



VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*



Australian Wood Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*)

**SUBMISSION TO**

# *Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements*

**Victorian National Parks Association**

Level 3, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton VIC 3025 • 03 9341 6500 • [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au) • [vnpa.org.au](http://vnpa.org.au)

ABN 34 217 717 593

# **Submission to the Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements**

## **Victorian National Parks Association. May 2023**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information and knowledge into the Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements.

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) is an independent member-based organisation, working to improve protection of Victoria's biodiversity and natural areas, across land and sea. The VNPA has been actively working to protect Victoria's biodiversity for over 70 years.

The Term of Reference (TOR) of the committee are as follows:

The select committee of nine members be established to inquire into, consider and report by 31 August 2023 on Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements, including but not limited to

—

- (a) the operation of annual native bird hunting seasons;
- (b) arrangements in other Australian jurisdictions;
- (c) their environmental sustainability and impact on amenity;
- (d) their social and economic impact.

The main issue we will address in this submission relate to mostly to TOR b,c,d.

The VNPAs position is that duck hunting should be banned or discontinued, as it is in Western Australia, NSW, Queensland and the ACT because of the:

- steep decline in duck populations, which will continue as climate change and other pressures reduce wetland health;
- wounding, death and disturbance of non-target birds, some of which are threatened;
- damage to wetlands.

We also note the economic contribution to Victoria is comparatively small, compared to other nature-based activities and visitor attractions.

### **2.0 Victorias Wetland Habitats in context**

According to the Victorian State of Environment Report Biodiversity Update 2021, since European settlement, Victoria has lost two thirds, totalling 4,000 (191,000 hectares), of its natural wetlands. Their decline in number, extent and condition continues due to climate change, water regulation, cropping, drainage and grazing. As a result, it would be expected that those species dependent on wetlands would also experience population declines and a reduced distribution, including native waterfowl.

The majority of threatened wetland-dependent species of fauna are birds, followed by amphibians, fish, reptiles and mammals. The conservation status in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Threatened List for each fauna group as of 2021 are as follows:

- Amphibians - six critically endangered, four endangered, one vulnerable.
- Freshwater fish - three critically endangered, nine endangered, two vulnerable
- Birds - 12 critically endangered, 13 endangered and 15 vulnerable
- Mammals - two vulnerable.
- Reptiles - one critically endangered, five endangered

*Note: some of these threat /conservation status categories may have changed following the detailed update of the threatened species list in 2022. See Appendix I for list of threatened water bird in Victoria.*

### 3.0 Hunting and Waterbird Population Trends

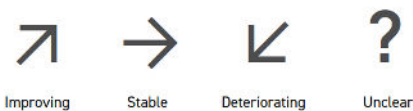
The Victorian State of Environment Report Biodiversity Update 2021 concluded that the status and trend for water birds species, at least in the Murray Darling Basin was ‘poor’ with a declining trend, with a high data confidence. The report notes: *“The annual Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey, which has been conducted since 1983, continues to show the long-term decline in waterbird abundance and distribution along two regular transects across the southern Murray-Darling Basin”*<sup>1</sup>

<b>B:14</b> Waterbird species in the Murray-Darling Basin <b>Region</b> Murray-Darling basin <b>Measures</b> Number, abundance and distribution <b>Data Custodian</b> DELWP	<b>Comment</b> The annual Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey, which has been conducted since 1983, continues to show the long-term decline in waterbird abundance and distribution along two regular transects across the southern Murray-Darling Basin.	<b>2018 Status</b>	<b>2018 Trend</b>	<b>2018 Data</b>
		<b>2021 Status</b>	<b>2021 Trend</b>	<b>2021 Data</b>

#### Key to Status



#### Key to Trend



<sup>1</sup> Page 252 SOE Biodiversity Update 2021, Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability [https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/State%20of%20the%20Environment%20Biodiversity%20Update%202021%20Report\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/State%20of%20the%20Environment%20Biodiversity%20Update%202021%20Report_WEB.pdf)

## Key to Data Confidence



High



Moderate



Low



Unknown

Kingsford et al on their research identified significant longterm declines in total abundances, functional response groups (e.g. piscivores (fish-eating birds)) and individual species of waterbird, associated with reductions in cumulative annual flow. These trends indicated ecosystem level changes. Between 1983 and 2020, the annual Eastern Australian Waterbird survey has surveyed the distribution and abundance of up to 96 waterbird species that include herons, egrets, large and small waders, migratory shorebirds, ducks and terns. Between 1983 and 2015 the surveys showed a 72% decline in waterbird abundance across the Murray-Darling Basin.<sup>2</sup>

The survey in 2020, a year in which Victoria received its average rainfall, found a continuation of the long-term trend of decline in total abundance, breeding index, number of species breeding and the wetland area index.

A further survey in 2022, found that despite three years with more rains, our declining populations of ducks and other waterbirds have not yet recovered after years of prolonged and widespread drought. Long-term monitoring shows that the bounce-back of waterbird numbers has not been as high as would normally be expected.<sup>3</sup>

Across these three survey years 2018, 2019 and 2020, each of the functional bird groups – ducks, herbivores, large wading birds, piscivores and shorebirds – all declined in abundance. Five of the bird species subjected to hunting – black duck, Australasian shoveler, grey teal, Australian shelduck and Australian wood duck – have experienced long-term declines, while another three hunting targets, the hardhead, chestnut teal and pink-eared duck, have shown no trend.<sup>4</sup>

The hunting of the above eight ducks is allowed in Victoria, one of the three states where it continues. In 2020 there were 60,400 ducks shot in Victoria, about a quarter of the number in 2019 due to COVID-19, the bushfires and reduced duck numbers. Wildlife Victoria reported that 262,567<sup>5</sup> native birds were shot and killed in 2022 with an unknown number of birds wounded and left on the wetlands by shooters as well as the numbers of duckling and other juvenile birds and eggs that were left on the nest without parent birds. This also adds an increased burden on volunteer wildlife carers already dealing with high numbers of injured wildlife<sup>6</sup>.

Menkhorst (2019) assessed the susceptibility of 39 waterbird species to disturbance from hunting. Those with the highest susceptibility included herons, egrets, bitterns, gulls and terns, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Kingsford R, Porter J, Brandis K and Ryall S 2020, 'Aerial surveys of waterbirds in Australia', Scientific Data, 7, Article 172, Supplementary information.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367180582\\_Eastern\\_Australian\\_Waterbird\\_Aerial\\_Survey\\_-\\_October\\_2022\\_Annual\\_Summary\\_Report](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367180582_Eastern_Australian_Waterbird_Aerial_Survey_-_October_2022_Annual_Summary_Report) and <https://birdlife.org.au/news/victorian-government-allows-duck-shooting-to-go-ahead-in-victoria-this-year/>

<sup>4</sup> Porter J, Kingsford R, Francis R and Brandis K 2020, 'Aerial survey of wetland birds in eastern Australia: October 2020 annual summary report', Centre for Ecosystem Science, Sydney, NSW.

<sup>5</sup> Wildlife Victoria responds to potential ban on ducking hunting in Victoria, Wildlife Victoria, February 2023

<sup>6</sup> Wildlife Victoria responds to the 2023 duck hunting announcement, Wildlife Victoria.

sandpipers and their relatives. Menkhorst believes that ‘susceptibility ranking, combined with the recommendations of significant population numbers, provide a clearer and more defensible basis for decisions about the need for further management interventions at individual wetlands.’<sup>7</sup>

Hunting also impacts on endangered and threatened species through direct mortality from shooting, disturbance by shooters of nesting structures<sup>8</sup>, roosting sites and water quality. Threatened species such as the Blue Billed Duck<sup>9</sup> have an action statement that highlights the threat to the species from duck shooting, other listed threatened species such as the Hardhead (*Aythya australis*) and Blue-winged shovelers (*Spatula rhynchotis*) are without Action Statements, and are highly susceptible to shooting<sup>10</sup> with only very simple “Do not shoot” documents on the GMA website, but no further actions put in place to reduce their decline in numbers by the government, but shooting is allowed in their habitats putting them at direct risk.

#### **4.0 Hunting and Animal Welfare Issues**

The hunting of wild birds is a cruel practice that results in many birds being injured. Many of the injured birds die of their injuries, often days later. Dependent young are often deprived of their parent birds and may be left to starve to death.

Both the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)<sup>11</sup> and Australian Veterinary Association condemn the inherent cruelty in native bird shooting.

According to the RSPCA:

*“It is indisputable that duck hunting using a shotgun results in a substantial number of ducks being wounded, with some individuals surviving, whilst others will suffer before eventually dying. Until evidence to the contrary is provided, it appears that based on Australian studies, approximately 26% of birds shot will be wounded or maimed/crippled . Of these, approximately 12% will be wounded and survive, and approximately 14% will be maimed/crippled but this could be as high as 33%. The likely outcome for wounded, maimed or crippled birds is a slow and painful death.”<sup>12</sup>*

In addition to the inherent cruelty of the shooting of native birds, is the impact on Critically Endangered and threatened wildlife through direct mortality from shooting, as well as the damaging

---

<sup>7</sup> Menkhorst P 2019, ‘Assessing waterbird susceptibility to disturbance by duck hunters in Victoria’, technical report series no. 305, Arthur Rylah Institute, Heidelberg, Victoria.

<sup>8</sup> Fearful swans abandon their nests at start of duck-shooting season The Age, By Miki Perkins and Rachel Eddie March 18, 2022

<sup>9</sup> Action Statement Blue-billed Duck *Oxyura australis*. Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 No. 174. DSE 2003.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Terrible tragedy unfolding’: Threatened species gunned down during duck season Michael Dahlstrom 17 March 2022.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rspca.org.au/take-action/duck-hunting>

<sup>12</sup> <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-many-ducks-and-quail-are-wounded-due-to-recreational-hunting/>

of habitat and habitat structures such as nest sites from individuals undertaking shooting of native birds.

The killing of native wildlife impacts endangered and threatened species, this is well documented and includes the shooting of protected ducks and other species such as swans, dotterels, moorhens and many others.

### **5.0 Hunting and other native birds – Quail & the Plains Wanderer**

Plains Wanderer (Critically Endangered under State and Commonwealth laws EPBC Act and FFG Act) and quail similar habitats and look alike. Plains Wanderer are very difficult to distinguish from and are likely to be mistaken for quail when flushed, with quail shooters not needing to undergo ID tests, this leaves the Plains Wanderer at risk of direct mortality from shooting.

The Plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) is a very ancient member of Australia's avifauna, with its origins tracing back over 60 million years when Australia was part of the Gondwana supercontinent<sup>13</sup> and is listed under both State and Commonwealth legislation as Critically Endangered.

The animal is a small quail like bird standing around 10cm tall with close resemblance to Button and Stubble quail. A vast majority of native quail shooting occurs on private property, this coincides with a majority of Plains Wanderer habitat occurring also on private land, which makes the regulation and measuring of impact of these activities on Plains Wanderer near impossible.

To conduct shooting of native quails, there is no accuracy identification requirements, this leaves the Plains wanderer at risk of being shot with some quail shooters occasionally killing Plains wanderers.<sup>14</sup> Shooting also has the potential to have adverse impacts upon the species due to both incidental shooting and interactions between birds and dogs<sup>15</sup>.

Quail shooting is listed as a Key Threat under the Commonwealths National Recovery Plan for the Plains Wanderer.

Due to the declining number of this iconic grassland species, the hunting of native quails in the Plains Wanderers distribution must cease across both public and private land to ensure the species isn't harmed by native quail shooting. The ongoing use of toxic lead ammunition is still allowed in quail shooting, posing a significant risk to not only wildlife but the public health, and must cease immediately.

---

<sup>13</sup> Action Statement #66 Plains Wanderer, DSE (2003)

<sup>14</sup> Action Statement #66 Plains Wanderer, DSE (2003)

<sup>15</sup> National Recovery Plan for the Plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*), Australian Govt Dept. of the Environment (2016)





Photo- Dr. Mark Antos

## 6.0 Social Impact of Native Bird Hunting

The shooting of native birds is deeply unpopular in Victoria with 9 out of 10 Victorians supporting an end to the practice.<sup>16</sup> The 2021 season was reduced from three months to 20 days. A 2020 report by the DJPR revealed that the gross economic contribution of duck hunting was \$65 million, however, that had declined by 28% since 2013.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the nature-based tourism sector and visitation to protected areas, such as national parks, is estimated at over \$2 billion annually, in Victoria.

Recent economic studies on national parks estate and outdoor activities sector:

- Parks in Victoria directly feeds into Victoria's economic activity, generating \$2.1 billion through park tourism and supporting at least 20,400 jobs.<sup>18</sup>
- Around \$7.4 billion is spent each year on nature-based outdoor activities in Victoria. This expenditure **makes a \$6.2 billion contribution to Victoria's economy**, and supports around **71,000** direct and indirect full-time equivalent jobs.<sup>19</sup>

Parks and protected areas also provide a range of ecosystem services worth many millions to the Victorian economy:<sup>20</sup>

- The market value of water runoff from nine of the highest yielding Victorian national parks is estimated at **\$244 million a year**.
- Stormwater retention services from Melbourne's metropolitan parks is estimated at **\$46 million a year**.
- Management of local ports by Parks Victoria is worth **\$300 million a year**.
- Coastal protection from parks is estimated to avoid costs of **\$24–56 million a year**.

---

<sup>16</sup> Birdlife Australia, Media release, Victorian Government allows duck shooting to go ahead Friday, 24 February 2023

<sup>17</sup> [https://djpr.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/1948706/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.pdf](https://djpr.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1948706/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.pdf) Page 19

<sup>18</sup> Parks Victoria Annual Report 2016–17 page 27

<sup>19</sup> Marsden Jacobs Associate, Victoria's nature-based outdoor economy Key estimates and recommendations Prepared for Outdoors Victoria & Sport and Recreation Victoria 27/1/2016 <http://outdoorsvictoria.org.au/media-release-victorias-outdoor-economy-worth-6-2-billion/>

<sup>20</sup> Valuing Victoria's Parks Accounting for ecosystems and valuing their benefits: Report of first phase findings, Parks Victoria, DELWP 2015 <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/about-us/valuing-victorias-parks>

- The benefits of pollination services to agriculture across Australia are worth between **\$123 and \$167 million** to consumers.
- The enjoyment visitors get from visiting parks is estimated at **\$600–\$1,000 million a year**.
- A conservative estimate of the amenity value for residents living immediately adjacent to Melbourne’s metropolitan parks alone is **\$21–28 million a year**.
- **Avoided costs to the Victorian healthcare system** attributable to nature-based outdoor activity alone are **worth at least \$265 million** a year and recreation benefits are worth **\$455 million a year**.

The scale of birdwatching as a domestic tourism activity in remote and regional areas of Australia is significant, with daytrips and overnight trips representing an estimated value of \$283 million to the Australian economy.<sup>21</sup> It would be expected that Victoria would receive a proportion of this, which should be quantified to compare to the estimated value from duck hunting.

Interestingly, economic assessments of recreational hunting also highlights that those who do hunt, do so for a variety of reasons including enjoyment of camping, 4 wheel driving and other out-door pursuits. According to the survey, the majority of game hunters value another activity as highly, or more highly, than hunting. 68% indicated that there were one or more activities which they would find it hard to choose between, or would prefer to over hunting. Only one third (32%) of hunters would always choose recreational hunting over any of the other activities listed.<sup>22</sup> If duck hunting was discontinued, this suggests that a significant proportion of participants would still pursue other outdoor activities or other hunting activities, meaning the economic impact would be significant less than the reported \$65 million annually (circa \$20 -25 million), though this should subject to detailed analysis.

## 7.0 Conflicting land management issues

Victoria’s is the most cleared State in Australia, with habitat largely cleared for farming and development. This leaves remaining areas of natural habitat as critical refuges for our unique plants, animals and ecological communities.

This makes remaining areas of natural habitat on public land vital for the plants and animals that have called Victoria home for millennia.

It seems perplexing then that native bird shooting is allowed across public lands, that have conservation of nature and wildlife as their objectives, and allow for low impact recreation such as walking, camping and fishing. These land tenures include; Natural Features Reserves, including Streamside Reserves, Geological and Geomorphological Reserves, Bushland Reserves and Wildlife Reserves,<sup>23</sup> all of which are subject to shooting of native birds unless stated otherwise by the land manager.

Wildlife (State Game Reserve) Regulations 1994 apply to many Natural Features Reserves that are also State Wildlife Reserves, classified as State Game Reserves where shooting is permitted.

---

<sup>21</sup> Steven, R. (2022) Bird and Nature Tourism in Australia. KBAs in Danger Case Study Report. Report prepared for BirdLife Australia. Carlton, Australia.

<sup>22</sup> [https://djpr.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/1948706/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.pdf](https://djpr.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1948706/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.pdf) Page 19

<sup>23</sup> Conservation Reserves Management Strategy, Parks Victorian (2003)



The Management Objectives for the 3 reserve categories (Nature Conservation Reserves, Natural features Reserves and Historic Reserves) are outlined below;

- Nature Conservation Reserves are to be managed primarily for the conservation of biodiversity. They are suitable for passive recreation such as nature study and picnicking subject to careful management of visitor use.
- Natural Features Reserves, including Streamside Reserves, Geological and Geomorphological Reserves, Bushland Reserves and Wildlife Reserves that are open for hunting, are also managed to conserve biodiversity but also for visitor use.
- Historic and Cultural Features Reserves are managed to protect a range of heritage values and also the conservation of natural values.

The conflict between land tenure objectives that have purposes for the conservation and protection of native wildlife and passive recreation being open to duck shooting is contradictory. The conflict between shooting wildlife and conservation of natural areas and wildlife must be resolved by ceasing the killing of native birds within these areas from shooting, as this is not an appropriate activity for these public lands.

## Appendix I: Threatened Victorian Water Birds

Common Name	Scientific Name	Conservation Status 2021*	Conservation Status 2013**
<b>Birds</b>			
Australasian bittern	<i>Botaurus poiciloptilus</i>	CR	EN
Australasian shoveler	<i>Spatula rhynchotis</i>	VU	VU
Australian little bittern	<i>Ixobrychus dubius</i>	EN	EN
Australian painted snipe	<i>Rostratula australis</i>	CR	CR
Australian painted-snipe	<i>Rostratula australis</i>	CR	CR
Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	VU	Not listed
Black bittern	<i>Ixobrychus flavicollis</i>	EN	VU
Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	CR	VU
Blue-billed duck	<i>Oxyura australis</i>	VU	EN
Brolga	<i>Antigone rubicunda</i>	EN	VU
Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	VU	NT
Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	EN	VU
Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	VU	VU
Curllew sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	CR	EN
Eastern curlew	<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	CR	VU
Eastern great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	VU	VU
Fairy tern	<i>Sternula nereis</i>	CR	EN
Freckled duck	<i>Stictonetta naevosa</i>	EN	EN
Great knot	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	CR	EN
Greater sand plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	VU	CR
Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	VU	EN
Grey-tailed tattler	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	CR	CR
Gull-billed tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	EN	EN
Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>	VU	VU
Hooded plover	<i>Thinornis rubricollis</i>	VU	VU
Inland dotterel	<i>Charadrius australis</i>	VU	VU
Lesser sand plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	EN	CR
Lewin's rail	<i>Lewinia pectoralis</i>	VU	VU
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta nigripes</i>	EN	EN
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albibrons</i>	CR	VU

Magpie goose	<i>Anseranas semipalmata</i>	VU	NT
Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	EN	VU
Musk duck	<i>Biziura lobata</i>	VU	VU
Pacific golden plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	VU	VU
Plumed egret	<i>Ardea intermedia plumifera</i>	CR	EN
Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	EN	EN
Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	CR	VU
Terek sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	EN	EN
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	EN	VU
Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	EN	VU