

Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

May 2023



Wildlife Victoria Submission

Table of Contents

- 1. Summary 2

- 2. About Wildlife Victoria 3
 - 2.1 Wildlife Victoria Operations 4
 - 2.2 Wildlife Victoria Activities during Duck Shooting season 6

- 3. Considerations 8
 - 3.1 The operation of annual native bird hunting seasons 8
 - 3.2 Arrangements in other Australian jurisdictions 20
 - 3.3 Environmental Sustainability and Impact on Amenity 22
 - 3.4 Social and Economic Impact 29

- 4. Conclusion 41

1. Summary

Wildlife Victoria provides a submission to The Select Committee for the Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. Having provided Victoria with a wildlife emergency response service for 35 years - including attendance in field during the Duck Hunting season in the form of operation of veterinary triage services for native waterbirds – Wildlife Victoria is well placed to provide an informed submission.

This submission addresses the Inquiry Terms of Reference across the four dimensions of:

- (a) The operation of annual native bird hunting seasons;
- (b) Arrangements in other Australian jurisdictions;
- (c) Environmental sustainability and impact on amenity; and,
- (d) Social and Economic Impact.

Across each dimension Wildlife Victoria provides both direct evidence and insight for consideration by The Select Committee and which supports the permanent cessation of Recreational Native Bird Hunting in Victoria – both native waterbirds and quail.

Wildlife Victoria's primary focus in this submission is on providing evidence and insight based on Wildlife Victoria's specific observations and experience and draws on Wildlife Victoria proprietary data. Wildlife Victoria notes that Victoria's waterbirds are in long term decline¹ however Wildlife Victoria refrains from making ecological assertions in this submission given our expertise is specific to the scope of Wildlife Victoria's operations and long term Victorian waterbird decline is confirmed by independent eminent scientific study.

Wildlife Victoria is opposed to Recreational Native Bird Hunting in any form and across any species and calls for its immediate and permanent end in Victoria

¹ <https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-adobe-websites/science/bees/ces/Eastern-Australia-waterbird-aerial-survey-2022-Final.pdf>

2. About Wildlife Victoria

Wildlife Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation that has provided Victoria with a statewide wildlife emergency response service for 35 years. The organisation's staffing consists of a head office, centralised 24/7 phone-based Emergency Response Service, and in field wildlife veterinarians and veterinary nurses together with a statewide network of over 1,200 trained wildlife rescue volunteers and wildlife rehabilitators. Wildlife Victoria provides its services at no cost to the Victorian public and is an ACNC registered charity governed by a Board of Directors.

In 2022, Wildlife Victoria responded to over 110,000 calls for help from the Victorian public for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife and assisted 62,000 native mammals, birds and reptiles across 410 species. Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service is staffed 24/7, 365 days a year and is experiencing a consistent 15% year on year increase in demand for services.

In addition to our wildlife operational response, through our education and advocacy programs Wildlife Victoria helps wildlife by providing people with the knowledge and skills they need for a peaceful and positive co-existence with wildlife, and facilitating positive community attitudes toward wildlife.

Wildlife Victoria operates across seven key functional areas and during the annual duck shooting season in Victoria undertakes a series of activities at no cost to the Victorian government or the Victorian taxpayer and which afford Wildlife Victoria a unique perspective across recreational native bird hunting arrangements.

2.1 Wildlife Victoria Operations



Emergency Response Service (“ERS”)

- Staffed 24/7 by trained Emergency Response Operators (“EROs”) who take calls from the public requesting help for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. In essence, the “000” for Wildlife in Victoria.
- EROs triage calls and in most instances will dispatch trained Wildlife Victoria wildlife volunteer first responders to attend. EROs also liaise with other agencies as needed and provide guidance and advice for callers.



Wildlife Travelling Veterinary Service (“TVS”)

- Staff veterinarians and vet nurses working 7 days per week from custom built 4WD vehicles fully equipped to conduct detailed in field assessment and triage. Operate from Regional Victoria hubs.
- Staff veterinarians and vet nurses operate both as in field first responders where a veterinarian is required and provide free of charge “house call” services to DEECA² licenced wildlife rehabilitators to assess and treat wildlife in rehabilitation



Volunteer Management

- Oversight of over 1,200 trained volunteer wildlife rescue first responders and licenced wildlife rehabilitators across the State.
- Provision of a full suite of growing volunteer services including mental health support, code of conduct and compliance, issuance of PPE, ongoing training and help desk services.



Grant Management

- Wildlife Victoria provides annual financial Grants to its volunteer base (both wildlife rescue volunteers and licenced wildlife rehabilitators) and is the primary funder for DEECA licenced wildlife rehabilitators in Victoria.
- Wildlife Victoria grants issued were \$800K in 2022 vs DEECA grants direct to rehabilitators of \$230K for same period.

² DEECA = Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action



Community Engagement

- Wildlife Victoria plays a key role in educating the Victorian public about wildlife. Wildlife Victoria runs education for schools and community groups.
- Wildlife Victoria attends community events and expos to engage with the public.



Advocacy

- A key and well-respected voice in advocating for wildlife, providing data based, nuanced and constructive additions to complex wildlife matters.



Sector Strategy and Engagement

- Provision of data-based advice to LGAs³ on wildlife matters
- Provision of expert advice and feedback to government departments with a focus on providing in field impact data and future policy recommendations
- Key member of DEECA's Wildlife Emergency Support Network
- Member of the Emergency Services Foundation (esf.com.au)
- Regular and ongoing engagement with sector participants and operational partnerships with such

³ LGAs = Local Government Authorities

2.2 Wildlife Victoria Activities during Duck Shooting season

During the annual Duck Shooting season in Victoria, Wildlife Victoria undertakes the following activities:

- Ahead of the duck shooting season, Wildlife Victoria provides input into season arrangements and advocates on behalf of native waterbirds.
- Wildlife Victoria conducts detailed planning and preparation, and refreshes its in field protocols. Wildlife Victoria selects its deployment team, conducts briefings and assigns roles and responsibilities. Wildlife Victoria manages logistics pre deployment such as accommodation bookings, purchase of equipment, meal arrangements, uniform provisioning, vehicle maintenance and transport arrangements.
- Wildlife Victoria deploys to one of the wetlands across the State for the opening week of Duck Shooting with its state of the art in field Wildlife Veterinary Triage facility. Wildlife Victoria veterinarians and vet nurses assess and treat any wounded birds left in field and assess any deceased birds left in field. All waterbirds, alive or deceased, are X-Rayed to determine cause of death and for evidentiary purposes. Wildlife Victoria's in field team commences work pre-dawn and finishes work after sunset in field. On return from field the Wildlife Victoria team deployed complete notes and daily reporting, conduct end of day team briefings and prepare equipment and supplies for next day.
- Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service triages incoming calls from the Victorian public for wounded ducks and allocates Case Numbers to wounded or deceased ducks reported from the Wildlife Victoria in field operations team. Emergency Response Service gathers statistics and provides reports.
- Wildlife Victoria maintains contact with both volunteer rescuers and authorities present with regards to operational response in field. Wildlife Victoria provides veterinary evidence including notes and X-Rays to the Game Management Authority where evidence of non compliance with duck hunting arrangements is noted.

- Wildlife Victoria responds to media queries regarding its in field operations and issues press releases to inform the public of activities and observations in field.
- Wildlife Victoria collates and issues post deployment reporting and shares this with other agencies and organisations for their information.
- Wildlife Victoria conducts a post incident review with its staff and arranges counselling as required. In accordance with Wildlife Victoria's workplace fatigue policy, deployed personnel are provided with time off regular duties post deployment.

3. Considerations

3.1 The operation of annual native bird hunting seasons

Wildlife Victoria has numerous and specific concerns regarding the operation of the annual native bird hunting seasons, based on our in field experience, data, and direct observations.

Wildlife Victoria is specifically concerned about:

- widespread wildlife welfare implications
- compliance and enforcement
- future changes in legislation
- impost to Wildlife Victoria

3.1.1 Wildlife welfare

The most enduring concern Wildlife Victoria has in regard to Recreational Native Bird Hunting in any form is that of wildlife welfare. The practice of shooting native species for sport, by nature, has profoundly negative impacts on wildlife welfare. From birds being left in the wetlands to die a slow and painful death from gunshot wounds, to surrounding wildlife being terrified by the sudden noise of gunshots next to their homes, there is no doubt that shooting animals for sport has deep and wide-ranging negative wildlife welfare implications.

Wildlife Victoria has direct evidence of native waterbirds being left in field alive with life threatening injuries. In the first 5 days of the 2023 Duck Shooting Season opening in Victoria at Wooroonook Lakes, near Donald, Wildlife Victoria's veterinarians were presented with 22 native waterbirds still alive. All needed euthanasia on welfare grounds to prevent suffering.

During the opening of the 2022 Duck Shooting Season in Victoria, Wildlife Victoria observed the mass abandonment by swans of their nests fleeing in fright at gunshot – leaving a substantive number of eggs

in nests unviable after being abandoned and, we contend, causing the loss of an entire generation of swans at Lake Bael Bael near Kerang.⁴

Given resource constraints Wildlife Victoria is typically present during only during the first 5 days of the Duck Shooting Season opening, and at only one wetland. Further, Wildlife Victoria is reliant on in field volunteer duck rescuers to present birds to the Wildlife Victoria team. The volume of waterbirds presented to Wildlife Victoria is therefore entirely contingent on:

- (a) Number of volunteer rescuers present, and
- (b) Number of Wildlife Victoria veterinarians present

During both the 2022 and 2023 Duck Shooting Season openings Wildlife Victoria observed very few duck shooters present. Nevertheless substantive wildlife welfare (and non compliance with duck shooting regulations) was noted. Wildlife Victoria observed impacts across all categories of waterbirds: threatened species, game species and non game species.

Ducks left injured or dead in field

Wildlife Victoria has documented in-field evidence of widespread hunter non-compliance of the requirement to retrieve dead or injured animals while hunting, including the shooting and maiming of threatened and non game species. It is publicly acknowledged by the GMA⁵ that it is currently logistically impossible for the GMA to ensure compliance of this requirement in field.

“Some of these ducks will be killed outright. Some will be wounded, brought down and killed on retrieval. Many others will be crippled or wounded and will die within a few hours or days. Some will suffer prolonged pain before they die.”⁶

Wildlife Victoria provides some recent sample case studies to support our assertions, noting these are only a mere sample of waterbirds assessed by our veterinarians.

⁴<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/fearful-swans-abandon-their-nests-at-start-of-duck-shooting-season-20220318-p5a5yd.html>

⁵ GMA = Game Management Authority

⁶ <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-duck-hunting/>

Case Study 1 – Pink Eared Duck

Left alive and suffering on wetland with multiple gunshot pellets inside body and multiple fractures. No duck shooters present and not retrieved.

Wildlife Victoria Case Number 00628788

Date: Saturday 29th April 2023

Location: Lake Wooroonook

Species: Duck, Pink-Eared (“Pink Eared Duck”)

Status: Game Species. Must be retrieved by duck shooters after being shot and if still alive killed humanely and added to the shooter’s daily bag limit.

Presentation: Located by a volunteer rescuer abandoned, injured and still alive, no duck shooters present. Rushed to the Wildlife Victoria Veterinary Triage Unit for urgent assistance.

Veterinary Assessment:

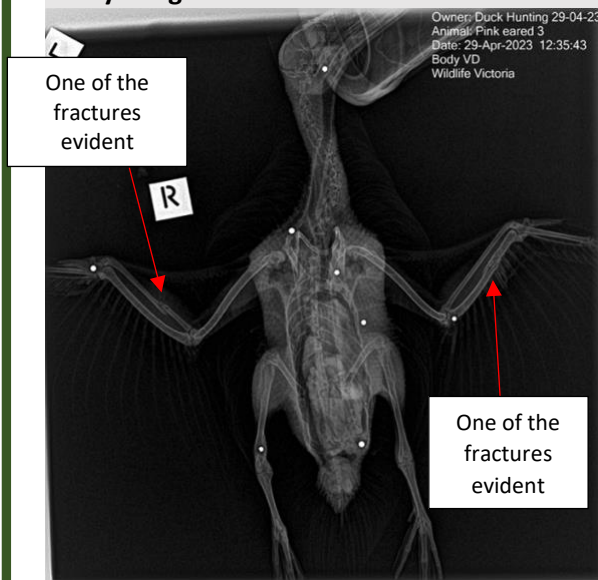
Presentation: Alive

Gross Exam Findings: Blood on left distal antebrachium with palpable fracture. Blood on right ventral antebrachium.

Radiographic Findings: 8 pellets. Mid radial spiral fx right wing. Mid-diaphyseal spiral ulna fx. Right distal tibiotarsal fx.⁷

Cause of death: Euthanised due to poor prognosis after multiple gunshot wounds.

X-Ray Image 1:



X Ray Image 2:



⁷ fx = fracture

Case Study 2 – Freckled Duck: Threatened species left in field. Shot but no duck shooters present and not retrieved.

Wildlife Victoria Case Number 00628916

Date: Sunday 30th April 2023

Location: Lake Wooroonook

Species: Duck, Freckled (“Freckled Duck”)

Status: Threatened Species under the Victorian Flora And Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. Not permitted to be hunted.

Presentation: Located by a volunteer rescuer deceased in the afternoon and transported to the Wildlife Victoria Veterinary Triage Unit.

Images 1 and 2: Presentation on arrival at the Wildlife Victoria Veterinary Triage Unit



Veterinary Assessment:

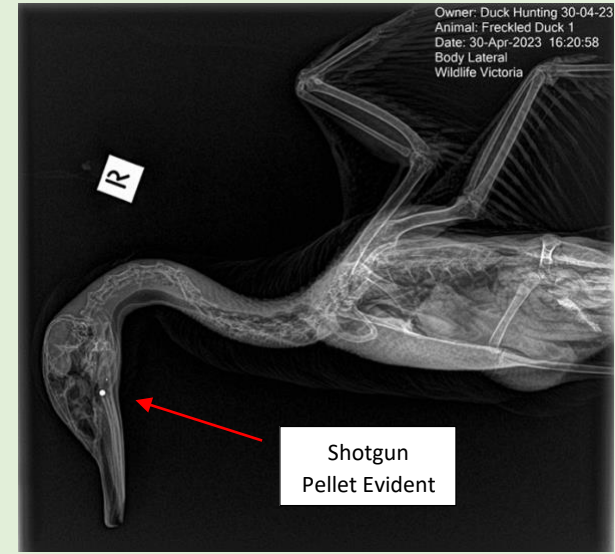
Presentation: Dead on Arrival

Gross Exam Findings: Small wound L cheek just caudal to commissure of beak. Small swelling palpable R cheek just caudal to commissure of R beak. Crepitus palpable R lower beak.

Radiographic Findings: Pellet R lower mandible with oblique fracture of mandible just rostral to ramus. Fragments of radiodense material around ventral mandible bilaterally.

Cause of death: Gunshot Wounds

Images 3 and 4: X-Ray Images



Case Study 3 – Blue-winged shoveler: Threatened species shot, butchered and hidden in field. No duck shooter present and not retrieved.

Wildlife Victoria Case Number 00628369

Date: Wednesday 26th April 2023

Location: Lake Wooroonook

Species: Shoveler, Australasian (“Blue Winged Shoveler”). 4th Blue Winged Shoveler presented to the Wildlife Victoria in field Veterinary Triage Unit.

Status: Threatened Species under the Victorian Flora And Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. Not permitted to be hunted.

Presentation: Located by a volunteer rescuer deceased, butchered and hidden in a tree hollow. Retrieved and presented immediately to the Wildlife Victoria in field Veterinary Triage Unit

Image 1: Presentation at rescue location



Image 2: Presentation on Arrival at the Wildlife Victoria Veterinary Triage Unit



Veterinary Assessment:

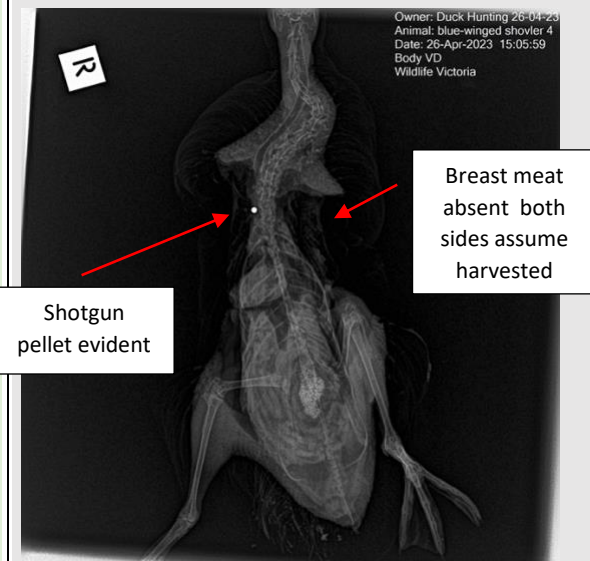
Presentation: Dead on Arrival

Gross Exam Findings: Skin + feathers from ventral thorax and abdomen removed, both wings amputated, keel/pectoral muscles removed prior. Viscera still intact.

Radiographic Findings: Pellet present R mid thoracic spine. Significant loss of soft tissue from thoracic inlet to caudal thorax. Scapulae, coracoids, clavicles missing bilaterally.

Cause of death: Likely Gunshot Wounds

Image 3: X Ray Image



Wildlife Victoria Duck Shooting Deployment Data 2023

Wildlife Victoria assessed 73 native waterbirds at Wooroonook Lakes during the opening of the 2023 Duck Shooting Season in Victoria across a 5 day period. All waterbirds had been left abandoned in field in contravention of duck hunting regulations.

Wildlife Victoria's in field Veterinary Triage Unit was presented with 8 threatened species and 6 non game species for assessment after being found abandoned. A total of 22 native waterbirds were still alive when presented to our veterinarians however all were euthanised given the severity of their injuries. Shooting threatened and non game species is in contravention of duck hunting regulations, as is leaving waterbirds alive in field to suffer.

All waterbirds presented to the Wildlife Victoria veterinary team were assessed and X-Rayed, irrespective of whether they presented as alive or deceased on arrival. In the majority of cases our veterinarians established that the definitive cause of death on assessment and evidence was death by gunshot wounds.

Native waterbirds assessed by Wildlife Victoria's Veterinarians at Wooroonook Lakes 26-30 April 2023:

Species	Species Status	Record Count
Teal	Game	30
Pink-eared Duck	Game	12
Pacific Black	Game	7
Wood duck	Game	6
Blue-winged Shoveler	Threatened	5
Australasian Grebe	Non Game	3
Eurasian Coot	Non Game	2
Hardhead	Threatened	2
Freckled Duck	Threatened	1
Moorhen	Non Game	1
Unassessed Ducks*	Game	4
Total		73

Illegal to Shoot

*These ducks were not formally assessed by the Wildlife Victoria veterinary team, however a visual inspection was performed by senior Wildlife Victoria staff and Wildlife Victoria is satisfied that based on this visual inspection the ducks were killed by damage inflicted by gunshot wounds.

Threatened and endangered species

Wildlife Victoria was in field for five days over the opening weekend of this year's duck shooting season. Over this time, the veterinary triage unit was in service for three full days, and two half days. The triage unit was in full sight, on the wetlands, with a veterinary team and support staff. Over this time, Wildlife Victoria liaised with Victoria Police, the GMA and the Coalition Against Duck Shooting. It was widely known that Wildlife Victoria was in field, assessing and attending to ducks, and providing data to authorities as and when needed. Under these very public circumstances and within a limited timeframe, for Wildlife Victoria to be assessing the quantity of ducks being left in field by hunters is alarming.

Out of the 73 birds illegally left in field by shooters and assessed by Wildlife Victoria, more than 10% (eight in total) of the birds were threatened species. The eight birds were identified as five Blue-winged Shovelers, two Hardhead Ducks and one Freckled Duck. As a small snapshot of hunter species identification competence and compliance, this percentage rate of killing of threatened species is also highly alarming.

3.1.2 Compliance and Enforcement

Wildlife Victoria is deeply concerned about the ability of the Victorian Government to ensure the appropriate compliance and enforcement capability necessary to effectively oversee Recreational Native Bird Hunting in Victoria. Year on year Wildlife Victoria sees evidence of non compliance with hunting regulations with breaches often observed by volunteer native bird rescuers and NGOs such as Wildlife Victoria (Wildlife Victoria's own CEO heard gunshots between the time of 7.30am and 7.40am at Lake Wooroonook on Sunday 30th April 2023). We contend it is next to impossible to oversee an entire statewide network of both public and private wetlands, particularly where even the few remaining duck shooters are widely dispersed and wetland topography makes it challenging to supervise and observe in field activity.

Effectiveness of the Game Management Authority

Wildlife Victoria refers to the *Assessment of the GMA's compliance and enforcement function* conducted by Pegasus Economics in 2017. This assessment documented that the GMA had deep structural and operational problems rendering it largely ineffectual.

"The GMA's inability to ensure compliance with the hunting laws has seriously undermined its credibility as an independent and effective regulator and raises questions about the integrity and sustainability of the regulatory regime."⁸

The GMA has not supplied Wildlife Victoria with any documentation of the implementation of the structural or operational changes recommended in the report, and as such maintains the view upheld in the report that the GMA may not be an effective regulatory body.

The report highlighted that the GMA was not capable of enforcing the specific requirements around licensing, species identification, bag limits, or reporting required during the duck hunting season.

⁸ Assessment of the GMAs compliance and enforcement functions 2017 Pegasus Economics 2017

To further support the assessment review’s findings and Wildlife Victoria’s understanding that little to no change has been implemented, Wildlife Victoria has evidence of widespread shooting of ducks that are excluded from the allowed species list.⁹

Given the importance of compliance and enforcement to ensure adequate protections for threatened and endangered waterbirds, and that the GMA has consistently failed to adequately respond to concerns over its inability to address and implement the recommendations of the aforementioned report, or make any other comparable or substantial changes or improvements to their capacity to manage compliance adequately, Wildlife Victoria advises that to continue to allow the GMA to continue in its current mode of operation would be highly detrimental to threatened and endangered waterbirds and other impacted wildlife.

Wildlife Victoria highlights that the GMA structure and staff does not contain veterinary personnel either in field or in office. This renders the GMA unable to definitively determine cause of death for any animal or perform radiographic activity and analysis surrounding cause of death for evidentiary purposes. Lack of veterinary personnel on staff at the GMA drastically reduces the capacity of the GMA to investigate and prosecute suspected breaches of hunting laws and relies on the goodwill of Wildlife Victoria or volunteer veterinarians to undertake such activity and provision the associated evidence.

In the circumstance that Recreational Native Bird Hunting is not banned, Wildlife Victoria advises that it would be seeking clarification and guidance from the Select Committee on:

- recommendations on new and improved processes the Select Committee would be outlining for the GMA to implement to ensure hunter compliance with Recreational Native Bird Hunting regulations
- clarification from the Select Committee on the GMA’s process for deciding the number of duck hunting locations it recommends to be available for hunting given the GMA’s lack of current and ongoing capacity to adequately monitor all locations.

⁹ “‘Terrible tragedy unfolding’ Threatened species gunned down during duck season” Michael Dahlstrom Yahoo News Australia 17 March 2022

Conflicts of Interest Management

Wildlife Victoria is also particularly interested in the updating and examination of internal and external conflicts of interest within the GMA.

Wildlife Victoria urges consideration of the long-term implications of the GMA using the same small group of survey and data contractors for its “abundance surveys” and population reports. Given the close relationship between the report providers and the GMA, Wildlife Victoria renews its concerns about the integrity and independence of the reports supplied by these contractors. If the Select Committee recommends that duck hunting is to continue, Wildlife Victoria would request the Committee to include that provision of process documents outlining the GMA’s management of conflict of interests for externally contracted services, along with the tendering process documents for external contractors, reporting requirements, and contractor selection processes be made publicly available as a matter of urgency. Wildlife Victoria has previously requested this information directly from the GMA, and the GMA has failed to respond.

3.1.3 Legislative Considerations

Wildlife Victoria requests that the Select Committee consider the aspects of the *Plan for Victoria’s new animal care and protection laws* issued by the Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions for consultation in September 2022. These proposed laws are in line with widespread community agreement that animals are sentient, and growing concern over the treatment of wildlife species that are already under threat from climate change, urbanisation and habitat fragmentation.

“The Objectives of the new laws would recognise that animals have the capacity to feel, perceive their environment, and to have positive and negative experiences like pleasure and pain – that is, that animals are sentient.”¹⁰ ‘Animals’ covered by the new laws include ducks.

¹⁰ Plan for Victoria’s new animal care and protection laws Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions September 2022

Considering the well understood and well documented pain that gunshots cause, Wildlife Victoria recommends the Select Committee considers the viability of the strategic positioning of the continuation of Recreational Native Bird Hunting within this soon to be new frame of reference.

Wildlife Victoria advises that if Recreational Native Bird Hunting is not banned, Wildlife Victoria will be requesting the government provide documentation of the processes it will be using to build its strategic case for the continuation of the practice within this changed legislative and cultural environment.

In addition, Wildlife Victoria asks that the recommendations made by the Select Committee are inclusive of the government's understanding of the continued change in community expectations and the ongoing decline in community support for Recreational Native Bird Hunting as reflected in the proposed new legislation.

3.1.4 Burden on Wildlife Victoria

As a Not for Profit Organisation and Registered Charity with the Australian Charities and Not For Profit Commission, receiving over 90% of our annual operating costs from the Victorian public in the form of donations, Wildlife Victoria is required to act in accordance with its organisation mission and in alignment with our donor and stakeholder expectations.

Wildlife Victoria's mission includes helping and protecting wildlife through our rescue, education, and advocacy activities and to respond to community reports of distressed wildlife and facilitate the care needed. Accordingly, Wildlife Victoria is compelled to respond to injured and distressed native waterbirds impacted by Recreational Native Bird Hunting – particularly given the ongoing welfare issues and non compliance with hunting regulations consistently observed, and strong opposition to Recreational Native Bird Hunting by the majority of the Victorian public and our stakeholders and donors.

As outlined at Section 2.2 of this submission, Wildlife Victoria undertakes a substantive role in field during duck shooting season and has a duty in accordance with our mission statement to be fully committed in our operations and approach to mitigating and minimising welfare risks for wildlife impacted by Recreational Native Bird Hunting. The costs of this undertaking are becoming increasingly

onerous across all aspects of Wildlife Victoria and must be considered in any future scenarios where Recreational Native Bird Hunting may be permitted. Wildlife Victoria provides its expert services at no cost to the Victorian Government and at no cost to the Victorian public however given the scale of the support we provide this will become unsustainable and will likely require Wildlife Victoria charging the Victorian Government for its services.

The impact to Wildlife Victoria of responding during Recreational Native Bird Hunting spans not only the economic cost of providing our services but also has impacts on employee wellbeing, and impacts on wildlife and the public elsewhere in the State unserved while Wildlife Victoria has expert personnel located on the wetlands.

The economic cost to Wildlife Victoria of responding in field during the opening five days of the 2023 Duck Shooting season is detailed at Section 3.4 of this submission.

3.2 Arrangements in other Australian jurisdictions

Recreational Native Bird Hunting is prohibited across four Australian States and Territories, spanning Australia's most populous states with Victoria as the outlier. In the States and Territories where recreational native bird hunting is permitted, there is substantive community concern about the practice with welfare and cruelty concerns paramount combined with strong evidence to this effect. In response to these concerns both South Australia and Victoria have announced public inquiries into the practice to consider its future and pressure is mounting on the remaining jurisdictions. The rationale for outlawing recreational native bird hunting in other states is consistent with the arguments made by the majority of the Victorian public opposing the practice in this State.

Wildlife Victoria notes that of the remaining most populous States where recreational native bird hunting is permitted (Victoria and South Australia) the number of native bird hunters was 11,549 in Victoria in 2022 and 1,200 in South Australia in 2021: 0.17% of the total Victorian population and 0.07% of the total South Australian population respectively. At the national level, this is a dying and unpopular practice and we consider it relevant that Victoria implements a ban in line with the majority of Australia.

In considering Victoria's position, geographically Victoria is adjacent to NSW where recreational native bird hunting was outlawed 28 years ago and geographically on the same side of Australia as QLD where it was outlawed 18 years ago. Victoria is also the smallest mainland state in land mass that permits recreational native bird hunting. In considering the impact on Victoria's native waterbirds and biodiversity it is important to note that these jurisdictional differences on the mainland see NSW and QLD residents readily able to travel to Victoria to kill native waterbirds resident in this state exacerbating species impacts at both the local and national level. Australia's most recent State of the Environment Report articulates that Australia's biodiversity is declining and the number of threatened species is increasing. This submission elaborates on this further in Section 3.3 of this document.

Recreational Native Bird Hunting by Australian Jurisdictions

Rationale for banning recreational native bird hunting (and opposition to the practice where it is still permitted) is homogenous across Australia

Recreational duck hunting banned across jurisdictions spanning 64% of the Australian population and in question across jurisdictions spanning an additional 33% of the Australian population. Strong activism against the practice in Tasmania despite no inquiry yet announced by the TAS State Government.

State by Size: proportion total Australian population	Status	Rationale and Opposition
NSW 32% population	Banned 1995	Cruelty, welfare, community expectation
VIC 26% population <i>Native Bird Hunters: 0.17% Victorian population</i>	Public Inquiry	Cruelty, welfare, compliance, community expectation
QLD 20% population	Banned 2005	Cruelty, welfare, community expectation, ecosystem and biodiversity concerns <i>"This is not an appropriate activity in contemporary life in the Smart State"</i> QLD Premier Peter Beattie
WA 10% population	Banned 1992	Cruelty, welfare, community expectation, ecosystem and biodiversity concerns <i>"WA's native wildlife should be protected, admired and respected, not shot for pleasure"</i> WA Environment Minister, Bob Pearce <i>"Our community has reached a state of enlightenment where it can no longer accept the institutionalised killing of native birds for recreation"</i> Premier Dr Carmen Lawrence
SA 7% population <i>Native Bird Hunters = 0.07% total SA population</i>	Public Inquiry	Cruelty, welfare, compliance, community expectation
TAS 2% population	Permitted	Cruelty, welfare, compliance, community expectation
ACT 2% population	Not Permitted	Has never been permitted
NT 1% population	Permitted	Ecosystem and non compliance concerns

3.3 Environmental Sustainability and Impact on Amenity

3.3.1 Environmental sustainability nationally and local role

The recently released Federal State of the Environment Report highlights systemic flaws in Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–2030 and outlines the new approach in Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019–2030.

“The new strategy functions as a policy umbrella over other national, state, territory and local government strategies, policies, programs and regulations. The strategy also provides the main instrument for Australia to implement its obligations under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and a range of other international agreements, including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the World Heritage Convention, and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019–2030 aims to:

- better align Australia's National Biodiversity Strategy with international obligations and allow flexibility to adapt to changing environments
- improve implementation and coordination of biodiversity conservation activities
- better communicate with and engage broader audiences
- include all landscapes and seascapes, including marine, aquatic, production and urban environments.”¹¹

Currently there are several instances where this strategy is yet to be implemented. For example, Magpie geese are not considered threatened in the Northern Territory, and they are permitted to be hunted. However, in other states, like Victoria, they are listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act as vulnerable to extinction. Magpie geese were previously abundant and allowed to be hunted in Victoria, before being listed as vulnerable. The risk of creating small pockets of species, in a conservation framework that is fragmented without a homogenous approach to species protection does not bode

¹¹ <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/biodiversity/management/national-and-international-agreements-and-policy>

well for our biodiversity goals and obligations. Sightings of Magpie geese in Victoria are now deemed newsworthy.¹²

The Hardhead duck is listed as threatened in Victoria in 2021 under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, however it is permitted to be hunted in the Northern Territory.

Not only does this impact the long-term viability of species from a biodiversity management perspective, it also adds an extra layer of complexity for interstate hunters coming unfettered into Victoria for Recreational Native Bird Hunting.

3.3.2 Species: Quail and Ducks

The Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 specify 241 duck shooting locations where non-shooters are excluded. These comprise 200 State Game Reserves and 41 other wetlands. However, the total number of wetlands open for shooting is not known by the GMA, the government or any government agency. The above figures do not include shooting sites on private property, or any other government owned land that allows shooting under specific land management arrangements. Henceforth, it is impossible to extrapolate out the data Wildlife Victoria has collected from time in field across the state to provide figures on the statewide breadth and depth of impact on threatened, game and non-game species.

It is also impossible to estimate in real terms the statewide level of non-compliance, or the resourcing the GMA would need to ensure sufficient oversight across all active shooting sites. Lack of basic information, such as the number and locations of hunting sites, indicates a systemic lack of control, insight, and capacity within the GMA and duck hunting institutions to properly manage duck hunting.

Quail

Last year, the GMA released findings from its first ever “Abundance estimates for Stubble Quail in Victoria” report. The report states that they observed 61 Stubble Quail across 54 sample sites. This sample was then extrapolated out to “estimated 3.1 million Stubble Quail in Victoria, with the highest

¹² <https://www.sheppnews.com.au/news/magpie-geese-sighted-at-reedy-swamp/>

population densities located in non-native pasture and seasonal wetlands.”¹³ The report flags “The precision of the statewide estimate of Stubble Quail abundance was moderate, with a CV of 29%.”¹⁴

This means that the Stubble Quail estimate could just as easily be up to 29% higher or lower than 3.1 million. The GMA however, fails to note this considerable potential variation of Stubble Quail population on their website, or that only 61 Stubble Quail were counted in the survey, instead quoting the extrapolated figure of 3.1 million.

Regardless of the 29% CV result of the Abundance estimates for Stubble Quail in Victoria, and the report’s recommendations for significant changes in methodology for future surveys, the GMA still recommended an open Stubble Quail shooting season in 2023.

In addition to the lack of data regarding Stubble Quail populations, there is an additional risk to a similar species of bird, the Plains-wanderer.

The Plains-wanderer is listed on the Advisory List of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna in Victoria as **Critically Endangered**. There is a National Recovery Plan for the Plains-wanderer currently in place, and the plan has identified increased risk to the species due to quail hunting.

“Plains-wanderers can occasionally be killed during the quail hunting season as they look superficially similar and are found in the same habitat. Stubble quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) are a native quail species that can be legally hunted in Victoria. The majority of hunting occurs on private property. There are also 16 State Game Reserves in which hunting is permitted (GMA, 2014). The degree to which quail hunting is impacting upon plains-wanderer survival is largely unknown; however hunting has the potential to have adverse impacts upon the species due to both incidental shooting and interactions between birds and dogs.”¹⁵

¹³ <https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/research/quail-research#:~:text=Results%20from%20the%202022%20survey,native%20pasture%20and%20seasonal%20wetlands.>

¹⁴ https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/893110/Abundance-estimates-for-Stubble-Quail-in-Victoria-2022.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-recovery-plan-plains-wanderer.pdf>

Wildlife Victoria advises that given the risks to both the unknown Stubble Quail population and the critically endangered Plains-wanderer population, to continue Stubble Quail hunting would be highly risky to the future of both species.

Wildlife Victoria also highlights the **current allowance of lead shot use in quail shooting**, and the largely undocumented risks that lead shot poisoning of the environment may pose to wildlife now and into the future.

Quail Hunters

Quail hunter numbers in the first row of the table below¹⁶ show that from 27,114 licence holders, the report recorded responses from a sample of 300 respondents over opening weekend. Of that 300, 114 of people self reported as Quail Hunters. Of the 114 self reported Quail Hunters, nine reported that they hunted on that opening weekend. The hunter numbers are similarly very low across all four survey periods, however, the days hunted, and Quail harvested numbers show that even with low hunter numbers, their impact is significant. The Quail harvested numbers are also self-reported by the hunters, so the veracity of these numbers has not and cannot be confirmed. The majority of Quail hunting takes place on private property, with no mechanism for oversight.

Table 3.9: Summary of responses for Stubble Quail surveys in 2022.

Stubble Quail survey	Period	Licence holders	Respondents	Stubble Quail hunters ¹⁵	Respondents who hunted	Days hunted ¹⁶	Quail harvested ¹⁷
1	Opening weekend	27,114	300	114	9	13	85
2	April ¹⁸	27,114	301	100	12	23	250
3	May	27,394	300	97	11	48	332
4	June	27,591	299	99	12	28	185

The percentage of endorsed Game Licence holders who hunted Stubble Quail was consistent in each survey period of the season. About 4% of licence holders hunted in each survey period, corresponding to approximately 1000 hunters (Table 3.10).

Source: ESTIMATE OF DUCK AND STUBBLE QUAIL HARVEST IN VICTORIA FOR 2022 Results from surveys of Victorian Game Licence holders in 2022 P.D. Moloney and J.S. Fleisch

¹⁶ https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/938547/Game-bird-estimates-2022-Final-Artwork-Low-Res.pdf

Ducks

Wildlife Victoria has documented in-field evidence of widespread hunter non-compliance with duck hunting regulations in Victoria. During the opening week of the 2023 season, Wildlife Victoria documented the bodies of eight dead threatened species left in field at the Wooroonook Lakes area. Of the eight, there were five Blue-winged Shovelers, two Hardhead Ducks and one Freckled Duck. The Freckled Duck is listed as the most threatened native duck species in Australia.

Since Wildlife Victoria announced these findings, there has been further confirmation from DEECA scientists that the Freckled Duck is present in some numbers on Lake Buloke and the GMA has now closed Lake Buloke to hunting in accordance with their agreement to shut wetlands where endangered species are found to be inhabiting. While it is reassuring to see the GMA act in this instance, it does raise serious questions about what would have happened if volunteer rescuers and Wildlife Victoria had not been in field, and indeed what is being missed at the vast majority of wetlands that are currently open for shooting and are unmonitored by Wildlife Victoria, DEECA, GMA or any other regulatory body.

Further to the lack of in field oversight, Wildlife Victoria has significant concerns over the GMA's practice of failing to remove species from the game species list before they become listed as threatened. The Blue-winged shoveler and the Hardhead duck are currently still listed on the game species list, even though they are also listed as threatened. The GMA has temporarily placed them on a seasonally restricted list, which stipulates that they may not be shot for the specified season, but that they remain listed as a game species. The failure of the GMA to act to remove the Blue-winged shoveler and the Hardhead duck demonstrates a lack of understanding and commitment to ensuring the sustainability of duck species and duck shooting. Indeed, the restriction on shooting the Blue-winged shoveler and the Hardhead duck only came into place after these species were placed on the threatened species list. This also raises serious concerns as to the veracity of the survey data and the processes used by the GMA in consideration of game species selection.

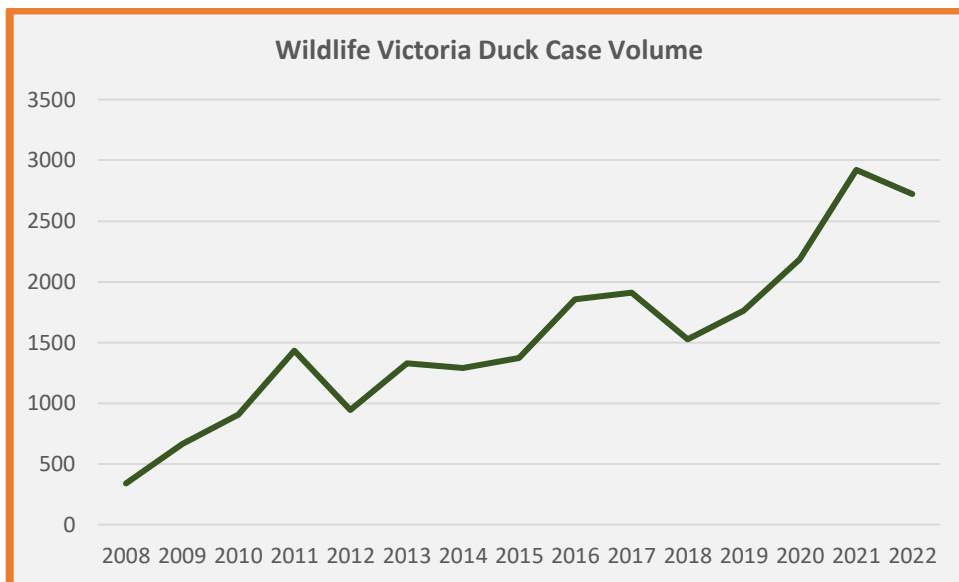
Should the Select Committee recommend the continuation of duck hunting, Wildlife Victoria asks that the Select Committee seek clarification from the GMA to provide information about the process the GMA uses to check the veracity of the survey data used in its game species considerations, and the proactive steps the GMA will undertake in future to ensure duck species are never co-listed as both

threatened and game species. Wildlife Victoria has previously requested the GMA for this information directly and the GMA has failed to respond.

Wildlife Victoria Data – the Victorian Public care about ducks

Over the last five years, Wildlife Victoria has tended to 11,911 native ducks across Victoria. These figures reflect a high level of public concern for the wellbeing of ducks, with members of the public consistently and increasingly calling the Wildlife Victoria Emergency Response Service to attend to sick, injured, or orphaned ducks.

The graph below shows the number (record count) of native duck cases Wildlife Victoria has recorded each year from members of the public calling our Emergency Response Service since 2008. This graph clearly shows an increase in public engagement and concern over the welfare of our native ducks in Victoria. This increase is in line with increasing community dislike and concern over duck shooting and the harm it does to our native ducks.



Wildlife Victoria has detailed data sets on location and species of ducks throughout Victoria. Wildlife Victoria has previously requested that the GMA develops a process to request and use Wildlife Victoria’s data in its consideration for setting bag limits, locations and season durations, however the GMA has failed to respond to our request.

3.3.3 Ecosystem and biodiversity impacts

This season Wildlife Victoria witnessed the impact of duck shooting on many species beyond the ducks targeted by shooters. Out of the 73 birds Wildlife Victoria tended to in field over the opening week from Wednesday 26 April to Sunday 30 April, six non-game species were referred to our Veterinary triage unit.

Eight of the 73 birds were threatened species. The eight threatened species were five Blue-winged Shovelers, two Hardhead ducks, and one of our rarest native ducks, the Freckled duck. Even though Blue-winged Shovelers and Hardheads are listed as threatened, and they were banned from being shot this year, they remain on the game species list.

In 2022, Wildlife Victoria witnessed the loss of a new generation of swans as brooding swans abandoned their nests and eggs in response to loud and unrelenting gun shots. None of the impacts of duck shooting on surrounding wildlife is quantified in the reports or recommendations submitted by the GMA in their submissions regarding duck shooting season arrangements.

3.3.4 Amenity impacts

There has been no data supplied by the GMA regarding the impact of duck hunting on people living in proximity to duck hunting locations. With an increase in people living and working in regional Victoria in recent years, and the expansion of residential developments into areas closer to duck hunting locations, the impact of duck hunting on local residents must now be considered in any future planning for duck hunting arrangements.

Wildlife Victoria receives increasing reports from members of the public concerned about the negative impact of duck shooting, not only on wildlife, but also on their personal amenity. People are unable to work and sleep, they are worried for their safety on their own property, and their pets and farm animals are distressed for extended periods.

3.4 Social and Economic Impact

3.4.1 Mental health impacts on Wildlife Victoria staff and volunteer first responders

The mental health wellbeing of Wildlife Victoria's staff and volunteers is paramount to Wildlife Victoria. As an Emergency Response Service that witnesses death, injury and distress of wildlife on a constant basis, Wildlife Victoria is very much committed to providing a safe and supportive work environment.

Wildlife Victoria's in field deployment during the opening week of Duck shooting season this year consisted of two veterinarians, one veterinary nurse, one Emergency Response Supervisor, two External Relations staff members, the Head of Operations and the CEO.

Even with staff briefings and preparation prior to deployment, the impact on staff in field and in head office during the event is profound. As an organisation that is centred around wildlife welfare, to be confronted with the deliberate harming of wildlife by fellow Victorians on this scale is very confronting.

"I just can't take any more photos of dead ducks right now" Wildlife Victoria staff member.

Over the opening week, every dead bird presented to the wildlife triage unit needed to be fully examined and recorded. Every live bird that presented at the unit needed to be examined, and decisions made about the viability of each animal. Not one bird was able to be saved over opening week, so all live birds were euthanised by the veterinary team, then further examined and recorded. The task of euthanasia and documentation is gruelling. The GMA nor any other part of the government conducts any in field veterinary work, so relies on Wildlife Victoria to provide this documentation. Wildlife Victoria provides this service free of charge to the government, however there is a significant cost to the mental health of Wildlife Victoria staff.

After the field work is documented, the External Relations staff in the office then receive, file and compile the photographs and notes for publication and record keeping. This requires staff to view hundreds of photographs and x-rays of bloodied, dead and dismembered native waterbirds.

Example of a small subset of photographs uploaded from Wildlife Victoria's in field team, that then needed to be filed and compiled by the Wildlife Victoria office team are detailed over the page.

Sample in field photographic set: Duck Shooting Season Opening 2023



Wildlife Victoria has commissioned a groundbreaking Mental Health and Wellbeing Review in partnership with LaTrobe University with the outcome to deliver best practice guidelines for a new wildlife volunteer support program.¹⁷

Events containing mass death have been highlighted in this report as resulting in decreased mental health and we provide an extract of this report for the information of the Select Committee, noting this research will be published on completion of the review:

“Exposure to death and animal distress were noted as contributory factors to poor mental health (Caro, 2019; Englefield, Candy, et al., 2019; Haering et al., 2020). The negative psychological impact on animal care professionals of euthanasia is well documented with exposure linked to emotional distress, job stain, turnover and increased risk of suicide (Baran et al., 2009; Reeve et al., 2005; Reeve et al., 2004; Rogelberg et al., 2007). Andrukonis et al. (2020) revealed higher heart rate and lower heart rate variability, indicative of emotional stress, in response to killing in animal shelter workers. Scotney et al. (2023) documented the psychological impact of lethal management methods in cat carers and found carers reported decreased mental health, quality of life and trauma symptoms following a cat cull event.”¹⁸

3.4.2 Community Expectations

Duck hunting popularity and support has long been in decline, with now only approximately 11,549 shooters taking part in the 2022 duck hunting season,¹⁹ while a recent RSPCA survey states that 68% of Victorians want an end to duck hunting.²⁰

“The research also showed that 69% of people were interested in visiting parts of regional Victoria, with more than half (54%) preferring to visit a location where duck hunting does not occur.”²¹

¹⁷<https://www.wildlifelifevolunteers.pdf>

¹⁸ From Part 1. Review of scientific literature and existing support programs designed for emergency responders, 1 March 2023, Anthrozoology Research Group La Trobe University

¹⁹ <https://rspcavic.org/rspca-urges-leaders-to-cancel-2022-duck-hunting-and-protect-our-native-ducks/>

²⁰ <https://rspcavic.org/rspca-urges-leaders-to-cancel-2022-duck-hunting-and-protect-our-native-ducks/>

²¹ <https://rspcavic.org/rspca-urges-leaders-to-cancel-2022-duck-hunting-and-protect-our-native-ducks/>

Figures in the *Out for a Duck* report show even less support, quoting that 87% of Victorians support a ban on duck hunting.²² This lack of support for duck hunting reflects a mainstream rejection of the cruelty inflicted on native waterbirds through duck hunting. It also reflects the community view that cruelty to animals is unacceptable which is outlined in the new animal care and protection laws currently under consideration in Victoria:

“An act of cruelty would be primarily defined in the new laws as any act or omission that causes or is likely to cause unreasonable harm, pain or distress to an animal. Harm, pain or distress could be mental, as well as physical, and include experiences such as hunger, stress and fear.”²³

Responding to over 110,000 calls from the Victorian public each year requesting assistance for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife Wildlife Victoria is well placed to understand general community sentiment for Victoria’s ducks. Wildlife Victoria receives close to 3,000 calls annually (on average over 8 calls per day) from concerned members of the Victorian public requesting help for ducks they observe in distress or needing help and deeply concerned for their welfare.

We provide over the page a sample set of calls received by Wildlife Victoria for ducks, together with audio recordings, demonstrating the depth of feeling and care members of the public have for the welfare of ducks.

²² Out for a Duck An analysis of the economics of duck hunting in Victoria September 14, 2012 by Rod Campbell, Richard Denniss and David Baker

²³ Plan for Victoria’s new animal care and protection laws Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions September 2022

Live call recordings and cases: Members of public calling requesting help for ducks²⁴

Case 00617715 | Duck, Wood, hit by vehicle

Date: 28/2/2023, 3:43 pm

Case notes:

Ducks and ducklings that have been hit by car
Blood everywhere
MOP was quite distressed
Was an accident
Another MOP is there picking up 1 of the ducks that has been immobilised

Listen to the [call recording here](#)

Case 00593865 | Duck, Pacific Black

Date: 19/11/2022, 2.37pm

Case notes:

Large pond
Grate there, ducklings fell down the grate a few months ago, gardeners were able to scoop the out
Has happened again
No one can get them out, no gardeners there until Monday
Mother is frantic
Swimming around and around the grate
Not sure how many ducklings
Can't lift grate, it is welded in
Apparently possible to put something down into grate to lift them out
Mop sending photos of grate

Listen to the [call recording here](#)

Case 00583715 | Duck, Wood, Injured

Date: 12/10/2022, 7.59pm

Case notes:

One of the ducklings seems to be drooping wing a little bit. They are standing in middle of footpath.
Concerned it would be euthd told contain vet

Listen to the [call recording here](#)

Case 00579564 | Duck, Pacific Black

Date: 28/9/2022, 11.11am

Case notes:

Inside hospital courtyard, no way to exit without going through the hospital itself.
Signs up for staff to leave alone and not feed.
Happy to keep them there if that's the best course of action but concerned about them trapped.
Need to be contained (mum separate carrier from bubs) and moved to outside hospital

Listen to the [call recording here:](#)

²⁴ Recordings have been modified to remove personal identifying information

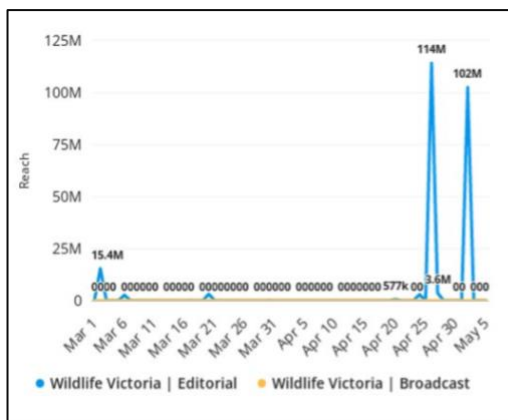
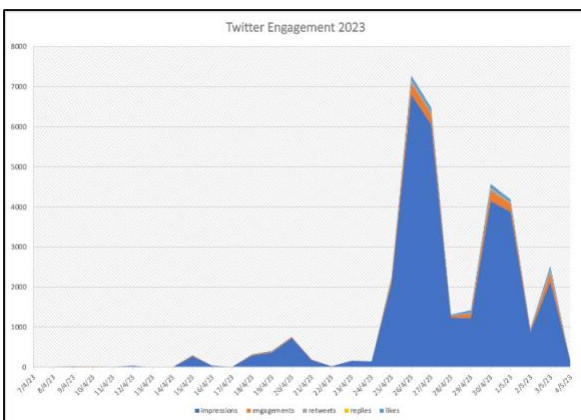
Media and Community interest in Duck Shooting

Wildlife Victoria measures media reach and social media engagement in order to inform key communications and understand matters of interest to the community.

Across all media and social media channels, subject matter and advocacy pertaining to duck shooting generates the highest reach and engagement – providing us with insight that the Victorian community are deeply interested in and care about the plight of our native waterbirds.

The first graph below shows Wildlife Victoria’s Twitter organic engagement prior to and during Wildlife Victoria’s in field deployment for duck hunting. Twitter is predominantly used by Wildlife Victoria as a media engagement tool, and during the duration of Wildlife Victoria’s deployment in field, tweet topics were limited to reporting on Wildlife Victoria’s in field experiences and calls to end duck hunting. The figures demonstrate an extraordinary uptick in interest in Wildlife Victoria tweets, and show that the media and public are invested in reading the educated and informed reports from Wildlife Victoria’s first-hand experience of duck hunting and the negative impacts on wildlife. These Twitter statistics have been replicated with similar jumps over many years during the opening week of duck shooting while Wildlife Victoria is tweeting from in field.

Similar increases can also be seen across other Wildlife Victoria social media platforms, and in media coverage of Wildlife Victoria’s in field activities. Below you can see that the public and the media are highly engaged with Wildlife Victoria’s commitment to end duck hunting, with figures taken from the same time period. News reach also shows a substantive uplift during duck hunting season opening when Wildlife Victoria is in field and reporting on its activities.



Wildlife Victoria asks the Select Committee to consider that the Victorian public does not support duck hunting, and by continuing to pursue this unpopular project the government is, on balance, damaging the Victorian government's relationship with the Victorian public. Wildlife Victoria poses that continuing duck hunting regardless of public opinion undermines the public's confidence in the government and reduces public trust in both the government and the GMA.

"Ducks are our nature, and it's bad if we kill our nature, they might become extinct."

Ataria Matthews, Age 8

3.4.3 Economic Benefit

The most recent report published by the government is the *Economic contribution of recreational hunting in Victoria*²⁵ report published in June 2020. It is based on data derived from a survey of game licence holders in Victoria. The figures in the report cannot be verified and there is no cost-benefit analysis in the report.

The lack of any publicly available documents that report on the true economic benefits of duck hunting leads Wildlife Victoria to believe that there are limited to no economic benefit. In contrast, the economic benefits of birdwatching and wildlife tourism are well documented and provide compelling evidence for ending duck hunting. The 2012 report "Out for a duck - An analysis of the economics of duck hunting in Victoria" by the Australia Institute provides the following summary:

"Summary

- Less than half of one per cent of Victorians are active duck hunters, while 87 per cent support a ban on duck hunting. Three per cent of respondents to our survey had participated in duck hunting and intend to do so again.
- Claims that duck hunting – or any recreational hunting – contributes significantly to the economy of Victoria are false. They assume that without hunting any related expenditure would be lost to Victoria. On the contrary, our survey shows that if duck hunters were prevented from hunting ducks they would go fishing, hunt other species, or go camping. There would be no impact on expenditure in Victoria from a duck hunting ban.

²⁵ https://djsir.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0009/1948707/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.docx

- Revenue from non-hunting tourism is far more important to Victoria’s economy. In fact, more than half of survey respondents would be less likely to holiday in an area with duck hunting.
- Most Victorians are willing to pay for improvements in animal welfare.
- Thirty per cent of respondents are willing to pay to end duck hunting.

The non-monetary benefits of ending duck hunting and the improvement in welfare of the non-duck hunting public, are far greater than the non-monetary losses that hunters would incur from a ban. We estimate this benefit of banning duck hunting at around \$60 million per year.”²⁶

Wildlife Victoria asks the Select Committee to consider the negative economic impact duck hunting has on Victorian tourism and recommends undertaking an immediate and comprehensive review of the economic, environmental, and reputational cost to the Victorian public for the GMA to administer the duck hunting program.

Wildlife Victoria Resource Management

There is significant workload placed on Wildlife Victoria due to the impacts of duck hunting. Wildlife Victoria is already under increasing public pressure to do more for our wildlife, and duck shooting creates an unnecessary drag on resources. Wildlife Victoria is experiencing an increase in calls for help of 15% year on year for all wildlife, with climate change, habitat destruction and habitat fragmentation being the main causes for wildlife suffering. This year Wildlife Victoria will spend time and resources educating the public and media about the impacts of duck shooting, and why Wildlife Victoria is seeking an end to it. Wildlife Victoria will also spend time speaking with state and local governments, and many other stakeholder organisations.

If Wildlife Victoria was no longer needed to treat ducks in the field or advocate for duck welfare under these circumstances, Wildlife Victoria would be able to reallocate these resources to provide greater outcomes for other wildlife that desperately need support to survive.

²⁶ Out for a Duck An analysis of the economics of duck hunting in Victoria September 14, 2012 by Rod Campbell, Richard Denniss and David Baker

Wildlife Victoria spends more than \$7M p.a. on wildlife veterinary services and operational costs associated with provision of an on call wildlife emergency response.

The services provided by Wildlife Victoria to the GMA and police in field during duck hunting season are of significant value. Wildlife Victoria is on site during duck hunting season providing veterinary care to injured animals, accurately identifying species, and providing radiographs, veterinary case notes and other useful information to authorised officers helping them to ensure compliance with hunting standards. This collegial and valuable service is provided at no cost to the GMA, however Wildlife Victoria asks that the cost of providing this service is considered in the overall cost of running the duck hunting season.

Wildlife Victoria Costs Duck Shooting Deployment 2023

Wildlife Victoria committed a **conservative \$30,000 in direct costs and provisioned infrastructure of \$487,000** in responding in field for the opening 5 days of the 2023 Duck Shooting season in Victoria, a significant impost on a not for profit organisation.

Wildlife Victoria absorbed all costs associated with veterinary procedures such as X-Rays and euthanasia without charging the Victorian Government for these services and despite the output from these veterinary procedures being provisioned to the Game Management Authority for evidentiary purposes to support the GMA in the execution of its compliance and enforcement obligations.

In diverting two of its Wildlife Veterinary Response vehicles and associated infrastructure to the opening week of the 2023 Duck Shooting season, Wildlife Victoria was unable to provide services to wildlife in West Gippsland and outer metropolitan Melbourne with both these regions unserved throughout. Veterinary personnel not deployed in field were unable to perform their duties in the absence of any veterinary infrastructure.

The conservative expenditure incurred excludes other Wildlife Victoria direct costs associated with duck shooting including and not limited to preparation of government submissions, advocacy and responding to media requests, and pertains to the deployed period and personnel only for the period Tuesday evening 25th May to Sunday evening 30th May. Opportunity and indirect costs are also excluded but nevertheless also relevant.

Summary:

Direct Costs: \$29,914

Infrastructure Provisioned: \$486,800

Opportunity/Indirects Costs: Not costed

TOTAL: \$516,714

Cost breakdown over the page.

Cost Breakdown: Wildlife Victoria in field deployment – 5 days Duck Shooting opening 2023

Deployment Costs and Infrastructure Utilised

Item	\$
Direct Costs	
Salaries and Wages	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deployment of 8 Wildlife Victoria personnel: Veterinarians, Veterinary Nurse, CEO, Operations and Support Staff. 	16,212
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Staff at Wildlife Victoria Head Office during deployed period 	1,096
Preparation and Planning	5,646
Accommodation	4,890
Fuel, meals and other ancillaries including veterinary consumables	2,070
SUB TOTAL	29,914
Infrastructure Provisioned	
Wildlife Victoria 4WD fully equipped Veterinary Response Vehicles x 2	470,000
General Infrastructure (generator, triage tents etc)	16,800
SUB TOTAL	486,800
TOTAL	516,714

Opportunity/Indirect Costs

Item
<p>Lost productivity: in accordance with the Wildlife Victoria employee fatigue policy, deployed personnel were absent from work for a period the week following deployment</p>
<p>Employee wellbeing – stress, long working hours and impact of observing and dealing with human inflicted high mortality wildlife response</p>
<p>Two areas of the State completely unserved given two mobile wildlife veterinary units deployed elsewhere. West Gippsland and Outer Eastern Melbourne without wildlife veterinary services due to diversion to duck shooting</p>



4 Conclusion

It is well beyond the time to end duck hunting in Victoria. Recreational duck hunting was banned in Western Australia in 1990, NSW in 1995 and in Queensland in 2005.

The pain and suffering inflicted on our beautiful waterbirds in the name of hunting tradition is truly shameful. Tradition is no justification for mass killing and maiming. Tradition is no justification for continuing with something that the Victorian public has now long rejected. The discord hunting has with our modern societal values is undeniable. In a world where we teach our children to value empathy, kindness and “a fair go” there is no fair go for ducks during duck hunting season.

Wildlife Victoria concludes by re stating the following factors in favor of ending Recreational Duck Hunting in Victoria:

- Widespread public condemnation of duck hunting
- The inability for the GMA to properly oversee duck hunting
- Large scale non-compliance of hunters
- The economic and reputational cost to the Victorian public and government if duck hunting were to continue
- The needless cruelty inflicted on ducks during duck hunting season
- The cost to Wildlife Victoria
- The impact on threatened species and other native waterbirds, particularly in the context of long term decline in Victorian waterbird numbers

Wildlife Victoria renews its calls for the immediate and permanent end to duck hunting in Victoria and urges the Parliamentary Committee to recommend an immediate and permanent end to duck hunting.