

Rewards without duck hunting

By **TIM HADDAD**

THE Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Native Bird Shooting closes for public comment on Monday.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting is encouraging people to have their say.

We know most regional Victorians oppose the unnecessary cruel slaughter of our native ducks and quail, and many feel intimidated to speak out, due to a loud pro-shooting minority. (Less than half of one per cent of the population shoot birds). This Inquiry is your chance to be heard.

The shooting has a terrible impact on mental health of those forced to live with or witness it, let alone on our native bird-life – many species unique to our country. And economically, our rural

economies are largely dependent on tourism which shooting thwarts. We all deserve better.

Made up of farmers, regional business owners and residents, to say we're concerned with Loddon council's recent vote to support native bird shooting would be an understatement.

It would appear to many that the Mayor - widely known as a keen duck shooter and ex-president of a duck shooting club - is using his position to promote personal interests.

Council's February meeting minutes discloses no conflicts of interest when duck shooting was discussed and Mayor Straub "noted its economic importance to the shire".

A Parliamentary Budget Office Report in 2021 stated duck shooters' net spend was at best, just \$10 million across all Victoria.

For context, Phillip Island Nature Parks - where they shoot penguins with cameras - brings around \$120 million and 800 direct jobs just to the Bass Coast Shire.

When the costs of duck shooting are factored in, such as law enforcement and lost tourism, the real economic impact of duck shooting is very likely negative.

Council's April meeting Agenda, shows no conflicts of interests disclosed either, when Mayor Straub moved that council

should make a submission in support of duck shooting.

Such support is not in line with council's objectives of promoting tourism or protecting the environment.

Independent economists including The Australia Institute 1, have reported duck shooting deters tourists.

A Game Management Authority Board Paper recently released, reports 2.2 million plastic shotgun components which can take hundreds of years to break down, are pumped into Victoria's environment each duck shooting season.

The environmental watchdog found 20 per cent of the wetlands it tested between 2017 and 2020, had ducks with lead levels unsafe for consumption 2. Lead am-

munition is banned in duck shooting but there are reports almost every year of it being used. Lead is highly toxic remaining in the environment for decades, posing serious risks to people and wildlife.

The most robust long-term science available to track duck abundance trends is the East Australian Annual Waterbird Survey, which shows duck numbers have fallen to just 25% of their long-term average.

As for how many threatened species are collateral damage in duck shooting, according to Arthur Rylah Institute "this data does not exist and would be extremely difficult to gather" (Waterbird Susceptibility to Disturbance from Hunting 2019).

Wetlands at Boort and surrounds, are home to many species of native birds unique to our country. Birdwatching, widely known to be hampered by shooting, is a booming business.

Over 1.4 million tourists birdwatched in our country, spending \$3 billion, in the first year data was collected (Tourism Research Australia Visitor Surveys 2019).

When Victoria bans recreational bird shooting like other states have done, the people of Loddon will be able to protect and enjoy their natural assets in peace, and tap into the financial rewards.

** Tim Haddad is a member of Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting*