

Advocates warn against creating a 'wildlife warzone'

LUCY WILLIAMS FEB 15, 2022



The pull of tourists to see birdlife is evident at Lake Murphy. Picture: Lucy Williams

A LOCAL animal rights activists is stepping up her fight to prevent local bird paradises being transformed into a "wildlife warzone".

Kate Bossence, who is a member of Regional Victorians Against Duck shooting, has been rescuing injured birds for 26 years and wants the duck hunting season cancelled once and for all.

Ms Bossence was speaking from the North Central Catchment management authority's Breakfast for the Birds at Lake Murphy, where she and her fellow bird lovers were waiting with dreaded anticipation for the imminent announcement of the 2022 duck hunting season dates.

She said there was more skill in shooting at a clay target range than in killing "gentle, sentient beings" or having people with "lethal weapons under the influence of alcohol let loose in a wetland".

But with the RSPCA claiming 68 per cent of Victorians were against the practice, Ms Bossence said she is the most hopeful she has been that it could soon be banned.

But Member for Murray Plains and Victorians Nationals leader Peter Walsh has urged the Victorian Government to cease delaying the announcement of this year's duck hunting season, amid calls for a full season.

He said he understood the Game Management Authority (GMA) had delivered its recommendations to the government, "so there are no excuses for further obfuscation".

"The pandemic, the shorter seasons and the reduced bag limits have all been disappointing for hunters, they deserve a full season," Mr Walsh said.

"Most recent data estimates duck populations have remained strong across Victoria, with estimates of between 2.9 and 3.6 million game ducks, numbers buoyed by our consecutive wet years combined with La Niña conditions over summer, have only sustained populations."

Ms Bossence said despite Lake Murphy's status as a RAMSAR listed wetland, meaning it is recognised as being of "international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology", duck hunters are still allowed to shoot there and, on many others, similarly recognised wetlands. Despite the reduction of allowed shooting locations, for advocates like Ms Bossence that is not enough.

She said in previous Lake Murphy seasons up to 500 birds have been rescued from the water and shoreline.

"They weren't just ducks and they also included protected species like freckled ducks - one of the world's rarest ducks," Ms Bossence said.

"Hunters have no respect for this land and the beautiful birds.

"Of the few that pick up and eat the birds, only a handful do the right thing and bury the remains.

"I've seen ducks with shattered bills and wings running for their lives, I've seen animals strangled and swung around by the neck."

Ms Bossence said it was not just the animals who were at risk, but humans too.

She said she has had a loaded shotgun aimed at her head by a duck-hunter and had also been physically assaulted when rescuing a shot, flailing bird.

Ms Bossence said there were not enough game management authority staff to monitor the behaviour of these hunters, and to ensure participants were adhering to humane standards of hunting.

While advocates for hunting cite the money it brings to the community, Ms Bossence said the "98 per cent Melbourne-based majority are self-sufficient" and "barely spend a penny in town".

"The alternative is promoting nature based tourism in the region, which is known as Victoria's Kakadu," she said.

"The number of jobs you could create is off the charts.

Field and Game Australia say their members participate in a variety of ethical hunting activities.

They say their members harvest a diverse range of game species like ducks for eating, "allowing hunters to stock up on great free-range food, with low food mileage".

Field and Game Australia were contacted for further comment.