



*Australian native wood duck. Photo courtesy Eleanor Dilley.*

NEWS

## **Tarrangower Times Let's RECLAIM OUR STATE – New Campaign Launched**

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Editor - 4 min read

### **Regional Victorians have been ignored in new moves to update the state's hunting regulations.**

A meeting with non-hunting stakeholders last week flagged several overdue reforms but did nothing to address longstanding concerns: too many hunting grounds, too close to homes and businesses, and the three-month duck shooting season is excessive.

Officials from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) had no answer when asked why the number of duck shooting sites had not been slashed to reflect the dramatic drop in shooter numbers. The number of active duck shooters has plunged 90 per cent since the 1980s, from an estimated 100,000 to 8,000 last year (or 13,000 pre-COVID). Yet the number of public State Game Reserves (where the public are restricted so shooters can shoot with no-one around) has actually INCREASED to 200.

And there are thousands of other (non-State Game Reserve) public lakes, streams, creeks, wetlands, reservoirs and rivers open to shooters too. No government authority has been able to estimate their number, or provide a legal basis for their use as hunting zones. It's impossible to monitor shooting at so many sites. And

other users of these wetlands and waterways are effectively locked out for a quarter of the year.

Historical records recently revealed by the Game Management Authority (GMA) show duck season has expanded 50 per cent - from eight weeks to 12 weeks - in recent decades.

The number of 'game' duck species legally hunted has jumped from five in 1958 to eight in recent years. Two of these are now in such trouble they're listed as threatened species, forcing Victoria to belatedly protect them.

Metro voters increasingly choose regional Victorian holidays in pandemic times. But for a quarter of the year a country sojourn will be marred by the crack of shotguns from before dawn till after dusk and the sight of dead and dying native birds.

It's time we called out the noise pollution (as well as the poor behaviour and inevitable cruelty) of duck shooting season. And we're tired of paying taxes to prop up this unwelcome activity.

The GMA – which documents obtained by FOI show is led by duck shooters – has commissioned expensive new helicopter surveys and computer modelling in a last-ditch effort to pretend shooting ducks is 'sustainable', despite continuing decline of waterbird numbers, even in La Nina conditions.

GMA also has a program to trap live ducks and x-ray them for shrapnel. They say the wounding (non-kill) rate is around 30 per cent but they want to measure it before doing anything about it.

Just before Christmas the State government quietly announced another \$5.3m 'Sustainable Hunting Action Plan' which commits to such programs and promotes the unpopular activity for another four years. Surely, it's time we had a Sustainable Hospitals Action Plan, a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan or even a Sustainable Birdwatching Action Plan. Why is hunting so special? In the first year birdwatching data was collected (2019), over 1.4 million tourists birdwatched in our country and spent \$2.88 billion\*. (This birdwatching tourist revenue is what regional areas are missing out on, because unsurprisingly, studies show most tourists avoid shooting areas).

The plan mentions no increase in licence fees to make game hunters pay for these burgeoning costs of researching and 'managing' their hobby. Hunting bureaucrats spruik controversial 'economic benefits' from duck shooting. Government shows no interest in holding a real cost-benefit analysis of the negative impacts of duck season.

Public consultation on the proposed regulations is scheduled for February-March this year but it seems the government's mind is largely made up in favour of shooters.

Regional voters have long been told to wait for the DJPR policy review when the hunting regulations sunset every 10 years. That time has arrived but it seems this review offers little joy for regions. Housing and community developments have expanded in recent decades but no government agency will undertake a safety or amenity review of duck shooting sites nearby.

Regional residents have no way to seek an end to duck shooting at even one location despite the gross over-supply of shooting sites. Well-argued community appeals to create a bird sanctuary at Cairn Curran, Lakes Bullrush and Linlithgow, and Richardson's Lagoon have hit a brick wall. DJPR and GMA say it's a land classification issue but the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning says it doesn't handle hunting policy.

Our alliance of more than 70 groups and growing – First Nations Clans, business, union, wildlife, animal welfare and environment groups - recently placed advertisements in newspapers across the state seeking a ban on duck shooting.

In light of this ever increasing support, today RVOTDS announce our new campaign to RECLAIM OUR STATE.

*\*Tourism Research Australia National Visitor Survey year ending December 2019.*

***Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc.***