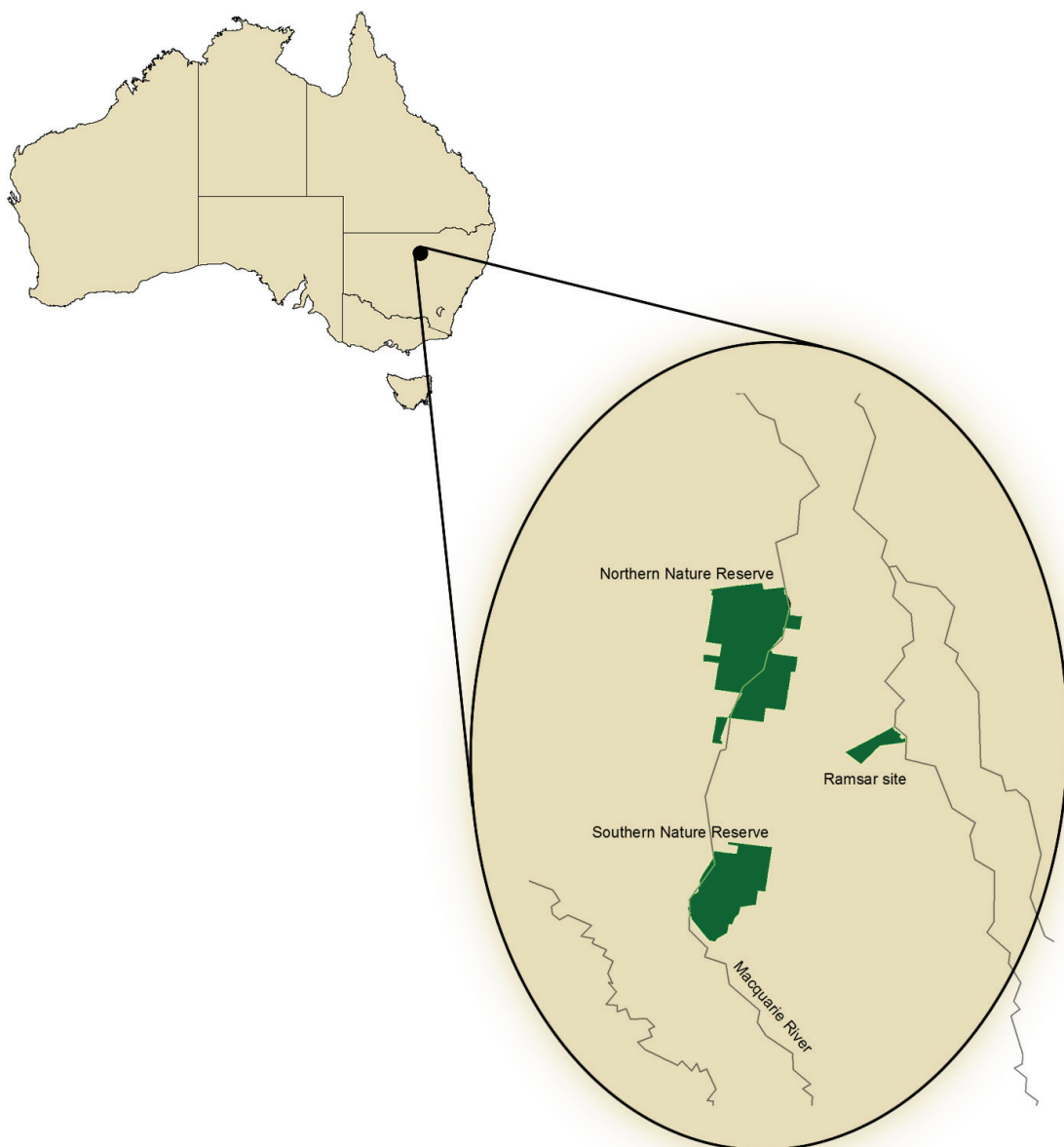
WATER AND PROTECTED AREAS CASE STUDIES

Activities include:

- The amount of water legally set aside for the wetland has steadily increased from 50,000 ML to more than 160,000 million litres. Now the State and Federal Governments are buying back water specifically for the wetland from the irrigation industry.
- The only irrigation farm in the Macquarie Marshes was recently bought by government with the aim of returning some of it to biotic marsh communities.
- There is active planning and management of environmental flows and learning about the wetland

Benefits: This additional water will increase flows to the marshes and improving the ecological health of the many thousands of native species, frogs, turtles, snakes, waterbirds, fish species, red gums, reed beds, and invertebrates that underpin the food web. It will also help increase the numbers of birds nesting there.

Contact: Interview contact: Professor Richard Kingsford, richard.kingsford@unsw.edu.au, tel +61293853442



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