



# Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Parliamentary Committee request for comment

Submission of the

Victorian Division

Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

May 2023

[www.ava.com.au](http://www.ava.com.au)

## The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) appreciates the ability to contribute to discussions that assist in the review of Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements.

Veterinarians by virtue of their training, skill and knowledge promote animal welfare at all levels of activity and interactions with humans or animals to ensure that animals receive adequate care and protection.<sup>i</sup>

The societal responsibility to care and protect animals should be exercised in all the human–animal relationships, from animals in the wild making brief contact with humans to farmed, flock and herd animals, companion animals, and animals used in sport, recreation, entertainment, education and research.<sup>i</sup>

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia.

The AVA consists of members who come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, animal welfare, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.<sup>i</sup>

## Summary

**The hunting of waterfowl using shotguns is strongly opposed by the Australian Veterinary Association.**

**Animal welfare impacts from recreational hunting are broad and unacceptable.**

The Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia have banned hunting and Victoria remains one of a reducing number of states where this activity, and the associated unacceptable animal welfare impacts, is supported and condoned by law.<sup>ii</sup>

Poorly managed challenges to animal welfare in modern society risk Victoria's reputation of commitment to good animal welfare practices.

There is an environmental impact beyond the injuring and maiming of directly affected birds and potentially other animals, through disruption of other species' habitat and nesting practices, and environmental lead contamination.

Economic justification should not ever condone poor animal welfare practices and the expected relatively small impact on the Victorian economy of banning this practice should not challenge Victoria's commitment to good animal welfare practices.

In the proposed plan for Victoria's new Animal Care and Protection laws it states that "modern animal welfare laws will help maintain community trust in our animal-based industries and sectors. Modern laws are increasingly important for demonstrating to our trading partners that Victoria's industries are committed to good animal welfare practices."<sup>iii</sup> In the AVA's view, allowing continued recreational hunting of birds in Victoria is inconsistent with this stated objective.



## Discussion

### The recreational hunting of native birds and quail:

1. creates unacceptable animal welfare impacts,
2. is incongruent with other Australian states and the proposed modernisation of Victorian animal welfare legislation,
3. has broad environmental impact,
4. has social impacts and economic risks for Victorian society by risking Victoria's commitment to, and reputation for, good animal welfare practice.

#### 1. The operation of annual native bird hunting seasons:

##### Unacceptable animal welfare impacts.

Humans have a responsibility and a duty of care to protect animals. Where a person does not meet his or her obligations to animals in his or her care, animals may suffer. When this happens, the law must be able to adequately intervene to enforce compliance and prevent suffering.<sup>iv</sup>

Animals can be used to benefit humans provided that they are humanely treated, but the benefit to people should be balanced with the cost to the animal. Animals should not be used for purposes where unreasonable and unrelieved suffering, injury or distress is likely to be caused.<sup>iv</sup>

When humans make use of animals, or alter in any way their natural habitats, being behavioural or environmental, a level of care should be established that befits human dignity as rational and compassionate beings.<sup>i</sup>

Such care should be humane, which implies empathy with the animal, an avoidance of unnecessary stress, injury and suffering and the demonstration of compassion towards a fellow creature.<sup>i</sup> Indeed, this ethic, and a clear recognition of the sentience of all vertebrate animals, is at the core of the government's proposed new animal care and protection legislation.

A study in Victoria of recreational hunting reported 14% to 33% of birds were wounded but not retrieved.<sup>v</sup> A similar study from Minnesota USA reported approximately one-third of ducks are injured but escape capture.<sup>vi</sup>

Wing, bill and leg fractures are common in surviving birds. If left, wounded birds can suffer from the disabling effects of the injury, including pain and infection, or thirst or starvation if unable to drink or eat. All of these increase the likelihood of being taken by a predator.<sup>vii</sup>

Clausen et al (2017) note that crippling of hunted birds due to shotgun injury constitutes an ethical and animal-welfare problem and also may affect population dynamics. Mortality due to crippling may not happen immediately after injury and it may take days or weeks of pain and suffering before birds die.

Often only those birds aligned with the central cluster of shotgun pellets will be fatally injured; birds hit at the perimeter of the shotgun volley may receive pellet injury and survive. The hunting of waterfowl using



shotguns may result in the non-fatal injury of a proportion of target birds resulting in unacceptable pain and suffering.<sup>vi</sup>

## 2. Arrangements in other Australian jurisdictions:

### **The recreational hunting of native birds is incongruent with other Australian states and the proposed modernisation of Victorian animal welfare legislation.**

For most of the year, native water birds are protected under native wildlife laws across Australia.

Duck hunting is banned in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

In the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, there are declared 'open seasons' in which some species of ducks and other waterfowl are permitted to be shot for sport and recreation.<sup>ii</sup>

South Australia is also currently holding a Parliamentary inquiry into the practice.

## 3. Impact on environmental sustainability and amenity.

Humans have a responsibility to care for the natural environment of free-living native animals. People should take steps to preserve endangered species and protect native animals from harm and disease where possible.<sup>iv</sup>

Retained shotgun pellets have been found in around 10% of birds surveyed, even after intensive hunter education campaigns.<sup>ii</sup>

Lead contamination of the environment is also a potential environmental and public health concern.<sup>viii</sup> A radiographical study in Victoria carried out over almost 20 years reported that between 6% and 19% of trapped live ducks (of mixed species) had embedded shot.<sup>ix</sup>

Shooting for recreational purposes can also result in disruption of other nesting species such as swans due to noise and movement disturbance.

## 4. Social and economic impact: risking Victoria's commitment to good animal welfare practice.

The Victorian government is currently investing significantly into modernising Victoria's animal welfare laws, recognising and respecting the sentience of all animals and acknowledging the importance of animal welfare in modern Victorian society's behaviour and function and with resulting impact on animals.



“Modern animal welfare laws will help maintain community trust in our animal-based industries and sectors. Modern laws are increasingly important for demonstrating to our trading partners that Victoria’s industries are committed to good animal welfare practices.”<sup>x</sup>

In June 2020 the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions produced the “Economic contribution of recreational hunting in Victoria” Final Report.<sup>xi</sup>

The relatively small economic contribution determined by this report indicates that retaining the open season on economic grounds is not justified – to do so would ignore the high ethical and reputational price Victoria will pay for poor animal welfare practices which are in opposition to the current modernisation of Victorian animal welfare legislation, explicitly recognising animal sentience in these species of animals.

In the proposed plan for Victoria’s new Animal Care and Protection laws it states that “modern animal welfare laws will help maintain community trust in our animal-based industries and sectors. Modern laws are increasingly important for demonstrating to our trading partners that Victoria’s industries are committed to good animal welfare practices.”<sup>xii</sup>

## Recommendation

The Australian Veterinary Association strongly advises that the recreational hunting of waterfowl using shotguns should be prohibited at all times of the year.<sup>ii</sup>

The unacceptable and broad animal welfare impact resulting from the permission granted by law for this behaviour and function of Victorian society directly opposes the philosophy and veterinary ethics practiced by Australian registered veterinarians in addition to what was understood for the proposed modernisation of Victorian animal welfare legislation and to be in line with other Australian states.

The risk and impact on Victorian society also extends further to the social and environmental risks associated with the practice of recreational hunting.

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<sup>i</sup> AVA Policy: [Philosophy on animal welfare and the veterinarian](#)

<sup>ii</sup> AVA policy [Waterfowl hunting](#)

<sup>iii</sup> VICTORIA’S NEW ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION LAWS. Plan © The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions 2022

<sup>iv</sup> AVA policy [AVA Statement of principles – animal welfare and ethics](#)



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<sup>v</sup> Norman FI & Powell DGM (1981) Rates of recovery of bands, harvest patterns and estimates for black duck, chestnut teal, grey teal and mountain duck shot during Victorian open seasons, 1953-77. *Australian Wildlife Research* 8:659-664.

<sup>vi</sup> Szymanski, ML & Afton, AD, 2005, Effects of spinning-wing decoys on flock behaviour and hunting vulnerability of mallards in Minnesota. *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, Vol 33 No 3, 993-1001.

<sup>vii</sup> Shooting of Pest Birds (BIR001) Standard Operating Procedure: <https://pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/BIR001-SOP.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Whitehead, Peter J. and Tschirner, Kurt (1991). Lead shot ingestion and lead poisoning of magpie geese *anseranas semipalmata* foraging in a Northern Australian hunting reserve. *Biological Conservation*, 58(1):99-118.

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.theage.com.au/environment/conservation/fearful-swans-abandon-their-nests-at-start-of-duck-shooting-season-20220318-p5a5yd.html?fbclid=IwAR0I7aBejUHqOrAdnj78HS-UUqbFbW6hgpXylMeM7jPHEhuxgL-X4Y3n8Ao>

<sup>x</sup> VICTORIA'S NEW ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION LAWS. Plan © The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions 2022

<sup>xi</sup> Economic contribution of recreational hunting in Victoria, Final report, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, June 2020.

<sup>xii</sup> VICTORIA'S NEW ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION LAWS. Plan © The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions 2022