

Recreational Native Waterbird Shooting Considerations for 2020

By Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc. on behalf of those around the state adversely impacted.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc. is calling for the 2020 duck shooting season to be completely closed based on dire environmental conditions, significantly declining waterbird indices and a lack of impact studies of duck shooting on the growing numbers of the public by the waterways.

Summary

- All major indices for waterbirds show significant declines over time, well below long term averages.
- 2019 wetland area index lowest recorded since surveys began 37 years ago.
- Waterbird abundance strongly related to rainfall and wetland habitat availability.
- Most of Australia has experienced below to very much below average rainfall and hotter/drier times are predicted which will further dry out remaining wetlands.
- Waterbirds less widely dispersed.
- Little breeding recorded, with swans and ibis being responsible for 97% of it.
- Unreliable harvest data— a critical component in ensuring sustainability.
- Insufficient data regarding impact of shooting on native waterbird populations.
- Inability to control duck shooting or sufficiently monitor compliance.
- Lack of risk assessment re impact of duck shooting on families around the waterways.
- Lack of impact studies on tourism / other more popular forms of recreation hampered by duck shooting.

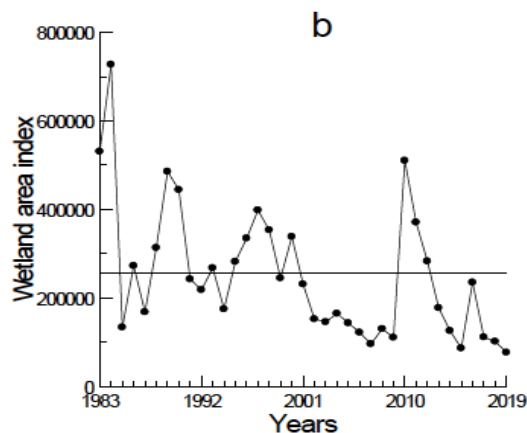
Introduction

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc. welcomes the invitation to submit comment for the second time. Evidence shows there is overwhelming reason to close the 2020 season. Previous Labor governments have closed seasons in 2003, 2007 and 2008 for less environmentally dire circumstances. With only 0.2 of one percent of the population shooting ducks, we submit this is GMA's opportunity to demonstrate independence to shooters and a respect for sustainability in recommending a season close.

Habitat, Distribution and Abundance

East Australia Annual Waterbird Survey “*the most significant piece of data on bird numbers*” (Graeme Ford; GMA), is the most comprehensive, independent, professional scientific long term data set available.

There is a significant long term downward trend of all indices, continuing to be well below average with wetland habitats the lowest since surveys began 37 years ago. (EAAWS)



Variable	1983-2019 All years	
	regression	
Total waterbird abundance	decline	$r^2=0.24$, $p=0.002$
Wetland area index	decline	$r^2=0.24$, $p=0.002$
Breeding index	decline	$r^2=0.12$, $p=0.041$
Breeding species richness	decline	$r^2=0.25$, $p=0.002$

All major indices for waterbirds; total abundance, breeding index, number of species breeding and wetlands area index, show significant declines over time, well below long term averages.

The slight increase in bird abundances observed in the annual aerial survey is likely to be from birds being more visible in stressed situations (drought). Long term trends are more informative for predicting population status than year to year fluctuations (*as per p 35 & 42 of considerations document*).

Victorian storage levels have already decreased by 10% and are likely to decrease further with ongoing hot dry spells predicted, further stressing habitat for already struggling bird populations.

Birds numbers observed in Victoria were 40% down on last year.

Reduced wetlands across states mean there is limited opportunity for large scale movement between north and south. This means birds which have sought refuge in Victoria's remaining wetlands will literally be “sitting ducks” for shooters if a season goes ahead, significantly impacting Australia's native waterbird populations.

Environmental Conditions

The dire situation of plummeting habitat, breeding and abundance indices, is further exacerbated by exceptionally dry weather with significant rainfall deficiencies and warmer temperatures the last three years, set to continue into 2020.

Across the country, unprecedented drought and environmental conditions are adversely affecting our native waterbirds, many species unique to our country.

The Murray Darling Basin - a critical breeding habitat for waterbirds - has experienced its worst drought period in 120 years and many critical wetland systems in the Basin are dry.

The future is grim, with experts predicting worsening climatic conditions and worsening drought across Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology, the CSIRO and any number of scientific bodies are pointing out that climate change will produce more frequent and severe droughts in the years ahead. (*Michael Rowland for ABC News Breakfast July 2019*).

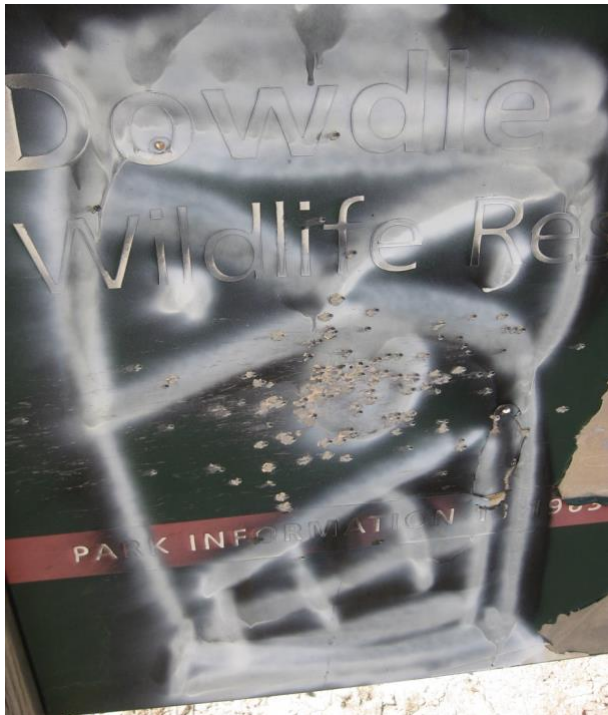
- <https://www.abc.net.au/news/about/backstory/news-coverage/2019-07-20/australias-drought-crisis-is-still-a-real-and-ongoing-threat/11321564>
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- <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/waterbirds-at-risk-as-irrigation-saps-floods-in-murray-darling-wetland-20180702-p4zp09.html>
- <https://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/news/how-will-climate-change-affect-bird-migration-our-scientists-explain>
- <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2018/11/going-extinct-by-neglect-the-state-of-australias-threatened-birds/>

Critical Sustainability Factors

“To effectively manage game species it is important to quantify the numbers harvested” (ARI / GMA)

- Insufficient and Unreliable Data of Bird Numbers Shot.
 - I. Estimates of numbers of birds shot are not only based on a small number of shooters then extrapolated out assuming the entire duck shooter base would be same, but reliant on shooters’ memories and honesty. *“Estimates of total harvest should be interpreted with caution” (page 25 of Harvest Estimates)*
 - II. As confirmed by Graeme Ford CEO GMA, Estimates do not include birds shot and left behind including protected species, found most years by the public. As most waterways are not monitored, the true number of birds shot including protected species is likely much higher.
 - III. Harvest estimates also miss the secondary ripple effect of shooting on bird populations. Otherwise healthy birds of breeding age are shot, reducing the chances of population recovery. Monogamous pairs are impacted, resulting in surviving partners unlikely to recover and death of offspring.

- No account is given to the impact of duck shooting to migratory birds who are particularly vulnerable to climate change and disturbance. Shooting disturbance impacts their ability to feed and rest prior to their long journeys. Migratory birds are suffering particularly high levels of decline and Australia are under numerous International obligations to protect them (<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/migratory-species/migratory-birds>).
- Lead is still used in duck shooting despite being illegal (as reported most years). Lead is extremely toxic to ecosystems, animals and people particularly women and children who consume even tiny traces. *“The literature suggests that significant insult to the brain of children occurs at very low levels and medical intervention with chelation fails to reverse such effects”*. (emedicine.medscape.com/article/1174752) Until this serious health and safety risk can be resolved, further shooting seasons should be ceased under the precautionary principle.
- Birds are twice as vulnerable to climate change as mammals, an international team of scientists has concluded after checking 481 species in 987 populations around the world (*Global Change Biology, Zoological Society of London*).
- Non – compliance. It is clear, whether authorities are present or not, duck shooting is not controllable. Some examples of the magnitude of waterbirds and protected species which are not accounted for in authorities “harvest statistics” are as follows. Sadly this is likely the tip of the iceberg as the vast majority of areas where duck shooting is allowed, are not monitored.
 - ⇒ Box Flat 2013 *“The bodies of about 760 game ducks and 155 non-game birds were left on the water at the Box Flat flood plains near Boort. The shooting happened on opening weekend of duck season”*. (ABC March 2013)
 - ⇒ Lake Toolondo 2016, *“The Andrews government is headed for a showdown in the courts over the illegal shooting of dozens of rare and threatened birds during the opening of duck season. The shooting occurred despite the presence of Victoria police and authorized compliance officers”*. (The Age April 2016)
 - ⇒ Kerang 2017, *“Another 437 birds have been recovered this week including 44 threatened freckled ducks from last weekend’s massacre at the marshes in northwest Victoria, recognized as a RAMSAR wetland of international importance. The total number of illegally shot freckled ducks now stands at 112. The latest find takes the total number of birds gunned down in the opening weekend shooting spree to 1,247 and this was from just one of Victoria’s wetlands. What happened on other wetlands?”*. (Medianet March 2017)
 - ⇒ *This year (2019) despite record low numbers of duck shooters, over 30 instances of hunting / firearm related offences were reported just at the few waterways authorities happened to be at on opening weekend.*



These photos show the reality faced by rural families and tourists during and after duck shooting.

Insufficient Regulation and Monitoring.

According to Arthur Rylah Hunters Bag Survey Reports;

- In 2017 hunters' bags were checked at only 31 wetlands (out of thousands) "with some level of coverage". Only a handful of wetlands were checked by GMA for wounded / unretrieved birds. Even just at these few, 18 birds were found including 9 dead swans and 2 dead pelicans.
- In 2018 bags were checked at only 19 wetlands and only one wetland was checked for wounded / unretrieved birds.
- In 2019 no wetlands were checked for wounded / unretrieved birds.



Birds left behind after duck shooting; including penguin, musk duck and pied cormorant (protected species). Picture Kim Wormald.

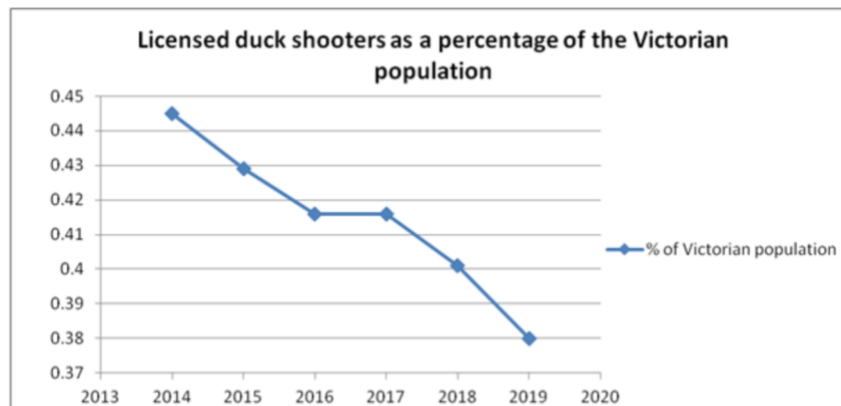
In both the 2017 and 2018 reports, Arthur Rylah Institute clearly state that "Estimating the daily take is an important component of assessing the impact of the duck season on populations of game bird species" and that the survey "needs to include a larger number of wetlands, more evenly spread across the State". This advice has not been heeded.

GMA reported 1300 duck shooters were at the waterways they monitored on opening weekend. Latest figures however report 10,000 duck shooters were active on opening weekend. If these figures are correct, it shows the magnitude of the unmonitored areas and likely much larger problems associated with non-compliance which went unreported.

Other Relevant Considerations

The Wildlife Act was put in place over 40 years ago. Since then there has been significant change;

- Significant biodiversity loss. Of the 1870 globally threatened bird species, 75% have been adversely impacted by human activity including hunting (*State of The World's Birds 2018*). Sadly Australia is one the worst offenders in the world when it comes to general species extinction and Victoria has the highest number of threatened species by sub region in Australia. With over 45% of our bird species unique to Australia, including our native waterbird species shot each year, they require urgent protection at the few Victorian areas there is water.
- Animals have been found to be sentient beings. There is much evidence that birds feel pain, fear and sorrow. Ballistics experts advise at least one in four birds shot will not be killed outright. The cruelty involved in the nature of shotgun pellet dispersal is unavoidable and one of the main reasons other states have banned duck shooting. Until this critical aspect is rectified (important to 98% of Victorians according to Labor's *Animal Welfare Action Plan*), a further season must be halted.
- Changes in recreational interests. There is significant and growing interest in nature based activities such as walking, running and cycling (*Marsden Jacob 2016*). Bushwalking #8 in Ausport's latest Top 20 (hunting didn't rate) is a popular activity for tourists (*Tourism Research Australia Visitor surveys*). These activities are hampered by duck shooting occurring in the same vicinity.
- Duck shooter numbers are declining and now make up less than 0.38 of one percent of the population. Around half this tiny number are inactive.



- Rural economic pressure. Agriculture is becoming less reliable due to climate change and market price fluctuations. Manufacturing is similarly unpredictable. Rural Victoria must look to a new economic solution or face continuing financial decline (*Auditor General's Report followed by SGS Economics and Planning 2016 and 2018*). The solution is nature based tourism.

- Tourism contributes more to the Australian economy than agriculture (agriculture, forestry and fishing), employs 1 in 19 Australians and supports 1 in 8 businesses and for the fifth consecutive year, real growth in tourism GDP has outpaced national GDP growth (Tourism Satellite Account). Nature based tourism is the fastest growing component (Tourism and Transport Forum 2017) bringing jobs and cash with it. Sadly, whilst many Victorian rural communities are rich in birdlife and wetland habitats which could attract the growing numbers of nature- based tourists, only 16% of would-be holiday makers are not deterred by shooting (The Australia Institute 2012).

Consider Gannawarra with its 14% structural unemployment rate and high take up of social security. The Kerang RAMSAR wetlands of international importance could be a tourism mecca providing much needed jobs and revenue if it weren't for duck shooting.

- Rural population increases require safety considerations and jobs. More people now live around waterways where shooting takes place. Aside from having the right to safe and peaceful enjoyment of their properties, nature based activities and tourism- already worth \$7.4 billion and 71,000 jobs to Victoria (*Marsden Jacob 2016*)- could provide these people with much needed opportunities.

As rural communities have expanded, no consideration has been afforded those who live near waterways, of noise pollution or impacts to children, animals and livelihoods of duck shooting in close proximity.

Conclusion

Based on the significant continued long term decline of native waterbird indices, the hotter and drier environmental pressures set to continue and the inability to control duck shooting, the 2020 season must be closed.

This is notwithstanding the lack of risk assessments of the impacts to rural communities.

Thank you for allowing us to comment. We hope to see a sensible recommendation by GMA to close the 2020 season based on the overwhelming facts and evidence.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc. are a not for profit association incorporated in April 2018. Now with over 4000 supporters, consisting largely of those who live or work around Victorian waterways and are directly adversely impacted by duck shooting, our purpose remains, to bring awareness of these impacts which have gone unrecognized, and to promote a better way for our waterways. [Click here](#) to see some of what rural people said.

References

- State of The World's Birds 2018
- GMA License Statistics & 2020 Season Considerations
- Victoria's Outdoor Economy Marsden Jacob 2016
- Tourism Research Australia last three years of Visitor Survey data
- Tourism Satellite Account 2018
- SGS Economics & Planning Analysis 2016 & 2018
- Tourism & Transport Forum 2017
- Global Change Biology, Zoological Society of London
- Submission to Regulatory Impact Statement for Victoria's Draft Wildlife Regulations 2012 -The Australia Institute
- Centre for Ecosystem Science Annual Aerial Waterbird Survey's
- The Arthur Rylah Institute Hunter Bag Surveys 2017, 2018 & 2019
- Ecosystems Across Australia are Collapsing under Climate Change – The Conversation 5/7/18
- Waterbirds at Risk as Irrigation Saps Floods in Murray Darling Wetlands –Sydney Morning Herald 4/7/18
- Sheer Speed of Global Warming Decimating Birds Say Scientists – Haaretz correspondent 23/7/18

“Victorians and visitors from interstate and overseas seek to enjoy our wildlife”

“Victoria's native wildlife are a unique and important part of the landscape.”

“The Victorian government is committed to conservation of Victoria's wildlife”

Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for the Environment

Statement Attachments;

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club

Environment East Gippsland Inc

Avon Plains Landcare Group

Firetail Birdwatching Tours

St Arnaud Field Naturalists

Environment Victoria

Wilderness Society

Victorian National Parks Association

Tasmanian Conservation Trust Inc

The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Inc

Humane Society International

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Sydney Harbour Kayaks

Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland

Wildlife Victoria



Recommendation to close the 2020 duck shooting season.

Ongoing drought in NSW and QLD has devastated waterbird populations. We cannot allow the ducks that remain and seek refuge in Victoria to be shot.

There are very few sanctuaries where duck hunting is prohibited. Quite apart from the carnage during the open season, it is now impossible to view waterbirds at close range on our lakes and swamps at any time, because of the birds' fear of shooters. The impact of duck hunting on the migratory waders that rely on our wetlands to prepare for their annual long flight to the arctic regions is also of huge concern. Continual disturbance to their feeding grounds in Australia in early autumn should not be permitted.

Rod Bird OAM, PhD
Secretary
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club



Environment East Gippsland supports the submission by Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc in calling for a 2020 duck shooting season close.

Jill Redwood
Coordinator

Environment East Gippsland inc

Locked Bag 3

ORBOST Vic 3888



The Minister for Agriculture and The Premier of Victoria
Parliament House, Melbourne 3001

Friday 13th December 2019

Dear Minister and Premier,

The Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group wishes to endorse the submission of the Regional Victorians Opposed To Duck Shooting (RVOTDS).

Walkers Lake is a small waterbody in our Landcare area and the only lake of the Avon Plains Lakes that holds water. It is a small oasis in an environment that lacks dams and lakes and whose river, the Richardson, is now reduced to a series of small waterholes.

The data tells us that the number of waterbirds is in serious decline and this is endorsed by our own bird surveys conducted at the lake. This scenario is evident in wetlands all over Victoria.

We urge the Victorian Government to heed the data and the predictions of a drier than ever 2020 and stop the slaughter of our native waterbirds. The price Victorians and Australians are paying for the pleasures of a diminishing number of hunters is scandalous.

Yours sincerely,

Prue McAllister

Avon Plains Landcare Group
Banyena 3388



To whom it may concern,

12th Dec 2019

As a licenced tour operator in Victoria I would like to make it clear that I do not support a duck shooting season in 2020, or into the future.

I take local and international tourists around the state throughout the year to enjoy the wide range of birds, animals and wild landscapes still existing here in Victoria. After 17 years of operating across the entirety of Victoria and having lived and worked in an irrigation district of northern Victoria I have a deep knowledge of the local environment and especially of issues around water, irrigation and environmental watering. The science and facts are clear. Water extraction for human use has greatly depleted the available habitat for water birds and the declines in their overall numbers are real. With an extensive drought throughout Qld and NSW, the more southern and coastal areas including Victoria are important refuges for ducks and other water birds that may not have successfully bred since flooding in 2016.

The indisputable evidence of a warming climate will only exacerbate the issues around water allocations and conflict between water for human use and that for the environment. In this climate, allowing the "sport" of shooting native water birds will inevitably deplete their numbers further. There is also the very real issue of the huge amount of suffering of birds that are wounded and not collected by hunters.

The visitors who I take to wetlands around the state marvel at the diversity and numbers of birds still present here, but these places and birds are being gradually being eroded away. I am particularly opposed to shooting at wetlands that have received environmental water during drought conditions. Whilst they should become a refuge for birds during very dry times, instead they become a dangerous and disturbed environment. My tours are adversely affected. I have to tell visitors that due to duck hunting we may not see many birds, and those that are present will be very spooked and difficult to observe. Actually I tend to avoid visiting wetlands between March and June most years, no discerning nature lover wants to walk around amongst empty shotgun cartridges or witness injured ducks that are suffering, something which I see regularly during the hunting season.

I look forward to a time when peace returns to our wetlands throughout the year,

Simon Starr, www.BirdingVictoria.com.au and Firetail Birding Tours established 2002

The Minister for the Environment and The Premier of Victoria
Parliament House, Melbourne 3001

Thursday 12th December 2019

Dear Minister and Premier,

the St Arnaud Field Naturalist Club writes to you again in the hope that its plea to end the persecution of our waterbirds will finally be heard and acted on.

In the north west of this State we have very little open water.

Thanks to the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline which now ensures a better water supply to towns, businesses, industries and farms, most open water- farm dams, waterholes and the like have been removed.

A small amount of water is allowed for environmental purposes- Tchum Lake at Birchip, Watchem Lake, Walkers Lake at Avon Plains, Woornook and a very few others.

These lakes are recreational lakes for their districts- fishing, swimming, boating etc, but also open to duck shooting, in season. This results in hazardous conditions for all users.

Given the lack of water bodies for ducks and all other waterbirds and given the increasing likelihood of even drier conditions in the coming year, birds will have to congregate in these few lakes and wetlands.

A shooting season will be like shooting fish in a barrel and is not acceptable to any right-thinking person. This is not sport but a massacre.

We ask this Government to ban once and for all this anachronistic practice and give our suffering waterbirds of all types, but especially our ducks a chance to live. When will you ban this practice- when the birds are all gone?

How can this be other than mismanagement when we know that our bird species are in serious decline?

No other native bird or animal is subject to this barbaric treatment- it must stop now.

We, the members of St Arnaud Field Naturalist Club ask that your Government hear our plea,

Anne Hughes,
President



P O Box 53 St Arnaud Vic 3478
Email: starnaudfieldnats@gmail.com
Web: www.starnaudfieldnats.org.au



The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria,
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place, East Melbourne VIC 3002
By email: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

CC: The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP Minister for Agriculture
By email: jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au

CC: The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
By email: lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

13 August 2019

Ban on Duck Shooting

We write as leading Victorian environment and conservation organisations to express our strong hope that the Andrews Government will support moves to ban recreational duck hunting, as has already been done in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia.

Habitat loss and degradation have reduced native waterbird populations to dangerously low levels in much of Eastern Australia. It is no longer possible to reconcile a shooting season of any length with the maintenance of viable populations of these birds. Prevention of extinction and maintenance of biological diversity needs to be prioritised.

Climate change represents an additional threat to these birds, with six out of eight 'game' species already show long-term decline. Species richness of these native water birds is currently very low, and therefore the number of birds that are breeding is also low. This indicates their habitat is in trouble, which is driven by climate change and over extraction of water.

This is a similar pattern to that seen in the millennial drought, when waterfowl across Australia suffered a population decline of approximately 85%. The shooting of breeding stock will hinder recovery of native water birds, and efforts need to be made to reverse this decline.

We understand Victoria aims to be respected globally for its animal welfare and land management practices, as well as the state's response to climate change, and we urge the Andrews Government to ban recreation hunting of water birds and other game species.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Ruchel".

Matt Ruchel
Executive Director
Victorian National Parks Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jono La Nauze".

Jono La Nauze,
CEO Environment Victoria

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amelia Young".

Amelia Young, Campaigns Manager,
The Wilderness Society, Vic.



tasmanian conservation trust inc

19 September 2019

The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria
Parliament House
Melbourne 3000

daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

Copied to

- The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au
- The Hon. Jaclyn Symes, Minister for Agriculture
jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Premier,

RE: Support for the banning of recreational duck shooting in Victoria

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust writes to you to give its support for the bill to ban recreational duck shooting that is currently before the Victorian Parliament.

While our organization is concerned with protecting the environment of Tasmania some duck species move between our states and therefore I feel compelled to write in support of a ban on recreational duck shooting in Victoria that will help protect Tasmania's duck species.

The principle reason that the TCT opposes recreational duck shooting is that it is inherently cruel as many ducks shot do not die a quick and humane death. I know this from personal experience. I have attended duck shooting protests on Tasmania's east coast each year since 1992 and have regularly witnessed birds that are brought down but require several additional shots before they are killed, some suffering for several minutes. I have also seen birds clipped, i.e. hit by pellets but not brought down. We can only presume that some of these birds die hours or days later from their wounds or are taken by predators. Shooters must pass a test to show they can identify game species but my experience shows that out of any group of shooters there are some that take higher risks, shooting at birds when they do not have a good shot which makes getting a clean kill much harder. This happens when we are watching them so we hate to imagine what happens when they are alone.

Floor 2, 191 Liverpool Street, Hobart TAS 7000 Australia

p (03) 6234 3552 f (03) 6231 2491 e tct6@bigpond.com ABN 63091237520

Another reason for banning recreational duck shooting is that it is not necessary for feeding the shooters or controlling a problem for farmers but is purely done for 'enjoyment' or 'sport'. Shooting wild species for sport or fun cannot be condoned in the 21st century. Shooters claim that they are helping farmers but I have never seen evidence that recreational shooters get organized to target farming areas at the very time they are suffering impacts from ducks. Recreational shooters go shooting when and where they most want to go, usually near to their favorite camp site.

As the impact of global warming intensifies the changing weather patterns are threatening wetlands and wetland bird species, including ducks. While these impacts are being felt in Tasmania it seems they are more severe in Victoria and other south-eastern Australian states. Information provided to me shows that six out of the eight target duck species in Victoria are experiencing long-term decline and there was a near total breeding failure in both 2017 and 2018. Given these circumstances all unnecessary killing of ducks must be stopped permanently.

The movement of ducks across Bass Strait is not closely studied but it is known that birds will cross both ways including during years when wetlands in one state are dry. It is not an exaggeration to say that the banning recreational duck shooting in Victoria will help preserve duck populations in Tasmania as well.

Wetlands in Victoria and Tasmania are under tapped as nature-based tourism assets. I can't speak on specific wetlands in Victoria but in Tasmania duck shooting dominates the magnificent Moulting Lagoon during autumn which is usually the best time to visit Tasmania's east coast. To state the obvious, tourists do not want to stay at Moulting Lagoon when shooting is occurring.

I am sure that the Victorian tourism industry can benefit greatly from replacing shooting on wetlands with sensitive tourism. Tourism will provide an additional reason for conserving the wetlands from other threats. Perhaps Victoria can set an example for Tasmania to follow and we will finally ban duck shooting and take advantage of our magnificent wetlands as a tourism asset.

Yours sincerely,



Peter McGlone
Director
peter@tct.org.au



The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Inc.

Understanding Our Natural World

Postal Address: PO Box 13, Blackburn, Vic. 3130

Club Address: 1 Gardenia Street, Blackburn.

Email: admin@fncv.org.au

Website: www.fncv.org.au

Phone: (03) 9877 9860

Reg. No A0033611X

ABN 55 791 612829

*Patron: The Honourable Linda Dessau, AC
Governor of Victoria*

12 August 2019

The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place, East Melbourne VIC 3002
By email: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP Minister for Agriculture
Level 36, 121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
By email: jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne VIC 3002
By email: lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Premier, Minister Symes and Minister D'Ambrosio,

Re: Recreational duck hunting prohibition bill

We understand the Victorian Parliament will soon be considering a bill to ban recreational duck hunting in Victoria, which will be proposed in a Private Members Bill from Animal Justice MP Andy Meddick. We write to express our strong support for this bill which we hope our Victorian Government will also support.

Recreational hunting remains legal in Victoria, despite polling showing that an overwhelming number of Victorians want it banned. The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Inc. (FNCV) wants to add its voice to the chorus of protest against this annual, barbaric slaughter of our native birds.

The RSPCA opposes duck hunting as do many members of the Victorian Parliament. Duck hunting has ceased in three states: Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. When Carmen Lawrence banned it in WA she said "*Our community has reached a stage of enlightenment where it can no longer accept the institutionalised killing of native birds for recreation*".

There are many arguments against the killing of ducks:

- Hunting ducks in 2019 is completely unsustainable. Wetlands are under threat all over the State and bird numbers are in serious decline. The official average yearly death toll from shooting is estimated at about 390,000 birds. We cannot pretend that the annual loss of this many birds will have no effect on their future numbers.

Understanding our natural world

- Duck hunting is cruel. Shotguns operate by puncturing organs and splintering bones. They violate the spirit and letter of our Animal Welfare Act. A smashed wing will bring a duck down but a fractured leg or beak will see it fly off to die miserably later on.
- Even the most responsible hunter cannot avoid killing protected species and injuring birds.
- Lead shot remains in the environment and is an environmental poison, entering the food chain and impacting the food web. The accumulated effects of many decades of hunting have already damaged our ecosystems. Continued hunting, even with non-toxic pellets, is placing unacceptable pressure on already over-stressed bird populations.
- Further arguments against duck hunting include the number of accidents and even deaths amongst the shooters themselves.

The FNCV was formed in 1880, to provide opportunities for people with an interest in natural history to gather for discussion, learning and fieldwork. Its mission statement is "Understanding our natural world". It is the oldest such group in Australia. Its many special interest groups focus on: Botany, Fauna Survey, Fungi, Geology, Marine Research, Microscopy and Terrestrial Invertebrates, plus a group especially for Junior Naturalists. From its beginnings, the Club has contributed significantly to all natural science disciplines, through research, fieldwork and publications. It has been, and is, at the forefront of citizen science in Victoria.

The FNCV is a not-for-profit organisation of approximately eight hundred members, which has been highly active in the conservation of Victoria's natural environments. FNCV's achievements in this area include successfully campaigning for the reservation of Wilsons Promontory, and the formation of the Victorian National Parks Association. Operating from its own premises in Blackburn, the FNCV is today more active than at any time in its long history.

We commend this Bill to you and hope that duck shooting will soon no longer be a part of the Victorian way of life.

On behalf of the Council and Members of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria,



Maxwell Campbell,
President



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

Humane Society International Inc.
ABN 63 510 927 032

PO Box 439
Avalon NSW 2107
Australia

Telephone +61 2 9973 1728
Fax +61 2 9973 1729
Email admin@hsi.org.au

www.hsi.org.au



The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place,
East Melbourne VIC 3002
By email: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP
Minister for Agriculture
Level 36, 121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
By email: jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne VIC 3002
By email: lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

2 August 2019

Dear Premier, Ministers Symes and D'Ambrosio,

Re: Recreational duck hunting prohibition bill

Humane Society International is the world's largest animal protection charity with 10 million supporters worldwide.

We understand the Victorian Parliament will soon be considering a bill to ban recreational duck hunting in Victoria, which will be proposed in a Private Members Bill from Animal Justice MP Andy Meddick. We write to express our strong hope that the Government will support the bill and consign this cruel sport to history as has been done in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia.

Humane Society International objects to duck hunting on both animal welfare and conservation grounds.

Duck hunting is undeniably cruel. Due to the nature of shotgun fire, it is inevitable that a high proportion of birds will not die instantaneously and will suffer prolonged and painful deaths from their wounds. With hundreds of thousands of waterbirds shot in each Victorian hunting season, the level of suffering is wholly unacceptable.

Inflicting this cruelty on native water bird species when they are experiencing environmental stress due to intractable causes such as climate change is particularly objectionable. Humane Society International is gravely concerned by declines in waterbird abundance and asks that this key compounding threat to their survival be removed immediately.

Allowing this activity to continue would be an affront to conservation and contravene the commitments made in Victoria's Animal Welfare Action Plan, tarnishing the stated aim for Victoria to be respected globally for its animal welfare practices.

US Office:
Washington DC

Regional Offices:
Africa
Canada
Europe
India
Latin America
Mexico
United Kingdom

Whereas, we stand ready to warmly congratulate the Andrews Government when you take the decision to support the bill to outlaw recreational duck hunting.

Thank you for considering our views and those of our Australian supporters.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Beynon', written in a cursive style.

Nicola Beynon
Head of Campaigns

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Inc # A0007527C

PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552



Fairy Waxflower
Philotheca verrucosa

21/10/2019

Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Minister
for Solar Homes

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club to express our support for the cessation of duck shooting in Victoria, and in particular, for the Wildlife Amendment (Protection of Birds) Bill 2019 to be legislated. Duck shooting causes needless suffering for wildlife, threatens the conservation of many waterbird species, and is counter-productive for regional economies.

Wildlife suffer needlessly when disturbed and displaced from their habitats during duck season. Birds rarely die immediately when shot. Injured, they fall to the ground or into the water still alive to suffer a protracted death. No animal should be treated like this for the purpose of 'recreational sport'.

Every year hunters kill protected species, many of which look nothing like the species they are supposed to be 'targeting'. There is no justification for allowing the continued shooting of rare and threatened species which is well documented to occur every season. All waterbirds are struggling to survive due to the decimation of their breeding habitats caused by the draining or alteration of wetlands, river regulation, and the over allocation of water resources for irrigation. The loss and alteration of wetlands throughout southern and eastern Australia has magnified the vulnerability of waterbirds and this situation is only made worse by allowing there 'recreational' hunting to continue.

Hunting provides a false economy which undermines (rather than supports) regional growth and prosperity. For the sake of a few weeks of seasonal 'hunting activity' the wetlands on which the hunting is allowed are significantly undervalued. If these wetlands were extensively restored to promote ecological services and managed to provide high quality waterbird habitats, they would be able to support year round economic activity for the regions in which they occur. Investment in restoring and managing Victoria's wetlands as natural assets with the purpose of conserving waterbirds and their habitat is an investment in resilient and sustainable regional economies.

With the high probability that environmental conditions will continue to decline throughout south eastern Australia in coming decades it is now an extremely important time to fully protect waterbirds in this state by ceasing any further legal recreational duck shooting.

Yours Sincerely,

Richard Goonan
Secretary, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club richard.goonan@optusnet.com.au



11 September, 2019

The Hon. Daniel Andrews (Premier of Victoria)

daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

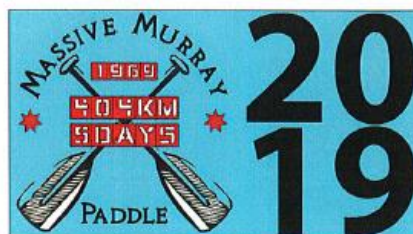
Dear Premier Andrews,

As a business owner in the tourism sector, I write to express my concern regarding the negative impact that Duck Shooting has on tourism in the Murray River's Barmah Forest and Gunbower Creek Forest, including the Kerang Ramsar wetlands.

I, myself have been paddling on the Gunbower Creek with my family when we have experienced the sounds of shots at very close range, which is very alarming. I have looked into it, and there seem to be no set boundaries or zones for duck shooting areas, which is very dangerous for those using the Gunbower Forest and Creek for other recreational purposes, including kayaking or canoeing and camping.

I am the owner of Sydney Harbour Kayaks in Sydney and Murray River Adventures in Cohuna Victoria, which runs guided kayak tours on the Gunbower Creek and surrounds. My company is also the organiser of the Massive Murray Paddle, Australia's iconic paddling race which takes place on the Murray from Yarrawonga to Swan Hill each year in the third week of November, and also the Black Swan Creek Race from Gunbower to Cohuna, which had its inaugural run this year in March.

Our tours on the Gunbower Creek are enjoyed by tourists and locals alike, and a favourite which those wishing to observe the abundant and varied birdlife on this stunning waterway. Our experienced guides provide an enjoyable, educational experience for our customers and give detailed information the flora and fauna, as well as on the history on the Creek and Forest, including pointing out objects of historical interest and Aboriginal culture such as the scar trees and middens.





I believe, in firm collaboration with the local Councils of Gannawarra Shire and Campaspe Shire and also operations like NC CMA and DELWP that the growth of nature-based tourism is vital for the injection of funds into the local towns along the Murray River, and indeed for the survival of the people of the regional towns in this wonderful area of Victoria. It is a tragedy that people should be deterred from enjoying these beautiful areas of public forest for fears of being shot by a very small minority of people who choose to shoot ducks.

I feel very strongly that Duck Shooting does not have a place in this area, and I feel that the negative impacts far outweigh the desire of a minority who wish to partake in this activity.

I look forward to hearing from you with regard to what can be done to, ideally prohibit or place much tighter restrictions on this activity.

Your sincerely,

Shannon O'Brien

Director

Sydney Harbour Kayaks

Incorporating:

Mirage Sea Kayaks

Murray River Adventures

Massive Murray Paddle

Black Swan Creek Marathon



The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio

Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes

Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street

East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

By email: lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

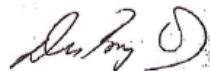
Dear Minister

Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (Wildlife Queensland) urges your Government to support the *Wildlife Amendment (Protection of Birds) Bill 2019*. Wildlife Queensland is a highly respected wildlife focused conservation organisation with over 6500 supporters, including supporters from Victoria. Wildlife Queensland was instrumental in forming an alliance with Birds Queensland, RSPCA and several other likeminded groups in achieving a ban on recreational duck and quail hunting in Queensland. On 10 August 2005 Queensland became the third Labor state in Australia to ban the recreational shooting of native waterbirds when Premier Beattie announced his Government's decision with the words 'This is not an appropriate activity in contemporary life'. Those words are just as true today.

Circumstances in Victoria today mirror the situation in Queensland in the early 2000s. The water levels and breeding numbers are in decline and the number of duck shooter have declined from 95000 in 1986 to very small number. There is no question this hunting activity causes inherent and inevitable pain and suffering. Some birds will be wounded, others will be crippled and die in perhaps a few hours or days. Let us not forget about the non- target species that accidentally get in the way.

Public opinion has changed for the better. Today the majority of the public view hunting of waterbirds as an outdated, antisocial activity and not acceptable in our society. In 1991 the then Victorian Government drafted legislation stopping hunting of waterbirds following the ban in Western Australia in 1990 but the draft did not progress. You have demonstrated your care for wildlife by banning opera house traps to protect and conserve platypus. Continue to demonstrate your care for wildlife. Support the Bill and protect our waterbirds. Do not be the last State to do so. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely



Des Boyland, Secretary

12th November 2019

protecting wildlife · influencing choices · engaging communities

Suite 1, Level 1, 30 Gladstone Road, Highgate Hill Qld 4101. Phone: 07 3844 0129 Fax: 07 3846 4784

wpsq@wildlife.org.au · ABN 44 235 565 907



Wildlife Victoria Inc.
ABN 27 753 478 012
T. 03 9445 0310
PO Box 100, Abbotsford VIC 3067
info@wildlifelifevictoria.org.au
www.wildlifelifevictoria.org.au
www.facebook.com/wildlifelifevictoria

12th August 2019

The Hon. Daniel
Andrews, Premier of
Victoria
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Premier,

Re: Duck Shooting in Victoria

Wildlife Victoria is opposed to the killing of indigenous native wildlife for food or recreation. The annual duck season has long been opposed by conservation, animal welfare and community organisations and has been discontinued in Western Australia, NSW and Queensland.

No doubt you are aware of the many arguments against the continuance of this annual slaughter, but I will outline our main points briefly.

1. Cruelty

Despite detailed regulations, the suffering caused to shot birds remains unacceptable. Shooters are regularly observed not complying with regulations and it would be uneconomic to employ the number of compliance officers that would be required to effectively enforce the regulations. Even large-scale wildlife crimes – for example the indiscriminate shooting of large numbers of birds at Box Flat in 2013 and Kerang in 2017 – remain unprosecuted.

2. Biodiversity

With decreasing rainfall and increasing temperature set to be a continuing trend due to climate change, water-bird populations are expected to continue to decline. Ceasing “recreational” shooting will remove at least one unnecessary pressure on populations in Victoria. Every year a large number of non-target birds are illegally shot - Swans, Moorhens and Coots as well as listed species such as the Freckled Duck. We have also seen on at least one occasion the bodies of shot, FFG-listed Grey-headed flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) recovered from wetlands near Geelong during the duck season.



Wildlife Victoria Inc.
ABN 27 753 478 012
T. 03 9445 0310
PO Box 100, Abbotsford VIC 3067
info@wildlifelivictoria.org.au
www.wildlifelivictoria.org.au
www.facebook.com/wildlifelivictoria

3. Safety and Amenity

The presence of (mainly) men with guns dressed in camouflage roaming the wetlands means that these areas are not perceived as safe for other recreational activities during the duck season. People living or visiting in proximity to the killing zones experience emotional distress due to the sounds of wildlife being killed. The presence of groups of sometimes alcohol-affected and occasionally belligerent armed men is not something most people wish to put themselves or their families near. The lack of a proscribed blood alcohol concentration (BAC) for shooters means that drinking is an inherent aspect of many of the "shooting parties" and increases the perceived and real risk to the community. The amenity of our natural spaces for other users is further reduced by the building of "hides" and the large amounts of rubbish left behind by shooters.

We urge the government to finally and permanently stop the declaring of an annual "duck season" in Victoria and return the wetlands to the wildlife and recreational users who shoot only with cameras.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Davidson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Megan
Davidson CEO

Mobile: 0419 805 062
Megan.davidson@wildlifelivictoria.com.au

