

A hit for hunting

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DUCK hunting could be banned in Victoria as early as next year, according to reports.

The reports suggest a parliamentary inquiry is set to recommend a total ban on recreational duck hunting in 2024.

The inquiry's final report isn't due to be tabled until August 31.

A full ban would bring Victoria into line with Queensland, NSW and Western Australia, where duck shooting is prohibited.

Field & Game Australia said in a statement the leak hinted at a potential ban on native game-bird hunting in Victoria, a position which "appeared to contradict the testimonies of experts who have predominantly spoken against such a ban".

"Professor Richard Kingsford, in his presentation to the committee, underlined habitat loss as the most pressing concern for waterbirds, rather than hunting."

He said the "fundamental issue" was the loss of waterbird habitat.

Prof Kingsford, a conservation biologist, said investigations were also carried out into whether there was any effect of hunting on those species, "and we found a very small effect, which was considerably overridden by the loss-of-habitat effect".

Field & Game said the leak prompted "growing speculation" about the motivations behind the disclosure.

"Some insiders believe that members of the committee, who are pushing for a complete ban on native game-bird hunting, released the report as a strategic move in an attempt to sway public opinion," the statement said.

"Critics argue that this is just a stepping stone for a more extensive agenda, as they suspect that these members intend to further the campaign against all hunting, fishing and animal agriculture."

Field & Game said the leak had "intensified the divide" between

conservationists, hunters and farming communities.

"Advocates of the hunting community argue that a ban on native bird hunting is not only unnecessary, but is a smokescreen for more comprehensive anti-animal-use objectives," the pro-hunting organisation said.

"With some information now in the open, it remains to be seen how the final report will address the myriad of concerns and whether it will diverge from the recommendations alluded to in the leaked document."

Anti-duck hunting group Regional Victorians Opposed to

Duck Shooting said it was pleased regional communities were being heard.

"The select committee seemed genuinely surprised at the gross lack of effective monitoring we provided in evidence," a spokesperson told *The Guardian*.

"Some committee members were also genuinely surprised at the millions of taxpayer dollars which have been channelled into hunt clubs when less than half of 1 per cent of the population hunt birds.

"Similarly, the millions of plastic shotgun components being pumped into Victorian ecosystems each bird shoot.

"It's time the Victorian Premier did the right thing by the rest of us. Other state premiers did so decades ago and their regional economies are doing great."

Member for Murray Plains Peter Walsh said the Coalition was "prepared to go the distance" to oppose any plans to end duck hunting.

Mr Walsh said if the leaked details were correct, the inquiry "has chosen to ignore a significant body of proven science and research which shows an annual season can be sustained without any short or long-term impact on duck populations".

"This is an emotive issue, but a formal inquiry must weigh all the evidence, and make its decisions

based on science, not social media," Mr Walsh said.

"Duck shooters are hunting for food, just as people have been doing for millennia, and because social media-savvy fringe elements have been able to distort the debate with a mixture of questionable material and making a lot of noise in a small space, the truth has been pushed into the background."