

It's the 2022 showdown and whose guns are blazing?

IN ever increasing numbers, the voices of multiple First Nations Clans, businesses, unions, environment and wildlife groups, are shouting out in support of regional Victorians' plea for a ceasefire on the gunning down of native birds.

Half page ads running in major papers, show an alliance of more than 60 organisations, representing hundreds of thousands of Victorians, expecting elected members of parliament to heed their citizens and legislate an end to the annual recreational shooting of Australia's native waterbirds – many species unique to our country.

And here's why.

Each year, the Victorian government allows thousands of normally peaceful public waterways to become what many call blood baths for up to three months, due to what is essentially a hobby for a small minority and no longer acceptable to most.

Known as duck hunting to some people, the practice is detrimental to others including those living nearby who call it by a different name – a living hell.

From an indigenous people's perspective, many areas used

for shooting are of significant cultural heritage. Recreational native waterbird shooting is not compatible with numerous First Nations Clans' cultural aspirations. To some, duck species may be a sacred cultural totem.

Sue Williams, spokesperson for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting inc (RVOTDS), the group co-ordinating the ads said, "to witness living wildlife is a major reason tourists are drawn to the regions, whilst the violence of shotguns and the cruelty inflicted on dwindling bird populations turns people away – it's well known in the tourism industry as an unacceptable loss to regional economies". (1)

Sounding alarm bells, the 39th annual Eastern Australia Waterbird Survey, which is the largest, most long term dataset available regarding waterbird indices, shows waterbirds have declined up to 90% in just four decades. "Game" bird numbers dropped by over half (58%) from just the previous year, now only 25% of the long term average. There is little if any breeding despite the La Nina effect and accompanying rain.

RVOTDS was one of several stakeholders who made a submission to Game Management Authority on Thursday, calling for a close of the 2022 recreational shooting season of native duck and stubble quail. In it, are the testimonies of those significantly adversely impacted.

Recreational duck shooting is banned in QLD, ACT, NSW and WA. In Victoria, less than half of one percent of the population are licensed to shoot ducks while professional polls have repeatedly shown most Victorians – particularly regionalians – want the activity banned.

In 2021 Victoria was the only state to allow recreational shooting of native stubble quail.

Paul Haw, Yung Balug Keeping Place and Wetland Tours said, "It's more than just shooting waterbirds, it's the destruction of aboriginal cooking mounds by (duck shooters) camping on them, burying rubbish, burning scarred trees at their campfires and causing loss of habitat around the wetland. It's sad to see protected species of birds floating to the water's edge".

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc.