

Wetlands

What is a wetland?

Wetlands are just that – areas that are regularly wet.

And because of their special soggy conditions they are homes to many plants and animals dependent on them for their lifecycle and survival.

Characteristics of wetlands

Special characteristics of wetlands include:

- Limited areas of open water, which vary depending on seasonal changes, such as climate and plant growth.
- A variety of water-tolerant plants on the banks and throughout the water.
- Fluctuating water levels in line with seasonal change. Even when inundated they are often shallow.

Why are wetlands important?

They are recognised internationally through the Ramsar Convention as one of the most threatened types of habitat.

The convention, which includes Australia, aims to protect wetlands by improving the community's understanding of their importance.

Plant and wildlife habitat

Wetlands are homes for many species of water birds, frogs, invertebrates and fish. They also support countless water-loving plants such as sedges, rushes and trees.

Biodiversity

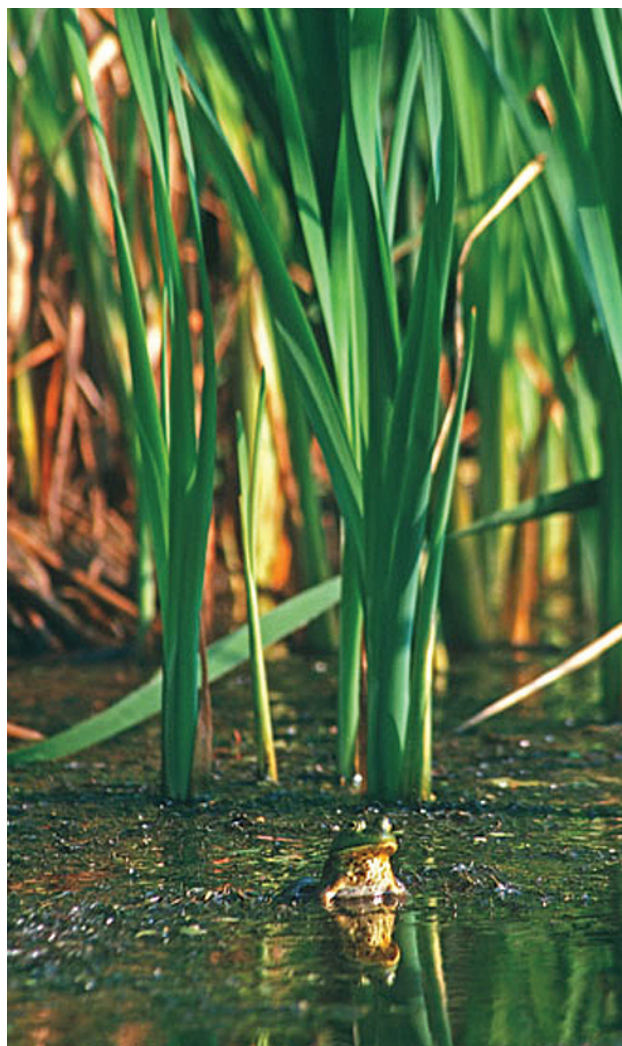
Large and small wetlands are borders between land and permanent water. They become refuge areas in drought and often support rare and threatened plants and animals found nowhere else.

Nursery and breeding grounds

Many fish, birds and invertebrates use wetlands as breeding grounds and nurseries for their young. Freshwater wetlands are particularly important for the breeding of water birds and more than two thirds of fish found in Queensland waters spend some of their life cycle in wetlands.

Water quality

The flow of water through wetlands is slowed by bank and in-stream plants, allowing sediment to settle. Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous, and other pollutants are removed as water passes through a wetland, improving water quality and decreasing algal blooms downstream.



Biological productivity and nutrient recycling

Wetlands are productive ecosystems. They recycle the nutrients that settle as water flows through, which in turn, promotes plant growth.

This cycle supports a diversity of plants and animals through seasonal changes.

Flood mitigation

Wetlands hold floodwaters and runoff, reducing flood peaks downstream and directing water-flow away from adjacent properties. This reduces erosion and flood damage in the catchment*.

Scientific research

Information about past ecological communities and climatic changes can be found in wetlands.

Studies trace the sediments, behaviour and ecology of water birds, fish, frogs, plants and insects.

Wetlands also are important educational sites and many Gold Coast wetlands are studied by local schools.

***Catchment: describes the area of land which contributes runoff to a particular body of water.**

How can we help protect wetlands?

There are many ways we can make sure the ecological, economic and social values of our wetlands are maintained.

As individuals and as a community we have a responsibility to protect our wetlands and that includes reducing water pollution.

The golden rules are:

- Pick up animal droppings from lawns and parks and place them in a bin.
- Do not feed native wildlife. It attracts pest species and increases faecal waste which affects water quality. Animals can also become reliant on human feeding and lose their natural ability to forage.
- Dispose of rubbish in a bin or take it with you if there isn't one.
- Don't dispose of garden waste in or near waterways – weeds enter the system and add too much nutrient. Put it in garbage bags and take it to the rubbish tip or place it in a bin.
- Dispose of cigarette butts responsibly.
- Wash cars and household equipment on the lawn instead of the driveway or the street, so detergents don't enter the stormwater system.
- Avoid over-watering and use fertilisers in moderation and according to directions on the product. Use fertilisers sparingly.
- Install silt fencing along property boundaries and keep building materials covered when building or renovating.
- Report pollution to Council's Health Services Section on (07) 5581 6220.

For more information contact

Gold Coast City Council

Catchment Management Unit

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