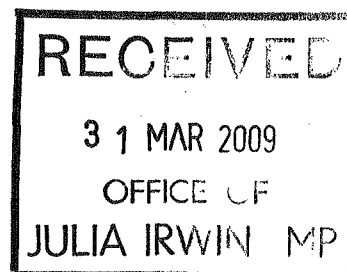




Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts



Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin

I refer to the proof Hansard transcript of the public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions (the Committee) on 25 February 2009.

When I appeared before the Committee as a witness on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA), I had prepared material to enable me to provide advice on issues raised in the petition on 'hunting for environmental conservation'.

I was asked by Mr Chester about the Commonwealth's obligations and resourcing for Ramsar wetlands. I answered the Committee's questions to the best of my ability, noting in my evidence that it was not an area within my expertise.

In checking the transcript for errors, it has come to my attention that my evidence in relation to the Commonwealth's Ramsar responsibilities are not factually correct and I would like to put the following statement on record so that the Committee is not misled in any way:

Australia has obligations under the Ramsar Convention regarding the protection of its Ramsar wetlands. Many of Australia's declared Ramsar wetlands are protected cooperatively by the Commonwealth Government and State governments with the State often having the direct management responsibility – depending on the land tenure. Most sites are protected by State legislation in addition to Commonwealth laws.

The ecological character of a declared Ramsar wetland is a Matter of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The Act provides the legal framework for implementation of the Ramsar Convention and has provision for making and revoking declarations of Ramsar wetlands; management planning of Ramsar wetlands – including duties relating to declared Ramsar wetlands in States and Territories; and has a requirement for approval by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment for activities with a significant impact on a declared Ramsar wetland..

DEWHA is providing funding for the preparation and updating of Ramsar site documentation, including management plans, site information sheets and ecological character descriptions. Ramsar wetlands are also targeted as a priority for funding under the Caring for Our Country Business Plan. A number of improvements to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Australia are underway. These include a 'Rolling Review' process, with funding under Caring for Our Country, which will enable a more systematic and regular review of the condition of our internationally significant wetlands. Other significant initiatives funded by the Australian Government are water entitlement purchase and water quality improvement programs which aim to maintain or restore important assets like Ramsar wetlands.

I also undertook, in response to a question from you, to provide the Committee with further information about IUCN. I trust that the following information will assist the Committee:

- The Australian Government is a longstanding State Member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). DEWHA is the current State Party / Member of the IUCN for Australia.
- Membership of IUCN:
 - provides an opportunity to pursue Australia's policy objectives in relation to biological conservation generally;
 - helps with relationships in World Heritage matters; and
 - favourably influences IUCN participation and contributions to other Conventions such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the International Whaling Commission.

The IUCN is also the official technical advisory body to the World Heritage Committee on natural heritage and the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN advises the CITES.

- DEWHA's International Section (Policy Coordination Division) co-ordinates the Australian Government's engagement with the IUCN. Other divisions/agencies involved with the IUCN include: Approvals and Wildlife; Heritage; Marine; Land and Coasts; Australian Antarctic Division; Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; and Supervising Scientist Division.
- The Australian Government pays an annual subscription for IUCN membership. Australia's membership dues for 2008 were CHF 275,607 (about AUD 280,000).
- Membership of IUCN is open to States, government agencies, international organisations, and national and international NGOs. Individuals can only become members of the six IUCN Commissions: ecosystem management; education and communication; environmental law; environment, economics and social policy; protected areas; and species survival.
- Decisions made at IUCN world congresses are not binding and state members can elect to implement outcomes as appropriate to their national circumstances.

- Governance of IUCN is structured as follows:
 - **World Conservation Congress (WCC):** A general assembly of IUCN members is held every three to four years. The last World Congress was held in Barcelona in 2008. Participants were all IUCN members, including representatives from NGOs, industry and all levels of government. DEWHA officials represented Australia in this Congress.
 - **IUCN Council:** The principal governing body of IUCN meets between sessions of the WCC. The Council is responsible for the oversight and general control of all the affairs of IUCN, subject to the authority of the WCC. The Council is composed of the President, the Treasurer, three Regional Councilors from each of IUCN's eight Statutory Regions, a representative of IUCN's Host Country - the Swiss Confederation - the Chairs of IUCN's six Commissions, and five additional Councilors chosen by Council on the basis of diverse qualifications, interests and skills. The elected members of Council hold office from the close of the World Conservation Congress to the close of the next ordinary session of the Congress.
 - **Commissions:** There are six commissions. They are the principal sources of guidance on conservation knowledge, policy and technical advice. The commissions are networks of expert volunteers entrusted to develop and advance the institutional knowledge and experience and objectives of IUCN (e.g. World Commission on Protected Areas).
 - **Regional/National Committees:** These are restricted to members of IUCN to facilitate cooperation and coordination. There are two committees of direct interest to Australia: the Oceania Regional Council (ORC) and the Australian Committee of the IUCN (ACIUCN). DEWHA participates in both of these forums.

If the Committee has any questions, I may be contacted on

Yours sincerely

Kerry Smith
 Assistant Secretary
 Wildlife Branch
 20 March 2009