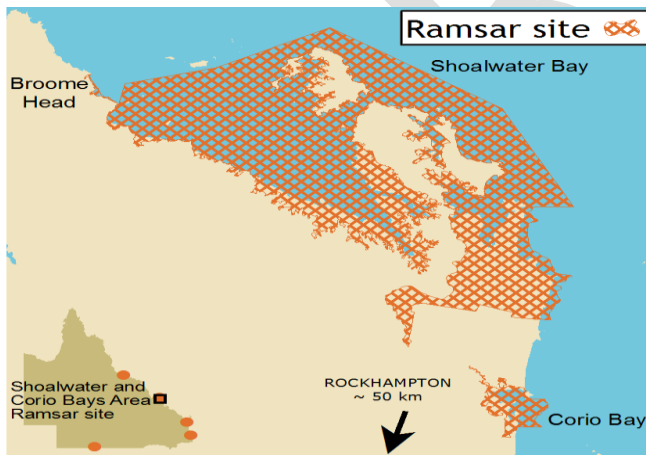


# Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area: A wetland of international importance

The Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area Ramsar site is one of the largest and most ecologically rich coastal wetland sites in Queensland. This near pristine area covers over 200,000 hectares and stretches along 330 kilometres of coastline between Rockhampton and Mackay on the central Queensland coast.

The Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area was listed in 1996 as an internationally important Ramsar site due to its outstanding coastal wetlands, ecological and biodiversity values. The site encompasses three separate sections - Broome Head, Shoalwater Bay and Corio Bay. Most of the Shoalwater Bay section is within the Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA), Australian Government Department of Defence. The Ramsar site excludes the terrestrial components of the major islands, Townshend, Leicester and Akens Islands.

Much of the Ramsar site is located in the Queensland Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park and the Commonwealth Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area. The Corio Bay section is a declared Fish Habitat Area and is surrounded largely by the Byfield State and National parks. The site also incorporates Dugong Protection Area and the majority of Shoalwater Bay is protected as Marine National Park Zone (green zone).



Location of the Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area Ramsar site

The site features undulating lowlands and hills, riverine plains, extensive parabolic dunes, and sandy beaches flanked by coastal cliffs. A broad diversity of wetland types are found within the site including rare peat swamps, freshwater streams, lagoons, perched lakes, saltmarshes, sheltered estuaries, mangroves, mudflats, seagrasses, coral reefs and sinkholes in the elevated dune areas, supporting rainforest flora and fauna communities.

The Traditional Owners of Shoalwater and Corio Bays are the Darumbal people. Limited archaeological surveys have uncovered middens, scatters of stone tools and campsites

amongst dunefields. The present day Darumbal people retain a strong connection to the Indigenous cultural values of the area.

## What is a Ramsar site?

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (more commonly referred to as the Ramsar Convention) was adopted in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. The Convention aims to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve remaining wetlands through wise use and management. The Ramsar Convention encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity. Queensland has five Ramsar sites—Currawinya Lakes, Shoalwater and Corio Bays, Great Sandy Strait, Moreton Bay and Bowling Green Bay. Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area was listed as a Ramsar site in 1996.

## Ecological character

As a Ramsar Convention signatory, Australia is expected to describe and maintain the ecological character of each of its Ramsar sites. An ecological character description (ECD) is a rigorously prepared assessment of ecosystem components, processes and benefits/ services of a site. The ECD is the benchmark against which ecological changes at the site are assessed for significance.

For further information on Ramsar wetlands, see [www.environment.gov.au/wetlands](http://www.environment.gov.au/wetlands)

## Why is Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area special?

Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area is recognised as internationally significant as it supports a variety of marine, estuarine and freshwater ecosystems in their near-natural state. These ecosystems provide significant habitat for a range of plants and animals, including international and nationally threatened species.



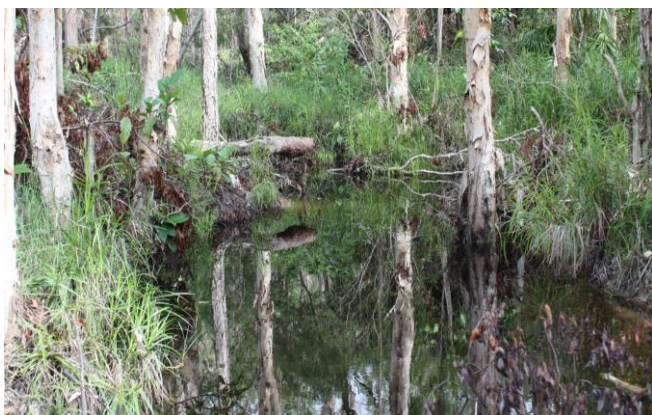
Freshwater Beach, Shoalwater Bay Area (Photo: DERM)



Due to its remoteness and location within the SWBTA, the Shoalwater Bay section of the Ramsar site is relatively undisturbed. It is part of the largest 'wilderness area' along the Queensland East coast and supports 22 different wetland types constituting a variety of marine, estuarine and freshwater typologies.

The biodiversity supported by these wetlands is very high, which is also partly due to the site's location in a coastal area where tropical and subtropical regions overlap. These diverse habitats support a range of ecosystem services supported by interacting climatic, geomorphologic and hydrodynamic processes. Wetland habitats and their values include:

- some of the most extensive seagrass beds on the east coast of Australia covering approximately 13,000 hectares and providing grazing habitat for dugongs and turtles, and habitat for fish of commercial and recreational value
- over 21,000 hectares of mangroves providing shoreline erosion, storm surge and cyclone protection, habitat for juvenile fish and other marine organisms, as well as sheltered roosts and feeding grounds for birds
- freshwater tree-dominated swamps, shrub-dominated swamps and marshes providing habitat for a variety of wetland flora and fauna, including endangered honey blue-eye fish and other species of conservation significance
- peat swamps supporting biodiversity, acting as a carbon sink and retaining palaeo-environmental information about past landscapes and climates
- extensive tidal ranges supporting critical habitat for migratory shorebirds.



Wetland area in the Ramsar site

The Ramsar site supports a rich diversity of native wildlife including some 445 fish, 11 frog, 60 reptile and 42 mammal species. Populations of threatened animal species include the water mouse, honey blue-eye fish, dugong, green turtle and, to a lesser extent, the flatback, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles. The site supports the largest feeding population of green turtles on the east coast of Australia and the largest dugong habitat in the Mackay-Capricorn section of the Great Barrier Reef.

Approximately 908 plant species have been recorded at the site including nationally endangered lesser swamp orchid and vulnerable quassia and Byfield matchstick.

Threats to the Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area Ramsar site include changes in climate, pest plants and animals, fire and recreation and tourism. Potential future infrastructure development (e.g. port, road, rail or pipeline) as well as urban development and encroachment, particularly associated with Corio Bay, would also pose a threat if undertaken.

## Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area's birds

Approximately 265 species of birds have been recorded at the site; 77 of these are waterbird species and 26 are migratory species. The site regularly provides important nesting, breeding, roosting and feeding grounds for over 20,000 waterbirds, many of which are listed under international agreements and partnerships. The site is one of the Australian network sites for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership.

Significant proportions of the flyway populations of the grey-tailed tattler, western Alaskan bar-tailed godwit, eastern curlew, whimbrel, terek sandpiper and Australian pied oystercatcher occur at the site. Akens Island and Pelican Rock, located in the Shoalwater Bay section of the site, also supports the largest pelican rookery in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.



Shorebirds and terns at West Point Port Clinton (Photo: R. Jaensch)

## Enjoying Shoalwater and Corio Bays Area

Visitors can access Corio Bay via Byfield National Park in the north along Nine Mile beach and in the south via Sandy Point to enjoy nature walks, wildlife watching, canoeing and fishing.

Public access to the Shoalwater Bay section of the Ramsar site is restricted due to its use as a military training area.

The Queensland Wetlands Program supports projects and activities that result in long-term benefits to the sustainable management, wise use and protection of wetlands in Queensland. The tools developed by the Program help wetlands landholders, managers and decision makers in government and industry. The Queensland Wetlands Program is currently funded by the Queensland Government.

Contact [wetlands@des.qld.gov.au](mailto:wetlands@des.qld.gov.au) or visit [www.wetlandinfo.des.qld.gov.au](http://www.wetlandinfo.des.qld.gov.au)

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