

Everlasting Swamp becomes newest national park for NSW

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Everlasting Swamp is New South Wales' newest national park.

NSW MINISTER for the Environment, Rob Stokes, has announced the Government has purchased 1,700 hectares of Everlasting Swamp, a shimmering wetland in the Clarence River floodplains, to establish a new National Park. The newly acquired land will be combined with the existing Everlasting Swamp State Conservation Area.

In a press release, Mr Stokes said: "The Everlasting Swamp and the adjacent Imersons Swamp form one of the largest coastal floodplain wetlands remaining in NSW and an intact ecosystem of this size is extremely rare and globally significant."

The minister first announced the creation of the new national park at the annual general meeting of the National Parks Association of NSW on Monday night. Mr Stokes was applauded when he listed a string of "significant acquisitions" that would be added to national parks and reserves in the state's wetland, coastal and mountain areas.

Kevin Evans, CEO of National Parks Association of NSW said: "This is an exciting and significant addition to the national park estate. Everlasting Swamp National Park will ensure the protection of this internationally critical wetland area and the many threatened species that rely on it — including iconic species like the jabiru and brolga. We commend the government for persevering with the negotiations necessary to secure this fragile wetland."

Mr Evans described the other acquisitions as "critical additions to the national park system".

Apart from creating the Everlasting Swamp park, Mr Stokes announced the NSW government is adding conservation land to two Ramsar-listed wetlands. Around 3,200 ha of extra land has been purchased for the Gwydir Wetlands State Conservation Area, which "plays an important role in the biological functioning of the Murray Darling Basin" and attracts threatened species such as the Australasian bittern.

Around 200 ha land will be added to the Doodle Comer Swamp Nature Reserve, which boasts forests of mature river red gum and is a habitat for more than 65 species of waterbird as well as mammals like squirrel gliders.

To help consolidate the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative, a corridor project aimed at linking habitats across a 3,600 km spine of mountains, Mr Stokes said the government would add a total of around 1,700 hectares to Dorriggo and Moreton National Parks and the area around Marble Arch (Deau National Park).

It had purchased small, "very expensive, but also crucial" areas of coastal land to extend the Jervis Bay and Arakoon national parks and the Glen Rock State Conservation area. Mr Stokes noted with significant development pressures, the "coast is at risk of being loved to death".

Dr Greg Clancy, an ecologist and birding and wildlife guide who has been visiting the Everlasting Swamps since the late 1970s, said he was "over the moon" to hear that it will become a national park.

"The Everlasting Swamp is really important for the broilgas," said Dr Clancy. "We've had up to 100 broilgas in that area and that's very rare in New South Wales. And there's a whole range of other waterbirds like whiskered terns, which come in their hundreds, and glossy ibis. The abundance and diversity is just incredible."

Because many wetlands in the Clarence have been drained, the Everlasting Swamp has become increasingly important as a habitat for birds. But Dr Clancy notes it is not pristine. Parts of the swamp have been invaded by feral pigs, weirs have been built to prevent salt water flowing in and cattle have turned some areas into temporary dustbowls. "It's going to be an interesting management challenge," said Dr Clancy.

"Now that it's a national park, I would certainly be keen to take tourists or birdwatchers into the area."