



Inquiry into Hunting of Native Birds

South Australian Parliamentary Committee

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd
May 2023

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

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

By virtue of their training, skill and knowledge, veterinarians promote animal welfare at all levels of activity and interactions with humans or animals to ensure that animals receive adequate care and protection.ⁱ

The societal responsibility to care for 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.ⁱ

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

The AVA consists of members 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.ⁱ

Summary

Hunting 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. South Australia remains one of a few states where this activity, and the associated unacceptable animal welfare impacts, is supported and condoned by law.ⁱⁱ

Poorly managed challenges to animal welfare in modern society risk South Australia’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’ habitats, and nesting practices,.

Economic justification should not ever condone poor animal welfare practices, and the expected relatively small impact on the South Australian economy of banning this practice should not challenge South Australia’s commitment to good animal welfare practices.



Discussion

The recreational hunting of native birds and quail:

1. creates unacceptable animal welfare impacts,
2. has a broad environmental impact,
3. has social impacts and economic risks for South Australian society by risking South Australia's commitment to, and reputation for, good animal welfare practices.

The operation of annual native bird hunting seasons:

Unacceptable animal welfare impacts.

Humans have a responsibility and a duty of care to protect animals. Animals may suffer when a person does not meet his or her obligations to animals in their care. When this happens, the law must be able to intervene to enforce compliance and prevent suffering adequately.ⁱⁱⁱ

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.ⁱⁱⁱ

When humans use 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.ⁱ

Such care should be humane, which implies empathy with the animal, avoiding unnecessary stress, injury and suffering and demonstrating compassion towards a fellow creature.ⁱ 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 that 14% to 33% of birds were wounded but not retrieved.^{iv}

A similar study from Minnesota, USA, reported that approximately one-third of ducks are injured but escape capture.^v

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.^{vi}

Clausen et al. (2017) note that the crippling of hunted birds due to shotgun injury constitutes an ethical and animal-welfare problem and 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. Hunting waterfowl using shotguns may result in the non-fatal injury of a proportion of target birds, resulting in unacceptable pain and suffering.^v

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.

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' where some duck species and other waterfowl are permitted to be shot for sport and recreation.ⁱⁱ

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

Impact on environmental sustainability and amenity.

Humans are responsible for caring 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

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

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.^{vii}

Shooting for recreational purposes can also disrupt other nesting species, such as swans, due to noise and movement disturbance.

Recommendation

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



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

The risk and impact on South Australian society extend further to the social and environmental risks of recreational hunting.

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

ⁱⁱ AVA policy [Waterfowl hunting](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ AVA policy [AVA Statement of principles – animal welfare and ethics](#)

^{iv} 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.

^v 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.

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

^{vii} <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>