

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**2 March 2022**

### **Why is Victoria's duck hunting season still happening in 2022?**

Wildlife Victoria, the state's wildlife emergency response service has criticised the Victorian Government following the weekend announcement from the Game Management Authority regarding the 2022 duck hunting season.

The Authority has announced a full-length three-month season that will commence at 8am on 16 March. The bag limit is four birds per day, and the Blue-winged Shoveler and Hardhead may not be hunted as both species are listed as threatened.

Wildlife Victoria CEO, Lisa Palma said the organisation and its supporters were devastated by the news.

"In this day and age, when we know duck numbers are significantly reduced, the Victorian public have indicated they are opposed to duck shooting and other states across Australia have banned this barbaric event, it beggars belief that the Government is yet again allowing another season to take place here in Victoria."

Western Australia, NSW and Queensland have all outlawed duck shooting.

This season, the Game Management Authority has permitted hunting of the Pacific Black Duck, Mountain Duck, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, and Wood Duck.

"As the CEO of the wildlife welfare organisation that led last year's in-field duck triage facility, I can tell you from personal experience that the practice of duck shooting is incredibly cruel. Too many ducks are fatally injured and then left to suffer a long slow death," said Ms Palma.

Volunteer animal welfare advocates retrieve injured ducks after they have been shot and wounded and take them to Wildlife Victoria's field based veterinary triage facility for assessment.

"My team and I will be there again this year, working to assess and treat waterbird injuries, with the constant sound of gunshots as our backdrop," said Ms Palma.

"Sadly, in the majority of cases, the kindest thing we can do for those ducks that get brought to us, is for our veterinarians to end their suffering by ethically euthanising them."

"They are such delicate creatures. It is truly awful to see how broken and damaged they are at the deliberate hand of a shooter who has not performed a clean kill."

Ms Palma said that duck shooting was a cruel and unnecessary practice that had no place in modern society.

"We know there are significant declines in our precious native duck species. We know that shooters often can't tell one duck species from another, and we know that five out of eight 'game' species are in significant long-term decline."

"Why on earth is this event still happening in Victoria?" Ms Palma questioned.

In 2021, Wildlife Victoria responded to more than 3,000 enquiries from the public regarding duck welfare. The organisation and its state-wide network of volunteers went to the aid of 7,118 ducks.

## **Dr Natasha Bassett's reflections on attending duck hunting season**

*I'm a veterinarian that has regularly attended the opening of Victoria's duck hunting season for years. This year is my eighth season. Last year I attended as Wildlife Victoria's Lead Triage Vet.*

*Even amongst my fellow veterinarians, aversion to the task of fronting up and bearing witness to the catastrophic fallout from this so-called 'sport' remains high. If not aversion, then at the least, apathy. I understand this. Until 2015, my first year in the triage vet role, I suppose I was like many other Victorians that had no idea what went on across Victoria's public and private wetlands for 90 days of each year. Actually, I wouldn't have known a native duck from any other. I suppose without thinking, I bought into the rhetoric of 'management' of native species – that someone, somewhere, knew best and that if 'they' allowed native ducks to be shot, then who was I to question this?*

*The only reason I went to the wetlands in the first place was due to a personal appeal from a vet nurse I worked with who had volunteered in the triage tent for the past 20 years. They were desperate for a vet, she said. She would look after me in the field and show me the ropes. So I arrived on the wetlands with a full vet kit and but no idea. Now I'm a little more clued in but the sense of shock I feel as a vet is fresh, every year.*

*The opening shots are the worst. All I can think as I look out across the water and dawn sky is how beautiful it all is, how peaceful. There is only a slight sense of foreboding as you pick out the figures of shooters waiting in the water. When the first volley starts, we watch but it's hard not to turn away. A few birds plummet like stones – clean kills, lucky them. The worst is watching a duck skip a beat in flight, slowly drop altitude, but still make it out and over these wetlands to some remote location where it will later die a slow death from infection or predation as it loses the capacity to stay afloat or fly. Some drop altitude more quickly and make for the reeds. To watch them struggle to get to cover in their shock and confusion, beating helplessly against the water, well, it makes me sick. The brutality is compounded by triumphant whooping of shooters, by the fact they clearly don't care about the suffering, that they may indeed even enjoy it.*

*For the birds that make it into the triage tent thanks to the dedication and courage of the rescuers in the water and on the shoreline, the outcome is usually not great. Any bird who can be caught is never in a good way, though without our intervention they would survive for days or weeks afterwards before succumbing to their injuries. When they come into triage, they have an expression that I can only describe as bewilderment. One minute they were flying, the next – this. We part the glistening down on gently and slide in a sedative injection to ease the next part of the process. Once they are anaesthetised we assess their injuries - what is repairable, what bears a poor prognosis for a wild bird dependent on flight and wading ability to survive and thrive.*

*Each individual shot pellet seems so small, so puny. But the typical picture we see is this – one shot shatters a hock or wrist joint, then higher up fractures the femur or the humerus or shoulder, then there are few peppering the main organs or lodged in the lungs and air sacs... or you get one wedged behind the eye or shattering the delicate structures of the bill. Add each of the bits of damage up from each of these puny pellets and you get a death sentence that gets paid in full only after days of suffering. Shotguns are not nice. The damage they do when fired into a flock of fast moving birds is wantonly brutal. There is no sportsmanship to this. There is some sense of relief in being able to assist a humane death by lethal injection, but the strain this puts on our vet team is profound because the whole situation is So Damn Unnecessary.*

*Whilst other states have banned this 'sport', the travesty prevails here. I truly believe that if Victorians knew the extent of the animal cruelty and sheer wastefulness involved with this so-called sport, it would end now. Premier Bob Carr wrote to our own Dan Andrews in 2019, encouraging him to do the very same. And yet, despite the fact that the numbers of active shooters in this state falls year upon year, we still have this travesty where a group of people is allowed to run amok in areas that would normally be protected, aiming at (though usually not cleanly dispatching) species that would ordinarily be protected.*

*Each duck that passes through our hands and into a body bag is grieved by the team, though sometimes we are too busy at that moment to do more than jot some details down, and capture photos documenting the injuries. We invite the media into the tent to bear witness and many of them*

*leave in tears, knowing that what have just recorded will be deemed “too graphic” to air on the nightly news. If I could, I would find a way to share exactly what I see as I work in the tent – the sheer beauty and will to live of our native duck species. Or how about the ludicrous splash of colour flicking across the head of a Pink-Eared Duck – how can that vibrant a pink, like 80s eyeliner, be found in nature? Yet here it is, found on one miraculous 400g package of beating heart and bright eye struggling to hold onto life on my clumsy trestle table in a tent on a muddy shoreline.*

*In 2017 – the year of the Koorangie Massacre when we had ducks lined up in triage waiting to be euthanised, including many threatened species and birds that couldn’t possibly be mistaken for ducks, the lovely vet nurse who had first gently encouraged me to the wetlands, had had enough. Towards the end of the weekend as we amassed bodies and catalogued injuries and spoke to media and the authorities, she said “that’s it, I can’t do it anymore”. I promised then that I would carry on until this ridiculous, wasteful nonsensical slaughter is banned in the State of Victoria.*

**Dr. Natasha Bassett**  
**Wildlife Victoria Lead Veterinarian**

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### **About Wildlife Victoria**

- Wildlife Victoria is a not-for-profit wildlife Emergency Response Service that has been operating for 35 years as an independent, not-for-profit organisation focused on the welfare of Australia's unique wildlife.
- In 2021, Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service received more than 100,000 requests for assistance and supported almost 90,000 sick, injured or orphaned native animals.
- Wildlife Victoria educates the community about wildlife, and helps the community manage wildlife incidents.
- Wildlife Victoria advocates for wildlife whenever their welfare is under threat or compromised.