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Gun risk is real for Victorians

Kerrie Allen



Think twice before visiting Victoria's public waterways this autumn.

From March to June, over half of the state's public wetland estate — about 280,000 ha — will open to people carrying firearms to shoot native birds for recreation. The sheer scale of Victoria's public land open to hunting is shocking. Perhaps that's why the government rarely discloses it.

The state's own hunting regulator didn't even seem to know. We asked it for years for an estimated number of hunting areas. The regulator had no answer, which raises the obvious question of how it monitors the activity.

The answer finally came from a senior government bureaucrat who also revealed that no safety-risk assessments had been done.

"Hunting is just like walking" she said, a claim that sits uneasily with the fact two public waterways in Mildura were closed to shooters in 2019 due to public safety concerns.

Concerns are widespread.

In a 2023 survey of more than 800 people, over half reported feeling unsafe when bird shooting occurred nearby.

Thoroughbred agistors described "freaked out" horses. Kayakers and birdwatchers abandoned activities. Campers reported unknowingly setting up near shooters, and leaving in distress. Interstate visitors said they were traumatised.

Descendants of the Kurnai people were blunt: "Shooting them, you're shooting our people." Families described boats of camouflaged men with guns near children enjoying water sports, injured birds limping from waterways, and a "warlike" atmosphere that disrupted sleep, livelihoods, and daily life.

Despite one in four Victorians living regionally, no Victorian minister has ever accepted an invitation to witness this firsthand. Non-hunting regional constituents are routinely denied access to the Premier to be heard.

Why are 99.5 per cent of Victoria's seven million people effectively locked out of over half our wetland area for a quarter of the year so that 0.5 per cent can fire shotguns at little native birds? A request submitted over a year ago asking Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos to exclude just 25 public areas to shooting has been ignored.

Any wonder regional communities feel snubbed by government, and Victoria's economic, environmental and safety credentials are plummeting?

Kerrie Allen is spokeswoman for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting