

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Response to Question on Notice

Session - Inquiry into Auditor-General's Report No. 202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)

Location - Melbourne

Asked By - Mr Sam Hibbins

Addressed To - Dr Mark Norman

Asked Date - 2 December 2019

Question

Mr Hibbins *"Just in terms of the funding, I wonder if you would be able to take this on notice and provide the Committee with a breakdown of the funding allocated towards the wetlands that you manage in terms of the specific programs, the source of funding and the time line of funding. I guess the point that I am trying to make is what was highlighted in the Auditor-General's report is the difficulty of relying on grant funding as opposed to recurrent funding and how do you then manage, particularly if you are looking at outcomes-based rather than inputs or specific programs—I am just wondering if you could provide that information to the Committee?"*

Response

The information provided below summarises all funding spent (or planned) by Parks Victoria between 2016 and 2020 on each of the 11 Ramsar sites (where Parks Victoria is the site manager) to deliver outcomes and achieve the objectives of the Ramsar Site Management Plans. Funding sources are divided into the two following categories:

- Recurrent funding:
 - An internal funding source used for base labour costs. This covers time spent conducting critical on-ground works and supporting activities such as participation in the Site Coordinating Committee representing Parks Victoria, contractor inductions, and assisting and guiding volunteers. It also includes operating costs contributing to on-ground actions.
- Tied funding:
 - Consists of external project funds sourced via funding bids. Such funding is received directly by Parks Victoria or via contract with Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs). It is used to deliver contracted activities such as on-ground works and monitoring. This funding often includes an allocation for staff time to enable completion of activities such as reporting, procurement and contractor management. All these funding sources have a term of two to five years. Examples of tied funding sources include:
 - Biodiversity Response Planning
 - Sustainability Fund (Conserving Victoria's Special Places)
 - National Landcare Project (via CMA)
 - Regional Landcare Project (via CMA)
 - Victorian Waterways Program Investment Framework (Via CMA)

Table 1: Expenditure at all Ramsar sites between 2016 and 2020

Fund Source	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	TOTAL
Total Recurrent	\$355,400	\$373,564	\$526,434	\$369,563	\$1,624,961
Total Tied	\$475,800	\$1,214,571	\$1,306,409	\$1,820,428	\$4,817,208
Total	\$831,200	\$1,588,135	\$1,832,843	\$2,189,991	\$6,442,169

Table 2: Expenditure type per site

Funding type	Barmah	Corner Inlet	Gippsland Lakes	Gleneelg Estuary and Discovery Bay	Gunbower	Hattah	Kerang	Lake Albacutya	Port Phillip Bay and Bellarine Peninsula	Western District Lakes	Western Port	Cross-site
Recurrent	\$355,055	\$265,000	\$88,000	\$48,000	\$28,165	\$498,198	\$64,165	\$36,378	\$75,000	\$0	\$139,000	\$28,000
Tied	\$491,852	\$30,000	\$1,764,997	\$0	\$0	\$754,932	\$109,820	\$310,329	\$736,078	\$64,000	\$555,200	\$0
TOTAL	\$846,907	\$295,000	\$1,852,997	\$48,000	\$28,165	\$1,253,130	\$173,985	\$346,707	\$811,078	\$64,000	\$694,200	\$28,000

In summary, Parks Victoria spent \$6,442,169 on Ramsar site management between 2016-17 and 2019-20. Of this, 25 per cent was recurrent funding and 75 per cent was tied funding.

To demonstrate the link between expenditure and outcomes, Table 3 provides an example of an on-ground activity undertaken by Parks Victoria at each site, and the targeted corresponding long-term outcome. This link is described in the program logic included in the Monitoring Evaluation Reporting and Improvement Plan for each Ramsar site (see example in slide 35 of associated Parks Victoria presentation).

Table 3: Line of sight from expenditure to fund on-ground activities and achieve long term outcomes.

Ramsar Site	Example of activity	Long-term Outcome
Barmah	Development of Strategic Action Plan	Maintain extent and condition of treeless grassy wetlands
Corner Inlet	Sea-urchin control	Maintain condition and extent of seagrass
Gippsland Lakes	Sea-spurge control	Maintain habitat for tern nesting
Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay	Predator control	Maintain waterbird diversity; presence and abundance of target species
Gunbower	Pest plant control	Maintain health of wetland vegetation communities
Hattah	River Red Gum thinning	Maintain lakebed hermland vegetation community to protect winged peppercress
Kerang	Boxthorn control	Maintain and improve the health of riparian and floodplain vegetation communities
Lake Albacutya	Bridal creeper containment	Maintain health of eucalypt woodland and wetland vegetation communities
Port Phillip Bay and Bellarine Peninsula	Fencing	Prevent stock access to maintain diversity of freshwater vegetation
Western District Lakes	Rabbit control	Maintain population of threatened flora species such as the spiny peppercress and salt tussock grass
Western Port	Feral cat control	Provide and maintain predator free beach nesting sites; other roosting and feeding habitats; and abundance of waterbirds

Other funds (not included within the tables) are also spent on the Ramsar sites to deliver ecological outcomes by:

- Other site managers on their estate, where the Ramsar site is cross-tenure. For example:
 - Gunbower – Parks Victoria (Gunbower National Park, Murray River Frontage) and the Department of Water, Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) (Gunbower State Forest).
 - Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula – variously Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and DELWP.
- Directly by CMAs who have access to other funding sources and who then also deliver those, often high-value and large-scale, projects. For example, *The Living Murray* project funds, from the Murray Darling Basin Authority, for the construction of environmental water delivery infrastructure and on-going ecological monitoring.
- By conservation organisations in the not-for-profit sector (such as Greening Australia and Glenelg Nature Trust) who fund and implement on-ground projects cross-tenure, often through the philanthropic sources, and coordination of volunteer labour.

As discussed during the hearing, on-ground actions in the broader catchment surrounding the Ramsar sites also provide benefit to the sites and assists in achieving site objectives through preventive measures. Examples include pest plant and animal control measures to reduce spread of those species, and programs which support better on-farm land use

practice to prevent nutrient runoff and associated poor water quality such as high nutrient loads, to prevent algal blooms. This component is more difficult to quantify and is not addressed in this response.