

**Submission
No 1531**

INQUIRY INTO VICTORIA'S RECREATIONAL NATIVE BIRD HUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation: Friends of Mallacoota

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From: Friends of Mallacoota <friendsofmallacoota@gmail.com>
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To: nativebirdhunting
Cc: Karen Mander
Subject: Parliamentary Enquiry into Bird Hunting in Victoria

Submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry into Bird Hunting in Victoria

Friends of Mallacoota is a community group of more than 150 members who are focused on protecting the environment and biodiversity of the area in which we live. This includes Croajingolong National Park in particular, but also includes all other areas of environmental importance in East Gippsland. For many years we have worked to protect our flora and fauna, in particular endangered species. This includes waterbirds threatened by activities carried out during the duck and quail hunting season sanctioned by the Victorian State Government.

We believe that duck and quail hunting should be banned in Victoria on both conservation and humane grounds.

There should be no tolerance of shooting native wildlife in this day and age. Our environment and ecosystems are under enough stress without pandering to the small number of people who enjoy killing and maiming native animals for so-called sport.

It has been claimed that duck hunting has economic benefits to regional areas but a review entitled "Estimating the Economic Impact of Hunting in Victoria in 2013" by Dr. Kristy Jones, February 2016, thoroughly discredited this claim.

Some of our members know first hand that people living in rural areas can be at risk of injury from shooters and are plagued by the noise of guns discharging from dawn to dusk. Macleod Morass in Bairnsdale has a number of suburban properties backing onto it and local newspapers have carried stories about noise pollution and the inconvenience of not being able to safely walk or exercise their dogs during the hunting season. This is a RAMSAR designated wetland and should be a sanctuary for waterbirds, not a killing field.

Macleod Morass was one of four waterways surveyed where toxic lead shot was found to be a serious pollutant. Lead shot is officially banned in duck hunting but is still widely used. Amazingly it is legal to use it in shooting Stubble Quail which is also hunted in Macleod Morass. You are referred to the 2018 CSIRO Report "Heads in the Sand" which found that lead levels were 'well above food safety guidelines' in a number of places in Victoria. Another problem with the people who shoot birds is their proliferation of litter, particularly the plastic casings of cartridges.

Lead shot poses a threat to humans and other non-target species when ingested. A case in point is the Wedge-tailed Eagle which readily eats carrion. This species is already under serious threat as evidenced by recent court cases in East Gippsland where a farm worker was jailed and a farmer fined for poisoning this protected species. Duck and quail hunting has the same outcome.

Respected organisations such as the RSPCA and the Australian Veterinary Association have condemned the cruelty involved in shooting native birds. Many are wounded and suffer a slow and painful death. In modern Australia surely this is completely unacceptable. Perpetrators would be fined and/or jailed if they did this to domestic pets or farm animals. Why is it different for waterbirds and quail?

Of great concern to our members is the killing of protected ducks and other birds. Many rare species such as the Blue-winged Shoveller and Hardhead were shot during the 2022 hunting season.

The above mismanagement and lack of action must be sheeted back to the Game Management Authority. According to its website this Government appointed authority is supposed to 'regulate through education, research and enforcement to achieve responsible and sustainable game hunting in Victoria'.

It has consistently failed to prosecute illegal shooters, opting instead to harass volunteers trying to protect wounded birds rather than monitoring shooters acting unlawfully. Its Game Officers shy away from prosecuting those who break the law. Infamously nothing happened after the wilful destruction of everything from swallows to swans in the Koorangie Marshes in 2017. Quite rightly the GMA Manager of Compliance resigned. Further, the Pegasus Economics Inquiry in 2017 recommended that the authority be disbanded. The Friends of Mallacoota wholeheartedly agree.

There can be no excuse to continue allowing our native birdlife to be killed and maimed. Duck and quail shooting should be outlawed immediately.

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