

Concern wetlands closures fall short

REGIONAL Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc (RVOTDS) welcomed the closure of the 32 wetlands to protect threatened species, but slammed the Victorian Government for ignoring evidence put to it, to close a small list of additional waterways for other “critically important” reasons.

The not-for-profit recently submitted to the minister, a list of 26 public duck-shooting sites it requested be closed not just for the presence of threatened species, but for aboriginal culture, proximity to residents, and public health or safety concerns.

Six of these requests have been fully granted and two partially, on the basis of protecting threatened species. However, none were granted on the basis of Indigenous culture, proximity to residents, or health and safety or social and economic reasons.

RVOTDS spokesperson, Kerrie Allen, said, “My question is this. How many tens of thousands of Victoria’s public waterways do less than half of one percent of the population who like to shoot birds, need to be able to shoot on? And what is the mental, physical, social and economic cost to everyone else?”

“Shooting hampers tourism and more popular (and financially beneficial) pastimes such as boating, fishing, and birdwatching. Incessant gunfire from duck shooters’ shotguns is audible within three kilometers, a nuisance (legal term) which has an adverse impact on people’s mental health as well as their ability to earn a living. Eco tourism businesses are forced to close. Shift workers cannot sleep. People cannot work from home. Farmers cannot attend their crops, irrigation pumps nor stock, for fear of being shot. Ammunition

(sometimes lead) lands on rooves which collect water supplies.”

RVOTDS said feedback from regional communities was critical, as no cost-benefit analysis has ever been done by authorities. Similarly, only two risk assessments have ever been done and both of those wetlands were closed to shooting (in 2019) as a result.

“We are appalled the government is not heeding community feedback, nor taking public health and safety more seriously.

“Closing a number of waterways to shooting would go a long way towards ensuring the regulator can actually perform its job and monitor the shooting, that nearby residents and landowners’ rights are protected, and that tourism could thrive in regional areas where it’s needed most.

“As most native bird shooting occurs on private land, removing these 26 public sites from the shooting list, does not restrict the shooters’ recreation. But it does benefit the wider community, significantly.

“The government appears to have very low regard for our native wildlife and regional communities. It can’t fund our hospitals, but it can find millions of dollars to support the minority recreation of native bird hunting, and it lets it happen at so many thousands of public waterways they can’t possibly be monitored.

“Why have a requirement in the *Game Management Authority Act* which states the regulator must consider social/economic impacts of hunting on community, when over the last decade it has continually refused to do so?” she said.