

# MAYOR UNDER FIRE

## ENVIRONMENT

BY DAVID CHAPMAN

CRITICISM of Loddon Shire Council's decision to support duck hunting is growing, with the Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting questioning the mayor's motives in championing the move.

Loddon Shire mayor Dan Straub put forward a notice of motion that council make a submission to the Select Committee Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements supporting duck shooting at a recent council meeting.

The positive economic impact of duck hunting on the local community, its positive mental health impact

and that duck hunting was a long-standing tradition for many families within the shire, as well as visitors to the shire would be raised in the submission.

The decision has attracted several letters to the *Bendigo Advertiser* from people criticising Cr Straub's motives due to his previous roles as president of the Victorian

Duck Hunters Association and as a candidate for the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers party.

The Regional Victorian Opposed to Duck Shooting group released a statement on Monday expressing its dismay at Loddon Shire Council's stance.

"To say we're concerned with Loddon Council's re-

cent vote to support native bird shooting would be an understatement," the statement read.

"It would appear to many the Loddon mayor - widely known as a keen duck shooter and ex-president of a duck shooting club - is using his position to promote personal interests.

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# Critics slam mayor's move

BY DAVID CHAPMAN

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"We know most regional Victorians oppose the unnecessary cruel slaughter of our native ducks and quail, and many feel intimidated to speak out, due to a loud pro-shooting minority."

The group said less than half of one per cent of the population shoot birds and that shooting had a terrible impact on the mental health of those forced to live with or witness it.

"And economically, our rural economies are largely dependent on tourism which shooting thwarts," the group said. "Such support is not in line with council's objectives of promoting tourism or protecting the environment."

However, Cr Straub addressed the council about potential conflicts of interest ahead of its discussions on the motion at the April meeting.

"Earlier today I asked the council for a discussion around the appropriateness of me vacating the chair to deliver this motion," Cr Straub said.

"There was a general consensus that there was no requirement for me to vacate. I just wanted to make sure there was an understanding of proceedings with me delivering this notice of motion."

Cr Straub said at the council meeting that in documentation to support his motion he had tried to deliver as much detail as possible around sustainable measures to support future economic growth for the council's area.

He described duck hunting as a "way of life".

"That's how we in the duck hunting community look at it," Cr Straub said. "It's not just something we go and do here and there

- it's a way of life." He said his decision to put forward the motion came directly from comments made by, and conversations with, a supporting community that loved to get out in the natural environment and take part in a long-standing cultural tradition.

Cr Straub said duck hunting was supported by the objectives of the council plan to preserve and protect the local environment, support biodiversity and habitat and support tourism growth.

Cr Straub also pointed to a January 19 report in local media which found 83 per cent of people surveyed supported duck hunting in the shire.

However, the duck shooting opposition group claimed shooting deters tourists, duck numbers had fallen to just 25 per cent of their long-term average and birdwatching was a booming business which was hampered by shooting.

"Over 1.4 million tourists birdwatched in our country (according to 2019 data), spending \$3 billion," group claimed.

Applications and comments to the inquiry close on May 8.

Cr Straub has been contacted for further comment.



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Mayor Dan Straub