

**Submission  
No 1101**

## **INQUIRY INTO VICTORIA'S RECREATIONAL NATIVE BIRD HUNTING ARRANGEMENTS**

**Organisation:** Gippsland Environment Group Inc (GEG)

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Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

8 May 2023

**Gippsland Environment Group calls for the immediate end to recreational native bird hunting in Victoria.**

**Ecological impact of duck hunting**

Victoria is in the midst of an extinction crisis and thousands of water birds are under extreme stress. Long-term monitoring across Eastern Australia shows duck populations have not recovered after repeated years of drought and low rainfall.

Many State Game Reserves, where duck shooting takes place, are Ramsar-listed wetland sites. Wetlands are crucial for water birds – providing important feeding, nesting and roosting habitats. Since colonisation, wetlands have been drained and converted for agriculture and urban development. This has meant significant impacts on water bird populations, with many species declining in numbers and some becoming threatened or endangered.

RSPCA Victoria estimates more than 260,000 ducks were killed during the 2022 season – with a median wounding rate of 17% - or 44,636 ducks injured.

**First Nations Cultural Heritage**

Duck hunting for sport can have significant adverse impacts on cultural heritage values for First Nations peoples. GunaiKurnai people of Gippsland have profound traditional connections to water birds and their habitats. The GunaiKurnai creation story of Borun (Pelican) and Tuk (Musk Duck) helps explain “the bonds we have to our Country and reminds us that our ancestors are still watching over the landscape today.” Quote from: <https://gunaikurnai.org/our-culture/stories/>

**Duck Shooting should be a controlled action under the EPBC Act**

Notable threatened or non-game species at risk from hunters include: Australasian Bittern, Australian Painted Snipe, Brolga, Great and Intermediate Egrets, Hardheads, Australasian Shovelers, Blue-billed, Freckled, and Musk Ducks. In 2017, there were 113 Freckled Ducks (one of the world’s rarest species of waterbird) slaughtered by shooters. This only represents those found by activists but there may have been more.

Other listed fauna impacted by hunting disturbance include Gang-gang Cockatoo, Growling Grass Frog, Green and Golden Bell Frog, Grey-headed Flying Fox and Dwarf Galaxias.

### **Species identification**

As the species identification test only needs to be done once, some shooters may not have taken the test for 25 years. Juniors (12 to 17 years) & non-Australian residents are not required to sit the test.

The Game Management Authority (GMA) recently conducted a hunting knowledge survey which found that 80% of duck shooters couldn't tell the difference between 'game' and protected species, 87% failed the question on dispatch of wounded ducks, and 85% were unaware of the risk they pose to human safety.

Apart from being killed or injured, shallow wetland species like wading birds and shorebirds, are vulnerable to the disruption caused by hunting activities. Disturbed and stressed birds have to travel further to find suitable habitat and food. This is exhausting, and time-consuming and increases the birds' exposure to predators and other threats.

### **International agreements / migratory waterbird conservation**

Australia is a signatory to three international agreements that protect and recognise the importance of conserving migratory birds and their habitats: Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement, China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement & Republic of Korea-Australian Migratory Bird Agreement.

Migratory birds rely on wetland habitats around the Gippsland Lakes as critical stopover sites during their long-distance migration. Species around the Ramsar listed Gippsland Lakes in during duck hunting season include Latham's snipe, Sharp-tailed sandpiper, Curlew sandpiper, Eastern curlew, Whimbrel, Red knot, Bar-tailed godwit, Little tern, Fairy tern, Caspian tern. Hunting during their stay has negative impacts on their survival and migration success.

The Gippsland Lakes are a water bird refuge not only for international migratory birds, but also for wetland species during inland Australian droughts affecting the Murray-Darling Basin.

### **Restoring Wetlands**

Restoring wetlands and other water bird habitats is a major focus of many Landcare groups and conservation organizations in Gippsland. These efforts involve planting native vegetation, managing water levels, and controlling invasive species with the goal of promoting long-term health and sustainability. Allowing duck hunting is an insult to the groups involved in restoration works.

### **Nature's health effects**

There is growing evidence that spending time in nature has positive impacts on mental and physical health. More connection and greater awareness leads to more concern for the local environment. This positive influence is shattered by the hunting season. Local tourism is adversely affected due to the inaccessibility of wetlands for nature-based activities. In a recent poll, over 50% of Victorians surveyed indicated they do not visit regional areas during duck shooting due to safety concerns.

### **Safety**

Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning (DELWP) found that between 2000 and 2016, there were 51 hunting-related incidents in Victoria, including 12 fatalities and 39 non-fatal injuries. The report also noted that approximately one-third of these incidents involved duck hunting, with many of the injuries caused by pellets from shotguns.

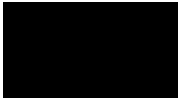
It is common for duck hunting to be associated with the consumption of alcohol. This adds to all risk factors associated with hunting.

The Game Management Authority has a conflict of interest, being simultaneously the promoter and the regulator of duck shooting. With the GMA being compromised and ineffective, local volunteers across Victoria have had to resort to monitoring the impact of duck hunting on local water bird populations and their habitats. This monitoring activity puts locals at risk from hunters.

**Slaughtering native water birds makes zero sense**

An independent economic analysis of DEPI's "Estimating the economic impact of hunting in Victoria in 2013" by Dr Kristy Jones 2016, found no evidence that duck shooting contributes to Victoria's economy. Measurements of the economic benefits of duck hunting rely on figures given by duck hunters on their expenditure – and do not take into account that other tourists are 50% less likely to visit regional areas during duck hunting season.

The 2020 "Economic contribution of recreational hunting in Victoria" DJPR report showed that 96% of hunters participate in other outdoor recreation activities in regional Victoria. These include camping, recreational target shooting, fishing and four-wheel driving - all providing the same personal benefits as hunting.



Gippsland Environment Group Inc.

