

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian wetlands need their wet and dry periods, experts say

Australians need to appreciate the importance of wetlands having both wet and dry periods to provide healthy habitat for different species, the Winton Wetlands Science Forum 2023 was told this week.

Much of the remarkable diversity of wildlife on Australian wetlands and other parts of the country were a result of the extreme variations provided by natural rainfall and weather cycles, attendees were told.

Dr Max Finlayson, an eminent wetland scientist and chair of Winton Wetlands' environmental advisory panel, told guests that a deeper understanding of wet-dry cycles could bring benefits to land managers of all kinds.

He noted that a large areas of wetlands in Australia were located on private land.

"There are large opportunities (for wetland scientists) to work with private landholders to manage wetlands and conserve their biodiversity and ensure they benefit from the many ecosystem services they provide for humans," Dr Finalyson said.

Another speaker, Emeritus Professor Peter Gell of Federation University, told the forum there was a wide variety of 'natural' conditions for Australian wetlands, and this often made them quite different to many of their counterparts in other countries.

"Not only do we need to relish the times when they are wet and waterbirds and fish are breeding, we also need to appreciate that healthy wetlands are sometimes shallow or even dry, and that this is part of the natural pattern of variability," Prof. Gell said.

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By appreciating the full range of 'natural' conditions in which Winton Wetlands and others exist, it was possible to gain better understanding of the adaptability of the plants and animals that live within wetlands, and assist humans with their own adaptability.

Forum organiser Lance Lloyd, an eminent aquatic ecologist, said the international 'Ramsar' agreement on protection of important wetlands was important, not just as a way to get international 'listing' but as a tool to promote the importance of protecting wetlands and making wise use of them.

With this in mind, Winton Wetlands Committee of Management was pressing on with its own efforts to achieve a Ramsar listing for Winton Wetlands, as other Australian Wetlands including Kakadu had done already.

Other speakers at the Science Forum, held on Thursday 29 June, talked about further aspects of the work currently under way to help Australian wetlands achieve more international recognition.

The Winton Wetlands Committee of Management has hosted the annual forum for the past eight years - with COVID interruptions - to share its deepening hands-on experience, and to help create effective professional networks for knowledge sharing and cooperation.

Winton Wetlands, just north of Benalla, Victoria, has been designated as a Wetland of Distinction by the Society of Wetland Scientists, the first wetland outside of the USA to be given this honour.

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