

Shoalhaven's Wetlands

Fact sheet

What are Wetlands?

Wetlands are areas where water covers the land either periodically or all of the time. Wetland vegetation is specifically adapted to living in a variety of saturated, fresh, brackish, or saline conditions. Healthy vegetation from the aquatic to intertidal environments around wetlands is essential to maintain vibrant wetland ecosystems.

Wetlands include:

- Swamps and marshes.
- Billabongs, lakes and lagoons.
- Saltmarshes and mudflats.
- Mangroves.



Saltmarsh and mangrove wetland at Comerong Island, November 2016.

Wetlands in the Shoalhaven

Some of Shoalhaven's wetlands are listed as nationally important wetlands under the [Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia](#). Nationally important wetlands are identified by the ANZECC Wetlands Network using several criteria. Important wetlands may include good examples of a wetland in a bioregion of Australia, wetlands with important roles for the ecology and hydrology of major wetlands, provide important habitat for fauna, specifically endangered or vulnerable species, or wetlands with outstanding historical and cultural significance.

Coastal saltmarsh and freshwater wetlands on coastal floodplains in the Shoalhaven, are also considered [Endangered Ecological Communities](#) under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW). Coastal wetlands are protected in NSW under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Resilience and Hazards) 2021*.



Mangroves at Crookhaven Creek, October 2022.

Unfortunately, wetlands around Australia are under threat due to human activity and climate change. In the past many wetlands were drained in order to be developed on, which has irreversibly changed these important habitats. Rising sea level due to climate change is adding pressure on wetlands and may cause “drowning” of wetland ecosystems. This is due to more frequent tidal inundation as well as increased salinity, which affects the composition of wetland vegetation (i.e. ecosystem succession). Wetlands may disappear if there are no areas left for them to migrate into.

Why are wetlands important?

Wetlands are considered one of the most important and productive ecosystems in the world. They support diverse ecological communities and are a haven for native animals.

Wetlands are important because they:

- Provide natural habitat and refuges for many migratory, rare or threatened species.
- Support and provide habitat for a range of [birds](#), including native and migratory species, which depend on wetland ecosystems for all or part of their life cycle.
- Play an important role in the hydrogeological cycle by storing water and recharging aquifers.
- Improve local water quality by cycling nutrients and sediments.
- Help reduce flooding and coastal risks by providing a natural barrier from storm damage and flooding.
- Store carbon, helping mitigate climate change.
- Are important for primary industries (e.g. fisheries).
- Are a home to Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural heritage.
- Provide a beautiful environment enjoyed for a variety of recreational uses such as swimming, boating, fishing and birdwatching.

Further information on [wetlands](#) can be found at the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.



Mangroves at Crookhaven River, October 2022.



Find out more

getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/

[foreshore-protection-management](#)

Or search “**Foreshore**” on our website.

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The preparation of this material has been supported by funding from the NSW Government's Coastal Management Program (Coastal and Estuary Grant).