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# 2022 duck shooting season: calls to end slaughter mount

- Hayley Elg

Latest News



Pacific Black Duck with wings outstretched. Photo: Nalini Scarfe

Victorians from all walks of life - including Indigenous Australians - have made a collective plea to the state government not to allow native birds to be gunned down in waters across the state this year.

Increasing numbers of people from a wide array of groups - including First Nations Clans, businesses, unions and environmental, animal welfare and wildlife groups - have added their names to an alliance urging the government to legislate an end to the annual recreational shooting of water birds.

A list of almost 70 community groups and organisations represents hundreds of thousands of Victorians and has appeared in newspapers across the state.

Each year, around May, the Victorian government allows shooters to venture out on to normally peaceful public waterways to shoot ducks, but many argue this group has become a small minority and is no longer deemed to be acceptable to most in the community.

Recreational duck shooting is already banned in New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, with growing calls for Victoria to follow.

Each group has its own reason for signing and speaking out about the issue - whether it is due to cultural, environmental and animal welfare or economic concerns.

For the first time, some Indigenous peoples have expressed concern about the activity and have called for the upcoming season to be called off, and recreational duck shooting to be banned in the state for good.

Yung Balug clan elder Gary Murray, who is also a representative of the Victorian Traditional Owner Land Justice Group, said it was time to ban duck shooting.

Working with Indigenous groups right across the state, he said the vast majority were opposed to duck shooting.

While he said the issue had been brought up in the development of conservation management plans in which Aboriginal people had been consulted, he said it was the first time clans were directly speaking out about it and calling for the season to be abolished.

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"I think that in 2022 it's time we got rid of the duck shooting season. We need to do better than what we've done in the past because ultimately it's ongoing cruelty to wildlife on our country, nation by nation, and that's bad news for everybody.

"I wouldn't let my kids or my grandkids see a duck being killed by a shotgun. It's cruel," Mr Murray told *The Courier*. "We need to get rid of duck shooting now, like other states have."

**You might also like: [Why some want the duck shooting season banned](#)**

Aside from the cruelty of killing ducks with shotguns, he also listed other concerns such as shooters potentially posing a threat to cultural heritage.

He said duck shooters descended on Victorian waterways where Indigenous people had lived for tens of thousands of years, so there were concerns about the vulnerability of cultural heritage sites - from scarred trees to burial grounds and Aboriginal cooking mounds.

"We are concerned about people going out into the bush hunting ducks at lakes and rivers because that's where a lot of our cultural heritage is, because our people lived on the waterways for over 75,000 years. There's a lot of cultural heritage out there.

"We have a lot of scarred trees across the estate and a lot of them are ancient - up to 400 years old. The scars represent our people taking the bark off to make all sorts of things like canoes and coolamons.

"We protect scarred trees, as we do with all our cultural heritage."

While he said these sites were protected by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act and knowingly destroying them could result in a "stiff financial penalty or jail", he said shooters could unknowingly disturb cultural heritage and contribute to a loss of habitat - and once it was gone, it was gone forever.



A pelican killed during the hunting season. Photo: Kim Wormald

"They go out and camp on country. Some duck shooters, not all of them, will go out there, cut down a tree and burn it for firewood."

Mr Murray said there were ongoing concerns about campfires getting out of control and wiping out heritage sites, while littering was also problematic.

"When out camping a lot of people run amok, drinking and lighting fires and all sorts of things.

"We are really concerned that one day a fire will get away from them and they could burn down all the sacred trees, for example at Boort - the biggest scarred tree place in the world. It would only take a match to light it up in summer and we could lose the whole lot."

He also voiced concern about the impact of lead seeping into the environment and being ingested by wildlife.

"We're also concerned about the lead going into the trees and the ground. So it's not just the ducks but other wildlife can pick that lead up and eat it and have a very slow and painful death," he said. "It's just cruel."

The call comes as the 39th annual Eastern Australia Waterbird Survey, the largest long-term data set available, reveals waterbirds have declined by up to 90 per cent in the last four decades.

Released by the University of New South Wales late last year, it highlights the four major indices for waterbirds (total abundance, breeding index, number of breeding species and wetland area index) have all continued to decline since 1983.



A wood duck killed during the season. Photo: Kim Wormald

This is despite the La Nina weather pattern and accompanying rain.

The report reveals total waterbird abundance in 2021 decreased from 2020 and remains "well below average" - the third lowest in 39 years.

All "game" bird species were also "well below long-term averages".

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc is one of a number of stakeholders who have made a submission to the Game Management Authority to call for the recreational shooting season of native ducks and stubble quail to be cancelled this year due to the results.

Mr Murray also expressed concerns about the declines in native species and said the season was exacerbating the issue, especially when it is not clear if shooters partake as a means to feed their families.

"All wildlife needs to be protected. We're losing them every year and some are coming closer to extinction.

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- Gary Murray

"We need birdlife out on those lakes because they're part of biodiversity and keep the environment balanced. The environmental balance as well as the cultural balance."

Further, he said duck species were a sacred cultural totem in some communities.

"We don't hunt or eat our totems and we don't believe anybody else should be doing it either."

He implored the government to take the concerns seriously.

"Other states have banned it but I don't know why Victoria hasn't. I'm actually absolutely astounded that they haven't," he said.

He said duck shooting was not compatible with the number of investments in eco-tourism and showcasing Traditional Owners' cultural heritage across the state.

"It is not appropriate to showcase to tourists our cultural heritage when you've got fellas running around with shotguns shooting ducks. It's totally inappropriate and it can also be dangerous."

Many people who live close to where these activities occur each year have come to dread it.

Sue Williams, a spokesperson for RVOTDS, the group coordinating the ads, said the season had the opposite effect of boosting the economy in the regions.

"To witness living wildlife is a major reason tourists are drawn to the regions whilst the violence of shotguns and the cruelty inflicted on dwindling bird populations turns people away - it's well known in the tourism industry, an unacceptable loss to regional economies," she said.

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A Grey Teal standing on one leg. Photo: Kim Wormald

Numerous studies, including one by The Australia Institute named *Out for a Duck* and a UComms poll from early 2021, show tourists avoid certain areas during the duck hunting season.

*Out for a Duck*, released in December 2012, found a tiny proportion of Victorians (less than 1 per cent) to be active duck hunters, while almost 90 per cent supported a ban on duck hunting.

The study also found claims that recreational hunting contributed to the state's economy to be false and that revenue from other tourism activities would be far more beneficial. Further, more than half of respondents stated they would be less likely to holiday in an area as hunting occurred.

Meanwhile the poll, taken by more than 1000 metro and regional residents last year, showed the majority supported a ban. Most support for a ban came from respondents in regional Victoria.

In a statement on its Facebook page, Hepburn Wildlife Shelter said it was proud to add its name to "such an impressive alliance".

"It really is way past time to end this sort of brutality and senselessness toward animals. Please support wildlife and stand up for their rights to live their lives without violent intent."

Asked if it would consider the views of those in opposition to the season going ahead, a Victorian government spokesperson said the government recognised there were "strong views in the community both in favour of and against recreational game hunting".

"The government reviews seasonal arrangements for the duck hunting season each year on the advice of the Game Management Authority (GMA) to ensure that game duck populations remain sustainable, and that hunting is responsible and safe."