

Opinion

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Big votes in animal welfare

FARMERS, fishers and hunters need to keep a close eye on the on-again, off-again Andrews Government's drafting of a new animal welfare Act.

They need to ask themselves: Why has a 2018 election promise to legally recognise animals as sentient beings, capable of feeling fear and other emotions, been deferred until 2022, an election year?

The Labor Party knows it needs to win over inner city voters in the electorates of Melbourne, Albert Park, Brunswick, Northcote, Richmond and Prahran.

Animal welfare is a big deal for swinging voters in these electorates, who buy free-range meat, if they eat meat at all, and follow animal activist groups such as PETA, more than the RSPCA, on social media.

These voters will not settle for a bit of tinkering around the edges when it comes to drafting a new animal welfare Act.

So far, all the Government has done is release a directions paper, which includes a proposal to end the exemptions farmers, fishers and hunters have to existing animal welfare laws.

These exemptions allow farmers to use 1080 poison, land managers to set leg-hold traps, hunters to use hounds and dispatch ducks and even anglers to reel in game fish and live bait.

When *The Weekly Times* asked Agriculture Minister Mary-Anne Thomas to confirm these exemptions would remain in place, she immediately referred the matter to her department.

Farmers are already dealing with ill-considered regulations and reforms that define manure as industrial waste, open up state's sensitive waterways to public camping and cause chaos within the CFA.

It's time to focus on building rural communities, not tying them up in more red tape.

NSW takes a strong stand on protecting its environment and communities

Loosen grip on Choke



Rampant lower Murray irrigation development is unsustainable, argues **MELINDA PAVEY**

FOR NSW the key issue around potential deliverability shortfalls in the Lower Murray, is the declining health of the Barmah Choke.

The NSW Government is not responsible for the expansion of permanent planting in the Lower Murray and is not interested in socialising this problem and destroying the Barmah Choke whilst further disadvantaging NSW Murray General Security licence holders.

The NSW Government does not support any new infrastructure, such as a pipe or new channel, through or around the Barmah Choke. The NSW Government has made it clear we will not tolerate any further degradation of the Barmah Choke. Just as Victoria has introduced limits on the Goulburn River to protect the local environment — a move NSW supported — we will do what we must to protect our environment and our communities.

A recent study released by the Murray Darling Basin Authority has highlighted shortfall risks for irrigators in the Lower Murray as a result of the declining capacity of the Barmah

Choke. I grew up not far from the Choke and have visited the area since I became NSW's Water Minister.

I've seen for myself the severe erosion being caused by running the river at near full capacity — up to 8500 megalitres a day — to meet increasing environmental and horticultural demands downstream.

The new demand for water is largely a result of the almost 100,000ha of permanent planting — predominantly nuts — based in Victoria and South Australia, which make up around 85 per cent of all permanent plantings in the Lower Murray system. These plantings need ongoing access to water and are vulnerable to even short periods of interrupted supply.

Right now, if there was a major breakout as a result of pushing the Choke too hard, or running the river at or beyond capacity, it could be catastrophic to downstream communities.

A breakout could mean the river would effectively have to be shut off while repairs that could take months are completed. To prevent this outcome, we need to look at both infra-



At limit: Overlooking the Barmah-Millewa Choke, Koondrook-Perricoota.

Picture: YURI KOUZMIN

structure and policy solutions that address the damage that has been caused to the Choke to prevent a major breakout and the potential for the Lower Lakes to move up to Murraybank Caravan Park.

We maintain our position that channel capacity on the River Murray is shared equally between NSW and Victoria. While this is not specified in the Murray Darling Basin Agreement, it is consistent with most other sharing terms spelt out, including storage in dams, river losses, and contribution to South Australian entitlement flows.

Other lower Murray States have developed irrigation industries to be-

yond the capacity of the choked-up Choke, and now seek to limit development in NSW.

I have a simple message for anyone who thinks they can keep developing greenfield sites below the Choke — NSW cannot and will not come to your rescue if there are shortfalls.

We will continue to work with our irrigation water delivery companies like Murray Irrigation to optimise water delivery through the Chokes in a way that minimises losses so those losses can be reallocated to NSW Murray irrigators.

• **Melinda Pavey is NSW Water Minister**

Bird shooting doesn't fly in a modern society

OUR native ducks and rural communities have been spared.

Victoria's recreational bird shoot is delayed, now set to commence in May and run for three weeks.

But whether it's three months, three weeks or three days, most believe bird shooting has no place in a modern society.

Less than half of 1 per cent of the population shoot birds. Not a single Victorian electorate has more than 2.48 per cent of voters who shoot birds. Most electorates have between zero and half of 1 per cent.

Conversely, the latest Ucomps poll (January 2021) shows the majority of Victorians want bird shooting banned and the strongest support for a ban

Duck shooting does not deliver what it promises, argues **KERRIE ALLEN**

came from regional areas — with good reason. According to ballistics experts, at least one in four of the tens of thousands of birds shot each year — even in "restricted" seasons — will be wounded only, flapping away to die painful deaths over days or weeks (why other states have banned it).

Many farmers are realising the benefits of ducks: they eat algae and the real crop pests (why they are used overseas to help rice farming). They even eat liver fluke.

From an economic perspective, a 2019 government survey of duck

shooters showed their alleged spend fell 46 per cent across Victoria between 2013 and 2019.

In the town of Kerang the fall was sharper at 62 per cent, in Swan Hill 54 per cent and Pyramid Hill fell off the list of mentions. Neither the Loddon, Buloke nor Colac-Otway areas made the 2019 list either. Greater Bendigo fell 64 per cent while the West Wimmera, Hindmarsh and Corangamite local government areas seemingly fell to oblivion from their already low alleged duck shooter spend levels in 2013. These shooters surveys don't

count the cost of bird shooting to community either.

Independent economists report duck shooting is detrimental. The costs of bird shooting include loss of tourism, loss of ability to work from home near it (and far more people live near waterways these days), and for shift workers to sleep.

Bird shooting sends children into tears, horses through fences and farmers into high trespass alert. And let's not forget the taxpayer dollars pouring into attempts to monitor this minority choice of recreation.

There's a better way.
• **Kerrie Allen is spokeswoman for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting**

Report illegal hunting

Illegal hunting and irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated. It is dangerous and can put people, property, livestock and wildlife at risk.

Illegal hunting includes:

- hunting at night for game or using a spotlight to hunt game
- shooting game on or across private property without permission
- hunting without the appropriate licence

If you see or hear illegal hunting activities, call 000 while it is happening. Record time, date, activity, exact location, description of person(s) and vehicle.

To report illegal hunting, scan the QR code, visit gma.vic.gov.au or call the GMA on 136 186 or your local Police station.



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