

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

Organisation: Geelong Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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Submission from the Geelong Field Naturalists Club Inc. to the:

Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements
Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Most Australian states have stopped recreational duck shooting.

The Geelong Field Naturalists Club believes that Victoria should also stop the unnecessary and environmentally destructive activity of recreational duck shooting and quail hunting.

The Geelong Field Naturalists Club strongly urges that the State Government legislates to ban future duck shooting seasons and the hunting of Stubble Quail.

Why duck and quail hunting in Victoria should cease.

1. Environmental Considerations

A) Significant disturbance to non-target species

Duck hunting involves groups of hunters entering wetlands (mostly Crown Land Reserves) to harass waterbirds into flight so that they can be killed using shotguns. The process works most effectively when birds are forced to continuously circle over the wetland and not be allowed to return to the water. All birds within the wetland, not just the duck species targeted for slaughter, are forced to remain aloft by the continued noise and destruction from the shotguns. It is normally illegal to harass wildlife in this manner. Migratory species are forced to burn up precious fat reserves required for their long-distance international migrations a few weeks after duck season begins.

To submit a range of migratory bird species or threatened waterfowl to this level of disturbance for the sole pleasure of a small percentage of the Victorian population is unjustified.

B) Killing of non-target species

Most killing of non-target species is a result of misidentification by the hunter. Each hunting season results in the accidental illegal killing of native birds that are listed as non-target duck species. The nominated non-target duck species vary each season with changes in abundance and concentrations of numbers. Given the hazard posed by hunting to populations of some threatened species of waterfowl, such as Blue-billed Ducks, Freckled Ducks, Hardhead and Australasian Shovelers, the threat from hunting cannot be justified. Hunters must only score 85% identification accuracy when obtaining a game licence to hunt ducks – this indicates up to 1 in 7 ducks may be misidentified.

A similar situation exists with hunters shooting Stubble Quail – the only quail species legally allowed to be hunted in Victoria. Species that are visually similar include Brown Quail, Button-quail species, endangered Plains-wanderers and other small brownish grassland birds that are easily mistaken for Stubble Quail (and there is no test to establish that the hunter can distinguish these species).

C) Environmental degradation

The overall detrimental physical impact by hunting on the environment is only moderate, but the problem is that much of the impact is cumulative. Each shotgun blast discharges metal shot into the wetland (no longer lead shot, but still a non-natural substance that will persist in the wetlands for many decades to be ingested by swans and other birds that feed on submerged vegetation). Along with the metallic shot, plastic wadding and the cartridge case are ejected. Few shooters pick up their ejected cartridges and the wadding is blasted well clear of the shooter so it cannot be retrieved. The shot, wadding and casings are not biodegradable and remain in the environment for decades. The accumulation of these products over long periods of time has potential for detrimental impacts on wildlife in the wetlands.

2. Animal Ethics

A) Unjustified Cruelty

Various studies into the wounding of ducks during hunting season show that during each duck season, significant numbers of birds are wounded and not retrieved. All birds on wetlands where hunting occurs are exposed to panic and on-going harassment from the noise of continual gunfire and the extra human presence in wetlands during hunting. The disturbance by the hunters prevents safe roosting or landing of birds in flight.

Across all areas of farming, the keeping animals in captivity, or the capture of native animals for animal research, detailed checks and procedures plus licences are legally required to show that animals are not subjected to unnecessary pain, suffering or stress. These detailed regulations flow from the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1986) and should apply in all areas of interaction between animals and humans. Before the Geelong Field Naturalists Club can set a trap to capture, record and release small mammals unharmed, we must present detailed procedures to an Animal Ethics Committee. We then require a Scientific Procedures Licence and other permits to operate on public land. At all times the trapped animals must be exposed to a minimum of stress and never harmed. We would not be allowed to operate our licence if animals were regularly injured and left to suffer. This is in stark contrast to the ethics regime applied to hunting our native birds. There can

be no justification for the suffering and trauma needlessly inflicted on birds during duck or quail hunting.

3. Economic cost of subsidising hunting

A) Cost of management of hunting.

It is difficult to decipher the income generated by the approximately 65 000 game licence holders to compare with the State Government grants to the Game Management Authority that total around \$9 million. The true cost to the State that is incurred by hunting season should also include the wages of the many Parks Victoria staff, police and others that are tasked specifically to oversee the compliance and management of hunting. This often involves overtime and weekend work at penalty rates.

B) Cost to adequately supervise duck hunting

Currently, the combined staff of the GMA, Parks Victoria and other authorities can only oversee hunting at a tiny proportion of the wetlands open to duck shooting. To effectively regulate hunting activities would be prohibitively expensive.

C) Exaggerated economic benefits claims by duck hunters

The hunting fraternity often quote the injection of funds into regional areas from hunters as a justification for this subsidisation of hunting. The often-quoted *Estimating the economic impact of hunting in Victoria in 2013* publication is full of dubious, inaccurate or invalid analysis of the survey data that were collected. It cannot be given credibility. The State Government subsidises a small proportion of our population to hunt of our native birds. There is very little economic return for this largess.

4. Impact upon non-hunters

A) Public land should be safely available to all members of the public.

During the duck season, a large number of wetlands are no longer able to be visited by non-hunters for much of the day. Bird watchers, fishers, botanists and those studying aquatic invertebrates are unable to visit wetlands for most daylight hours. Eliminating duck hunting will allow better access to wetlands by the wider public.

B) Safety of the general public

The urban sprawl in many areas has resulted in several major wetlands now being very close to residential or other buildings, increasing the risk of danger to the residents from stray shots. Similarly, any members of the public (including children) inadvertently entering wetlands during hunting season are placed in direct danger.

Many members of the public experience some degree of stress or panic from the noise of shotguns being discharged. Urban encroachment means many wetlands, such as Reedy Lake and Hospital Swamps in the Lake Connemara State Wildlife Reserve, are so close to urban zones that the noise of gunfire by hunters is now easily audible by nearby residents. This is distressing to some residents and their children. They become unnerved by the possible danger from nearby gunfire or by the thought of harm being done to local birds.

A detailed risk assessment, with accompanying risk reduction strategies, should be completed for all major duck hunting sites and sites near urban areas. Stopping duck hunting is the easiest way to resolve these problems.

Summary

The Geelong Field Naturalists Club acknowledges the substantial contributions to wetland conservation made by several key hunting organisations. We accept that a majority of hunters are knowledgeable and abide by the current regulations and have a genuine love of the outdoors.

However, the arguments for the continued hunting of duck and quail have been rejected by the vast majority of Victorians for quite some time:

- The killing of native birds on public land and then describing it as harvesting is disingenuous—harvesting implies the sowing, care and raising of crops.
- No longer does anybody need to shoot ducks or quail to help stave off family hunger.
- Those who still strongly feel the urge to kill animals and eat them can hunt rabbits, hares, goats or deer, creating an environmental benefit by reducing these pests.

The arguments to end duck and quail hunting are compelling.

Most other Australian states have already done so and Victoria should follow their example.

This submission is a combined effort from members of the GFNC Conservation Subcommittee.

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