

Should duck and quail hunting be banned in Victoria?

What they said...

'We accept that hunting is a legitimate activity that many thousands of Victorians enjoy.'
Steve Dimopoulos, Victorian Minister for Outdoor Recreation

'The Allan Government has announced that the slaughter of native waterbirds can continue – despite the key recommendation of its own inquiry that duck shooting should end.'
Animals Australia's response to the Victorian government's decision

The issue at a glance

On January 29, 2024, the Victorian Government announced its response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements.

The government announced two decisions. The first was 'Recreational duck and stubble quail hunting will continue in Victoria.' The government's second decision was that several new regulations would be introduced in 2025 to ensure that duck and quail hunting 'remains safe, sustainable and responsible.' <https://tinyurl.com/55e8va34>

Supporters of duck and quail hunting were relieved. Animal welfare groups were angry and distressed. The Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements had recommended that the practice be banned, and this was the outcome most parties seemed to have expected. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-31/victorian-inquiry-recommends-duck-hunting-ban/102797318>

Background

(Much of the information below has been abbreviated from an informative piece published in The Conversation on March 30, 2011. The piece is titled 'Ducking and weaving: should we be hunting in Australia's wetlands?' and was written by Richard Kingsford Professor, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, UNSW Sydney. The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/ducking-and-weaving-should-we-be-hunting-in-australias-wetlands-148>)

Early history of modern duck hunting

Modern recreational duck shooting began in the 16th century, soon after the invention of the gun. European colonists brought duck hunting to Australia and by the late 19th century, 159,000 ducks were passing through the Melbourne markets in a year.

Australian state governments soon started to declare open seasons for duck shooting, initially for most of the year (244 days) but this gradually became restricted, down to today's usual three months, beginning in March.

Timing of the duck hunting season

Hunting is timed to be outside the breeding and moulting seasons. Most ducks in southeastern Australia breed in spring and then become flightless, moulting, and renewing their feathers. Aside from these constraints, governments must decide whether to declare a duck hunting season each year. This decision is usually made based on weather conditions and duck

breeding rates over the previous twelve months. This becomes the political flashpoint for claims and counter claims around animal welfare, conservation and hunting traditions.

The pro-duck hunting lobby

The pro-duck shooting camp argue that their pursuit is founded on sustainability as duck shooting primarily kills newly bred ducks, most of which would die anyway. Overseas research generally supports the contention that young birds are more naive and more likely to be shot than experienced adults.

Hunters also argue that their pursuit is steeped in tradition, passing on skills developed over generations. They often liken duck shooting to fishing where skills and traditions have developed, and the quarry is also consumed.

Finally, there is the conservation argument. Hunters are primarily interested in ensuring they can continue to hunt, and they know that, without habitat protection and creation, opportunities are diminished. Therefore, hunters in Australia and overseas are active in habitat conservation.

The anti-duck hunting lobby

The anti-duck shooting camp argue strongly on animal welfare grounds. Shotguns rely on a spray of small pellets that fan out and collide with the flying duck. Shotguns have a limited range and rely on enough pellets hitting the duck to fatally wound it. This does not always happen, and a duck may have sufficient mobility to escape and die later, even if the shot brings the bird down. The suffering of the bird in these circumstances is stressed.

The conservation argument focuses on the effects of duck shooting on populations of the eight game species in southeastern Australia.

In the past, lead poisoning of ducks and other waterbirds was a problem. Lead pellets from shotguns would lie dormant in the wetland where they were later picked up by ducks, mistaking them for small rocks which they normally eat to grind up of their food. Steel pellets are now used, except for quail hunting, where lead pellets are still used.

Finally, there is considerable concern that non-target species, including rare species, are also shot.

Bans and reforms

Anti-duck shooting groups have successfully campaigned for the banning of recreational duck shooting in Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. The practice is still legal in South Australia, Victoria, and Tasmania.

Education and waterfowl identification tests (WITs) have significantly improved the problem of shooting threatened species. In the early 1990s, for example, more than 200 waterbirds from 24 non-target species, including grebes, freckled duck, herons and swans, were shot on two wetlands in New South Wales.

Duck hunting is highly contentious in Victoria.

In 2023, The Victorian Government launched a review into duck and quail hunting, which attracted more than 10,000 public submissions — the most ever received by a parliamentary committee in the state.

On August 30, 2023, the recommendations of the Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements were released. One of its recommendations was a ban on seasonal hunting because of concerns about the falling number of native birds. It also said the practice had caused an 'unacceptable wounding and death rate' of threatened bird species. However, the other seven recommendations all dealt with ways of reducing these problems (assuming a ban were not implemented). <https://thedailyaus.com.au/stories/victoria-ignores-advice-to-ban-duck-hunting/#:~:text=Review,native%20birds%20in%20the%20state>.

Despite the mixed nature of the recommendations, commentators anticipated that duck and quail hunting would be banned in the Victoria before the 2024 season.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-31/victorian-inquiry-recommends-duck-hunting-ban/102797318>

However, on January 29, 2024, the Victorian Labor government, under new premier Jacinta Allan, announced that the recreational hunting of waterfowl would not be prohibited. The outdoor recreation minister, Steve Dimopoulos, said the government had not changed its stance on duck and quail hunting but would introduce changes from 2025 to make the practices safer and 'more sustainable'. <https://tinyurl.com/2p89sv7v>

Internet information

On March 27, 2024, The Canberra Times published a report titled 'Call to close at least 30 wetlands to duck hunters.' The report details a call from BirdLife Australia for 30 of the wetlands it had survey to be closed to hunters because of the presence of threatened species in these areas.

The full text of this article can be accessed at

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8570663/call-to-close-at-least-30-wetlands-to-duck-hunters/>

On February 7, 2024, The Sentinel Times published a report titled 'Duck hunting season announcement welcomed'. The article gives the views of some of those living in the south Gippsland region who are pleased that duck hunting will continue in their state. It also details conservation work duck hunters in the area have undertaken over several decades,

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.sgst.com.au/news/duck-hunting-season-announcement-welcomed>

On February 1, 2024, The Guardian Australia published a comment by Georgie Purcell, a Victorian upper house MP for the Animal Justice Party. The opinion piece is titled 'Why I'm not done fighting – for animal rights, and for women'. It describes her recent experience of image manipulation and explains her opposition to waterfowl hunting in Victoria.

The full text can be accessed at

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/01/why-im-not-done-fighting-for-animal-rights-and-for-women>

On February 1, 2024, Sporting Shooter published a comment by Royce Wilson titled 'Victorian duck hunting ban rejected, 2024 season to go ahead'. The opinion piece supports the decision; however, it claims that the Labor government appears to have bowed to pressure from the Electrical Trades Union in deciding not to ban duck and quail hunting.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <https://sportingshooter.com.au/news/victorian-duck-hunting-ban-rejected-2024-season-to-go-ahead/>

On January 31, 2024, Animals Australia posted an article on its Internet site titled ‘Vic Labor Gov allows duck slaughter to continue – ignoring recommendation of its own inquiry.’ The article criticises what it claims is the government disregarding the Inquiry’s recommendation to ban duck and quail hunting and presents reasons why this hunting should stop.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <https://animalsaustralia.org/our-work/shooting-and-hunting/vic-duck-shooting-inquiry-outcome-recommends-ban/>

Animals Australia’s arguments in favour of banning (updated as of January 31, 2024, can be accessed at <https://animalsaustralia.org/our-work/shooting-and-hunting/duck-shooting-victoria/>

On January 30, 2024, The Herald Sun published a pair of opinion pieces presenting opposing views on duck and quail hunting under the heading ‘Victorian MPs Jeff Bourman and Georgie Purcell share their views on the duck hunting decision’. Bourman’s comment, titled ‘Hunting is safe, humane and sustainable’ argues in favour of hunting while Purcell’s piece, titled ‘It is senseless slaughter’ argues against it.

The two pieces can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/victorian-mps-jeff-bourman-and-georgie-purcell-share-their-views-on-the-duck-hunting-decision/news-story/3d1f6eea7963dd7fd008a0107e401748>

On January 30, 2024, The Illawarra Mercury published a news report titled ‘Premier denies duck shooting links killed Vic ban’. The article shows the Victorian premier denying claims that she was influenced by her husband’s preference for duck shooting or pressure from the Electrical Trades Union in her government deciding not to ban duck hunting.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/8503758/premier-denies-duck-shooting-links-killed-vic-ban/>

On January 30, 2024, The Conversation published a comment by Jack Pascoe titled ‘Allowing duck hunting to continue in Victoria is shameful and part of a disturbing trend’. The comment stresses the harm caused by hunting, especially from Pascoe’s perspective as an Indigenous man.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/allowing-duck-hunting-to-continue-in-victoria-is-shameful-and-part-of-a-disturbing-trend-222156>

On January 29, 2024, The Age published a set of nine letters opposed to duck hunting under the heading ‘Jacinta Allan’s support for duck hunting is shocking’. The full set can be accessed at <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/jacinta-allan-s-support-for-duck-hunting-is-shocking-20240129-p5f0px.html>

On January 29, 2024, The Augusta-Margaret River Mail published a timeline of the major events surrounding the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.margaretrivermail.com.au/story/8501751/how-did-we-get-here-duck-hunting-to-stay-in-victoria/>

On January 28, 2024, The Border Mail published a news report titled ‘Victorian duck hunting season gets the green light’ The article gives opinions of those supporting and opposing the government’s decision to allow hunting to continue.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.bordermail.com.au/story/8501511/victorian-duck-hunting-season-gets-the-green-light/>

On December 14, 2023, Delta Waterfowl, published a feature article titled ‘No Science, No Duck Hunting?’ The Delta Waterfowl Foundation is a non-profit organisation operating in both Canada and in the United States whose mission is to secure the future of waterfowl and waterfowl hunting.

The article explains the vital role that Adaptive Harvest Management systems have played in ensuring the continuance of duck hunting in the United States.

The full text can be accessed at <https://deltawaterfowl.org/no-science-no-duck-hunting/>

On August 30, 2023, the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements released its report and recommendations.

The full text of the report and its recommendations can be accessed at

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

On May 28, 2023, The Age published a feature article by Jewel Topsfield titled “‘It’s not about killing”: Duck hunters say they’re unfairly targeted’. The piece features the pro-duck hunting views of Glen Falla, a farmer and hunter, who is the Conservation and Hunting Manager of Field & Game Australia. Field & Game Australia (FGA) is an Australian non-government organisation formed in 1958 for conservation, hunting and clay target shooting.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/it-s-not-about-killing-duck-hunters-say-they-re-unfairly-targeted-20230519-p5d9rv.html>

In May 2023, The Victorian National Parks Association made a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. The submission outlined its arguments against native bird hunting: diminishing wetlands, long-term decline in waterfowl numbers, the immediate danger presented to endangered and threatened species, the cruelty issues, the lack of popular support for duck and quail hunting and the use of designated conservation areas for hunting.

The full text can be accessed at <https://vnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VNPA-Submission-to-the-Inquiry-into-Victorias-Recreational-Native-Bird-Hunting-Arrangements.pdf>

On May 8, 2023, The Australia Institute made a submission to the Inquiry into Victoria’s Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. The submission is titled ‘The Duck Stops Here.’ It gives a detailed analysis of the supposed economic benefits derived from duck hunting and claims these are exaggerated.

The full text can be accessed at

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e89/contentassets/eb5ec84005cc40b9bb4e434fc8147d6b/submission-documents/1879.-the-australia-institute.pdf>

On January 24, 2023, RSPCA Victoria released its submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. The full text of this submission arguing against duck and quail hunting in Victoria can be accessed at

<https://rspcavic.org/duck-hunting-season-2023/>

On July 12, 2022, The Courier published a feature article by Maeve McGregor titled “‘A war zone”: is Victoria hunting its native ducks to extinction?’ The piece presents the views of

several prominent animal rights activists and research scientists opposed to the continuation of duck hunting.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/7812978/a-war-zone-are-we-hunting-our-native-ducks-to-extinction/>

On September 14, 2012, The Australia Institute published 'Out for a Duck'. The Australia Institute is an independent public policy think tank.

This publication is an analysis of the economics of duck hunting in Victoria written by Rod Campbell, Richard Denniss and David Baker. The analysis claims that banning duck hunting would have no negative impact on regional economies.

The full analysis can be accessed at <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/out-for-a-duck/>

The Internet site of Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting can be accessed at <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/>

The site supplies information about what the lobby group does, information on the environmental damage caused by duck hunting and opportunities to support the group in their attempts to have duck shooting banned.

Duck and quail hunting should be banned in Victoria

1. Native waterbirds suffer pain and distress because of hunting

Opponents of duck and quail hunting claim that birds are inevitably traumatised and often suffer painful, lingering deaths because of hunting.

Numerous authorities have claimed that duck and quail hunting always cause pain and distress for wounded animals. The RSPCA has noted, 'In recreational duck and quail hunting people use a shotgun to shoot the birds; this causes inevitable pain and suffering as not every bird is killed outright. While no recent studies have been conducted, one historical report showed that on average nearly a quarter of ducks were wounded and not killed outright, but the figure could be as high as one third. No wounding rate figures are available for quail.'
<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-many-ducks-and-quail-are-wounded-due-to-recreational-hunting/> The RSPCA has explained this in further detail, stating 'a shotgun releases a spray of pellets rather than a single bullet. To kill a game bird, the bird's vital areas (i.e., brain or heart/lung) must be hit by pellets, but the chance of achieving a fatal shot decreases the further the bird is from the shooter. If the bird is flying alone and shot from a relatively close range, a large number of pellets are likely to hit vital organs increasing the chances of causing death rapidly. Death occurs from damage to vital organs, bleeding, and shock. However, if a bird is shot at by a hunter from too far away, the pellets will spread further out and, coupled with the reduced pellet velocity, this will result in the wounding of both the target bird and the birds surrounding it, inevitably leading to pain and suffering.'
<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-many-ducks-and-quail-are-wounded-due-to-recreational-hunting/>

Not all hunters kill wounded birds humanely. A study done in Minnesota in the United States reported approximately one-third of ducks are injured but escape capture. A similar study in Victoria reported 14 to 33 percent of birds were wounded but not retrieved.

<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/hunting-and-fishing/waterfowl-hunting/#:~:text=Wing%2C%20bill%20and%20leg%20fractures,being%20taken%20by%20a%20predator.> The South Australian RSPCA has claimed, 'Every year shooters are caught on camera wounding (not killing) ducks in flight with pellets sprayed from shotguns, and then failing to kill the wounded birds quickly or humanely after they fall from the sky. The

footage has also shown that some shooters do not bother to retrieve wounded birds. . . And some shooters have also been filmed leaving wounded birds accessible to their dogs, even holding the flapping birds up and appearing to encourage their dogs to snap at them.’ <https://www.rspcasa.org.au/the-issues/duck-hunting/> The Animal Justice Party has also claimed ‘wounded birds often continue to fly or fall from the sky into dense reeds where they are difficult or impossible to locate. [Further] ‘windmilling’ (swinging the duck by the neck around in an arc/circle) is frequently observed on the wetlands despite resulting in a slow and painful death. If this fails to kill the wounded bird, they are often shoved into a shooter’s belt or box, still alive.’ <https://vic.animaljusticeparty.org/inquiry-into-native-bird-shooting> 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. Studies have found that death due to crippling may not happen immediately after injury and may take days or weeks from long-term effects. Retained shotgun pellets have been found in around 10 percent of birds surveyed, even after intensive hunter education campaigns. A radiographical study in Victoria carried out over almost 20 years reported that between 6 and 19 percent of trapped live ducks (of mixed species) had embedded shot. <https://tinyurl.com/5n8y4kp5>

Numerous studies have shown that waterfowl are sentient creatures that suffer physical pain and the effects of trauma. Professor Gisela Kaplan, an Emeritus Professor in Animal Behaviour in the School of Science and Technology at the University of New England has stated, ‘There is ample evidence that birds feel pain, fear, shock, and sorrow much like humans do. Many birds are monogamous and form lifelong pairs. When a bird is shot, its mate may never recover or find a new mate. The effects will hence ripple through a species.’ <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/the-cruelty>

2. Duck and quail hunting kills threatened species and non-game birds and causes further reduction in bird numbers

Opponents of duck and quail hunting claim that every year threatened species are killed because of this activity. It is claimed that despite being required to pass waterfowl identification tests, hunters continue to shoot endangered species and non-game species through carelessness or lack of skill. It is also claimed that the bird population figures used to justify duck and quail hunting are likely to be inaccurate and that wild bird numbers are in long-term decline.

Critics of duck and quail hunting note that every hunting season there are frequent reports of protected species being injured and killed. PETA Australia reported during the 2022 season ‘Within just a few short days of the commencement of Victoria’s duck-hunting season for 2022, threatened bird species are already being killed illegally. First, an Australasian shoveler – a member of a threatened species – was taken to the Wildlife Victoria triage tent on opening day. The duck’s injuries were so severe that she had to be euthanised. A few days later, a baby great crested grebe – also not on the game species list – was found shot in the back of the head and across his back.’ <https://tinyurl.com/22aejkbp> In 2023 the ABC reported that duck hunting has been banned at Lake Buloke in western Victoria after threatened species were allegedly shot there during the opening week of the new hunting season. Not-for-profit conservation group Wildlife Victoria said eight threatened duck species were recovered from nearby wetlands, which prompted independent hunting authority the Game Management Authority (GMA) to review and assess hunting at the site in Donald. According to Wildlife Victoria, the waterbirds picked up by conservationists included the hardhead

duck, blue-winged shoveler and the freckled duck, which is listed as endangered in Victoria. All had been left in the field. Wildlife Victoria chief executive Lisa Palma claimed, 'I would suggest that the numbers of waterbirds that are killed or wounded and just left is probably well into the thousands.' This is believed to include threatened species which are only recognised postmortem. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-09/duck-shooting-season-threatened-species-found-dead/102298590>

Non-game species are also frequently traumatised and killed because of duck and quail hunting. In May 2023, Glenys Mahler, a wildlife activist, said she saw a black swan fall from the sky at Gunbower Creek, near Echuca, less than two hours after the start of the season. Although the swan had 'no bullet hole', Ms Mahler said she saw the bird fly into a power line and break its neck, reportedly after bullets startled it. <https://tinyurl.com/2tzbv7a> Animal Liberation Australia has claimed 'With no accuracy tests and minimal [regulatory] authority present on the wetlands, protected, rare, and non-game species are caught in the crossfire. Every year, the Coalition Against Duck Shooting finds their bodies and reports them to the authorities.' <https://www.al.org.au/duck-shooting>

It is also claimed that the population figures used to justify duck and quail hunting are not reliable and ignore the long-term decline in bird numbers across Victoria. Critics claim that the extrapolations that are made from limited population survey data give highly unrealistic estimates of bird numbers in the wild. In the case of quails, Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Hunting have noted that the first Game Management Authority 'count' was conducted in only 2022. It found 101 birds in the areas surveyed. This was extrapolated to a total population of 3.1 million. The highest anticipated error factor was 29 percent. The following year 400 quail were counted which was extrapolated to a supposed 7 million. Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Hunting are skeptical of these figures, describing them as 'incredible'. The lobby group notes that these estimates are in opposition to the trend observed in annual quail harvests between 1991 and 2023. These are the tallies of the number of quail claimed to have been shot each year over this period. These quail harvests have declined by about 50 percent over this time. <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/native-quail>

Opponents of continued duck and quail hunting stress that waterfowl numbers in eastern Australia are in long-term decline. The Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey is conducted every year by the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of New South Wales in partnership with the New South Wales Office of Environment & Heritage with financial support from the New South Wales, Queensland, and Victorian governments. The 2022 survey, the most recent survey published, commented on a pattern of long-term decline in bird populations. It found that total waterbird abundance in 2022 increased significantly from 2021 but remained well below the long-term average: coming in at the 11th lowest level in 40 years. The survey found 'Despite two successive La Niña years, three major indices for waterbirds (total abundance, number of species breeding and wetland area index) continued to show significant declines over time.' The survey noted that these 'Long term trends are more informative for predicting population status than year to year fluctuations.' <https://tinyurl.com/3b3e5zsu> Six of eight duck species that the government allowed to be killed for recreation were found to be in serious long-term decline. Two species of 'game' ducks, Pink-eared and Hardheads, were resilient in earlier times but have suffered population collapse during the last decade. Two further 'game' species are now on Victoria's threatened species list (Hardhead and Blue-winged Shoveler). <https://animalsaustralia.org/our-work/shooting-and-hunting/duck-shooting-victoria/>

3. The regulation of duck and quail hunting is inadequate

Those who oppose duck and quail hunting in Victoria argue that the training supplied to hunters to reduce harm to all species and protect endangered species is ineffective. They also claim that the in-the-field monitoring and regulation supposedly supplied by the Victorian Game Management Authority (GMA) is inadequate.

Critics claim that training hunters to recognise species and shoot them cleanly and humanely is difficult and often ineffective. Dr Liz Walker, the chief executive officer of RSPCA Victoria has noted, 'The government wants to invest \$10 million into mandatory training, hoping this will reduce wounding rates, however Denmark, a world leader in wounding reduction, took 20 years to reduce wounding rates, and these rates still sit unacceptably high at around 10 percent.' <https://www.mansfieldcourier.com.au/news-news/duck-shooting-given-the-green-light> Regarding bird recognition, Animals Australia has complained 'Duck shooters are required to sit a 22 question "Waterfowl Identification Test". You can pass this test with just 75 percent accuracy [this has since been raised to 85 percent – Echo editor] — and you only need to sit it once — meaning some shooters may not have taken the test for 25 years.' <https://animalsaustralia.org/our-work/shooting-and-hunting/duck-shooting-secrets/> In addition, duck hunters currently do not have to demonstrate shooting accuracy. Animals Australia has critically observed, 'Duck hunters don't have to pass a compulsory shooting accuracy test — despite the government's own data revealing shooters are likely to cause injury rates of up to 30 percent. The development of an accuracy improvement course for shooters was funded by taxpayers but attracted little interest from shooters. Fewer than one hundred shooters are believed to have attended the one-day course — yet more than 26,000 duck shooters are licensed for the 2018 season.' <https://animalsaustralia.org/our-work/shooting-and-hunting/duck-shooting-secrets/>

From 2025, there will be shooter accuracy training and testing; but critics have complained that this is not sufficient. Anyone applying for a duck hunting licence in Victoria from 2025 will have to undertake a clay target test, aimed at reducing wounding, however, the Coalition Against Duck Hunting has argued 'There is no proposal to test existing licence holders for shooting accuracy.' The Coalition has warned, 'Only new shooters will be tested. But the existing shooters are the ones whose wounding behaviour has prompted this program. There will be "incentives" to entice existing shooters to pass tests. But the worst shooters won't want to do any tests, and they will perpetuate the worst behaviours. The proposed online knowledge test for all is easily flouted by getting "help" from friends.' <https://tinyurl.com/mwbcwj5b>

It is also argued that there is no process for ensuring that all hunters know how to humanely kill injured birds. A shooter survey in Victoria found that 84 percent of shooters did not know how to kill quickly and relatively painlessly ducks that they had shot and injured. This means that if a hunter collects an injured bird, they are likely to cause additional and prolonged pain and suffering. <https://www.al.org.au/duck-shooting>

In addition, critics claim that the hunting areas that must be monitored by Victoria's Game Management Authority (GMA) are too many and too large to be regulated effectively. Animals Australia's chief executive officer Glenys Oogjes has stated, 'We know that there are too many wetlands for any level of robust regulatory management.' <https://rspcavic.org/new-data-reinforces-case-for-duck-hunting-ban/> Wildlife Victoria has similarly maintained, '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.’ <https://tinyurl.com/jcd36ww2>

In 2017, Pegasus Economics conducted an ‘Assessment of the GMA’s compliance and enforcement function’. The review found ‘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.’ <https://tinyurl.com/jcd36ww2>

4. A duck and quail hunting ban would not harm regional economies

Those who support a ban on duck and quail hunting argue it would not harm rural economies. They claim the supposed benefits that come from hunting have been exaggerated and that other regional industries, such as tourism, are more significant and would develop more rapidly if duck and quail hunting were banned.

Opponents of duck and quail hunting argue that the supposed economic advantages of hunting for regional communities have been overstated. It has been claimed that the economic contribution of hunting to Victoria’s economy was initially overblown because the figures were based on estimates of supposed expenditure supplied by duck hunters. Shooters were asked to ‘guesstimate’ their expenditure on hunting. Kerrie Allen, a spokesperson for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Incorporated, has said of this process, ‘The results were ludicrously high but have been quoted relentlessly to justify taxpayer subsidies. The millions allegedly spent by duck shooters equate to an incredible \$235 per duck bagged.’ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/who-calls-the-shots-on-duck-hunting-in-regional-victoria-20210801-p58erm.html> Alternate figures have been supplied by the Australian Institute, an independent think tank based in Canberra, which has used RM Consulting Group (RMCG) to survey and supply figures on hunters’ expenditure. RMCG is an environmental and agricultural consultancy which provides advice to government agencies, water authorities, institutions, and private sector clients. The Australian Institute has stated, ‘Based on calculations from RM Consulting Group, duck and quail hunting results in economic activity of between \$4 million and \$11 million each year. Even at the top of the range – \$11 million – duck and quail hunting represent just 0.002 per cent of Victoria’s gross state product of \$501 billion.’ <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e78/contentassets/5932d880e13447a687f2c3ef48170eff/3.-final-the-australia-institute.pdf>

It has further been noted that if duck hunting were banned in Victoria, hunters would probably pursue other related outdoor activities which would be likely to contribute comparable amounts to regional economies. Rod Campbell, the Research Director of the Australian Institute, has stated, ‘The RMCG work . . .has percentages in the 90s of respondents saying that in the absence of any kind of hunting they would go fishing, go boating et cetera. You know, polling aside, I think it just makes real-world sense that if you are a person interested in the outdoors and one kind of outdoor activity is not available you would be very likely to substitute that with another kind of outdoor activity.’ <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e78/contentassets/5932d880e13447a687f2c3ef48170eff/3.-final-the-australia-institute.pdf>

It has further been noted that tourism from among non-hunters would be likely to increase if the duck and quail hunting season in Victoria were banned. Rod Campbell, the Research

Director of the Australian Institute, has stated, ‘Our surveys asked people who were not hunters if they were more or less likely to go to areas for a general tourism visit if they knew that there was hunting occurring there. I think it is not very surprising that the numbers are pretty high . . . [with] about 76 per cent of people saying they would be less likely to visit an area that has a hunting season going on at it.’

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e78/contentassets/5932d880e13447a687f2c3ef48170eff/3.-final-the-australia-institute.pdf> Related findings were made by Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Incorporated in its surveys of regional businesses. The lobby group found that ‘Businesses want to expand but tourist numbers shrink during duck shooting seasons.’ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/who-calls-the-shots-on-duck-hunting-in-regional-victoria-20210801-p58erm.html>

Supporters of a duck and quail hunting ban argue that tourism has far more to offer all Australian regional economies than any form of hunting. In a letter published in The Gippsland Times on March 16, 2021, Kerrie Allen, a spokesperson for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Incorporated, noted, ‘Tourism typically contributes more to Australia’s economy than agriculture, forestry, fishing, media and communications combined. Even during COVID it was worth more than \$50 billion, employed about five per cent of working Australians and supported one in eight businesses (Tourism Satellite Account). Nature-based tourism is the fastest growing component . . . More overnight domestic tourists went birdwatching than visited the Great Barrier Reef. When independent economists report most holidaymakers avoid shooting areas, it’s clear we must make a choice. It’s not rocket science to see 860,000 birdwatchers is a better economic opportunity for regional areas than 7000 active duck shooters (Game Management Authority statistics) who typically camp and bring their own supplies.’

<https://www.gippslandtimes.com.au/uncategorized/2021/03/16/tourism-a-better-option-than-duck-hunting/>

5. Residents of wetlands in regional Victoria are endangered and inconvenienced by duck and quail hunting.

Among those who oppose duck and quail hunting are residents of regional Victorian wetlands who claim their lives are made unsafe and their enjoyment of their local environment is reduced by the annual hunts.

There are many residents of regional Victoria who oppose duck and quail hunting because of the harm they claim the activity causes to their lives and local environments. The organisation representing those in Victorian wetland regions opposed to duck and quail hunting is Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Incorporated. It claims to represent ‘farmers, business owners and residents.’ In its submission to the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements, the lobby group stated, ‘We experience the bird shooting without a choice. We are often the ones who are witnessing what goes on when the hunters think no-one is watching. As individuals, many of us are too afraid to speak up given the disturbing hunter behaviour we are privy to. The gunfire occurs close to our homes, on and adjacent to our properties. That in itself is quite disturbing and destructive enough, but we also contend with armed trespassers, the distressing sight of dead and injured birds, theft of firewood and the aftermath of rubbish and contamination strewn around our properties in the wetlands.’

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e91/contentassets/c70d45aa82c74bf08d098af78a57ed35/6.-final-regional-victorians-opposed-to-duck-shooting-29062023.pdf>

Anti-duck hunting wetland residents have noted that their family lives are disrupted, and their own recreational activities are obstructed. Their submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements further stated, 'We have to console our scared and worried children, take measures to manage petrified pets and move horses and other stock to agistment. The resultant heightened anxiety levels leave some residents legitimately fearful of their safety. Furthermore, the shooting encroaches onto areas where other outdoor pursuits normally take place. Activities such as cycling, bushwalking, horseriding, birdwatching, fishing, school nature excursions and kayaking are all unwillingly deterred by the shooting. This not only curtails the freedom and ability of others to enjoy the outdoors, but it impacts negatively on the tourism potential of these unique and beautiful places.'

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e91/contentassets/c70d45aa82c74bf08d098af78a57ed35/6.-final-regional-victorians-opposed-to-duck-shooting-29062023.pdf>

It has also been noted that it is difficult for residents to move safely around their local environment during duck and quail hunting season as the location of many shooting areas is not known. Kerrie Allen, a spokesperson for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Incorporated testified to the 'Inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements' that 'Only a very small number [of hunting locations] are signposted as shooting areas. They are largely at the state game reserves. There are only about 200 of those. The vast majority of public shooting areas are not signposted, and the maps are incorrect. It is not possible to know for sure where shooting can and cannot take place . . . Apparently, the maps are incomplete. GMA (Game Management Authority) have said to us that not all public foreshore areas are showing up on the hunting maps because they are not yet at a standard of accuracy . . . They have got no idea . . . Nobody seems to be able to give us an answer or even tell us whether it is closer to 8000 public waterways or 20,000 – it is scary – that we do not have any oversight of where these shooting areas are.'

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490e91/contentassets/c70d45aa82c74bf08d098af78a57ed35/6.-final-regional-victorians-opposed-to-duck-shooting-29062023.pdf>

In an opinion piece published in The Age on August 2, 2021, Kerrie Allen gave the results of surveys her organisation had conducted among wetland residents. She stated, 'In the absence of any government consultation to do so, our organisation has run surveys to capture the impacts of bird shooting on those who live or work near it. Concerns have flooded in from regional people relieved to be finally heard.' Residents' complaints apparently included 'Shotgun pellets landing on roofs and in water tanks. Wounded ducks flapping into backyards. Children shrieking in horror, asking why people do this to animals. The shooting is too close to homes, including a retirement village. Hunters' trespass is common.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/who-calls-the-shots-on-duck-hunting-in-regional-victoria-20210801-p58erm.html>

Duck and quail hunting should not be banned in Victoria

1. Duck hunting is a traditional recreation enjoyed by hunters and their families.

Supporters of recreational duck and quail hunting argue that these activities are important events in the lives of hunters and their families. They claim that they are time-honoured practices that have typically been passed on through generations, allowing valuable skills to be taught and supplying social and health benefits. It has also been noted that there are some Indigenous people and migrant groups for whom these activities are particularly culturally important.

The personal, social, and family significance of duck and quail hunting was stressed in many of the submissions made to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. In submission no. 6,969, Jo Howes noted, 'Hunting is labeled as a sport, yet to me it's a lifestyle...Hunting is my culture. My family are 6th generation farmers, and to cease duck hunting would impact our farm's economy, ecosystem, and livelihood severely, not to mention a decline in mental health wellbeing.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

Pap Arthur wrote in his submission, 'I hunt to eat as I was taught by my father and his father before him, now I have a son and daughter that I'm teaching with my father to do the same. Organic, clean of added chemicals, and we only take what we need.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/may/02/victorian-duck-hunters-urge-parliament-not-to-bow-to-political-correctness>

Related observations were made by Anthony Gommers in submission no. 9,999.

He noted, 'I was fortunate to be introduced to duck hunting by my father at the age of ten.

For the last 15 years I have been proud to enjoy the recreational pursuit, and the company that comes with it. Fellow duck hunters have always been welcoming, and keen to share stories, knowledge and occasionally some of their harvest around a campfire, creating some of my favorite memories with my father with hopefully many more to come.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

The health and psychological benefits of duck and quail hunting are stressed by many supporters. Jo Howes' submission further noted, 'It's how I de-stress and where I meditate on how lucky we are to be free in this beautiful country Australia. Hunting is how I stay physically fit. It's my main motivation to exercise.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

Nick Zema made similar points in his submission. He wrote, 'Hunting provides an opportunity for some to escape the hustle and bustle of city life and connect with nature. The serene and peaceful environment is a stress-relieving atmosphere that many people find soothing. It allows for an opportunity to decompress from everyday stressors and reset the mind. Hunting also encourages physical fitness, as it requires stamina and strength to trek through wetlands and carry equipment.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

Supporters of duck and quail hunting also note that these activities are an important part of the cultural legacy of Indigenous Victorians. Though not all support duck and quail hunting, there are many Indigenous people who do and who made submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. Dr Nathan Vale wrote, 'My people have been harvesting birds for 1000's of years. It's part of my culture. It brings friends and family closer together. It builds strong relationships with all people in Australia regardless of race.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

Many migrants to Victoria feel similarly. The activity allows them to perpetuate their particular cultural traditions and increase their social connections. Huseyin Alpozgen, President of the Australian Cypriot Sporting Shooters Association, wrote in his submission to the Inquiry, 'My story begins in 1984 when ... my family journey led us to Australia, the land of opportunity with vast land and hunting opportunities. I am currently 68 years old and have been hunting with my father and many friends since I could walk...' Mr Alpozgen argues that those who oppose duck

hunting want to impose their cultural values on others. 'They want us to become a robotic society, not to do outdoor activities, not to eat meat. Live in the city and drink coffee and eat lettuce.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490d32/contentassets/48d3fdff53e64336bcb28cedec84aee/submission-documents/121.-australian-cypriot-sport-shooting-associat_redacted.pdf

The Victorian Government has acknowledged these arguments, stating 'Recreational duck and quail hunting is a legitimate activity, and it matters to thousands of Victorians who love the great outdoors.' <https://tinyurl.com/2tc4j8e8> Steve Dimopoulos, the Outdoor Recreation Minister, has added, 'This is a legitimate activity that has existed on these lands for thousands of years and at least, in terms of white Australia, from 1860.'

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/8501511/victorian-duck-hunting-season-gets-the-green-light/>

2. Duck hunting is already regulated to minimise animal suffering and new regulations will be put in place to further reduce animal distress

Supporters of duck and quail hunting claim there are longstanding measures in place to ensure that birds do not suffer avoidable pain. The Victorian government has also promised that as of 2015 additional steps will be taken to further reduce animal suffering.

Victoria's Game Management Authority (GMA) currently offers a range of advice and practical support to reduce the likelihood of birds being wounded rather than killed outright. The GMA advises hunters to practise regularly using clay target shooting. They recommend hunters know the most appropriate ammunition and their maximum shooting range. For most hunters this is 30 metres. The GMA provides advice (including videos) on what are the best shots to take and how to increase the likelihood that a hunter will be able to readily retrieve a downed bird. They recommend the use of decoys and bird calls and give advice on where to place decoys. <https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/hunting/duck/reduce-wounding>

In Victoria, hunters can only use a shotgun to hunt ducks that does not exceed 12 gauge or have more than two barrels. This is to help ensure a humane kill. Only non-toxic shot can be used, and hunters caught using or possessing lead shot run the risk of fines, firearms seizure, and court. This is to help prevent lead shot continuing to pollute waterways.

<https://tinyurl.com/nvdm58wp> The regulations also require that once a bird is downed, a hunter must focus on that bird only and make all reasonable efforts to retrieve it immediately. S/he must not continue to shoot at other birds. There are a variety of techniques suggested for humanely killing wounded birds. <https://tinyurl.com/5dstvtvy>

As of 2025, the Victorian Government will impose harsher restrictions to ensure that existing regulations are followed by hunters. They are also introducing some additional requirements intended to reduce the suffering of hunted wildlife. These changes will include improving hunters' knowledge and skill by making education and training mandatory. Currently the training available does not have to be undertaken by hunters. From 2025, those applying for a hunting licence will be required to successfully complete training. The ban on the use of lead shot for duck hunting will be extended to include quail hunting as well. There will also be stricter enforcement of hunting regulations and harsher penalties will be applied to those found to have not followed the regulations. <https://djsir.vic.gov.au/game-hunting/duck-and-stubble-quail-hunting>

The new Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan will also be implemented to reduce the risk of wounding. This plan has been developed by government agencies, academics, animal welfare groups and hunters to address and reduce levels of wounding in a measurable, evidence-based way. The Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan mandates shooting tests for bird hunters as part of the licensing process. The tests will require shooters to hit a minimum number of clay targets in a practical test designed to simulate ducks in flight. They may also have to show they can estimate ranges. Once the regulations are in place, all new licence applicants will have to pass the proficiency test and existing hunting licence holders will be encouraged to do the test. <https://sportingshooter.com.au/news/demand-for-duck-hunting-licences-surges-as-compulsory-shooting-tests-loom/>

The Government will work with hunting groups, animal welfare groups, Traditional Owners and the Game Management Authority in implementing these changes. Victoria's hunting regulations will be updated by late 2024. There will be a public consultation phase for this regulatory update. <https://djsir.vic.gov.au/game-hunting/duck-and-stubble-quail-hunting>

As one of the components of their new training, duck and game hunters will have to demonstrate greater recognition of Traditional Owners' knowledge of hunting and land management practices. This is part of the Victorian Government's Sustainable Hunting Action Plan which involves all hunting practised across the state. The government recognises the knowledge of Traditional Owners and wants to partner with them in implementing hunting management strategies. Indigenous experts will be called on to help develop the training and education program all new hunters will have to undertake before gaining a hunting licence. https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/655616/Traditional-Owner-Game-Management-Strategy.pdf

3. Duck hunting is regulated to safeguard bird population numbers and protect endangered species

Supporters of duck hunting argue that it does not pose a significant threat to overall bird populations and that measures have been put in place to safeguard endangered species.

Though it is acknowledged that there has been an overall decline in bird numbers across Victoria, supporters of duck hunting claim that their sport has made no significant contribution to this trend. Professor Richard Kingsford, director of the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of New South Wales, says his research showed hunting had a small negative impact. He claims, 'It was a lot smaller than the effect of the loss of habitat... Over the last 40 years we have lost a lot of waterbird habitat due to the building of dams and diversion of water for irrigation and development of flood plains.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/it-s-not-about-killing-duck-hunters-say-they-re-unfairly-targeted-20230519-p5d9rv.html> Nationals Member for Euroa Annabelle Cleeland has stated, 'Any ban on duck and quail hunting introduced in Victoria would have been based on emotion and political ideology, not sound science. During the inquiry, the committee heard in evidence that the greatest threat to duck populations is habitat decline, not hunting.'
<https://ncreview.com.au/2024/02/06/duck-hunting-to-continue-with-common-sense-changes/>

Supporters of duck hunting note that specific management provisions are put in place each season to ensure bird populations are not put at risk. The Victorian Game Management Authority states, 'Recreational duck hunting in Victoria is managed sustainably, with the bag limits and season dates set to ensure that hunting does not threaten the conservation status of game duck species. Duck seasons arrangements may change from time to time; and hunters

should always check current regulations, season dates, and bag limits. Some game species may be protected from hunting at particular times, such as during drought, or bag limits may be changed in response to population numbers and/or environmental conditions.’

<https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/hunting/duck/hunting-methods> Starting from 2025, a new surveying process will be put in place to give greater security that estimations of bird numbers are accurate. This is the Adaptive Harvest Management process which is already widely used in other parts of the world. <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/continuing-recreational-duck-hunting-victoria> In 2019, an expert panel examined the Adaptive Harvest Management process and concluded it offered ‘key benefits by reducing uncertainties for hunters and other stakeholders, and that the suggested population monitoring and modelling framework is theoretically sound and appropriate.’ https://djsir.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1992674/Waterfowl-AHM-Panel-Report-Final.pdf

Supporters of duck and quail hunting also stress that measures are currently in place to help prevent hunters shooting threatened species. Hunters are required to pass a Waterfowl Identification Test (WIT) before being permitted to hunt ducks. This ensures that all licensed duck hunters can identify game and non-game waterbirds while in the field.

<https://www.fieldandgame.com.au/hunting/wit-tests/> In Victoria, the test consists of 22 multiple-choice questions. The test is viewed as a video, and applicants have 20 minutes to complete all 22 multiple-choice questions. A species of waterfowl is viewed for approximately five seconds and hunters must select the correct waterbird species and its hunting status before moving to the next question. A score of 85 percent or greater will be required to obtain a pass (that is, 57 out of 66), provided that the applicant also correctly identifies all non-game species. <https://www.fieldandgame.com.au/hunting/wit-tests/><https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/licencing/waterfowl-identification-test> All hunters must leave a fully-feathered wing on any harvested duck until immediately prior to cooking or until the duck has been taken to the person's ordinary place of residence. This allows Authorised Officers to identify all waterfowl in a hunter's possession. <https://www.fieldandgame.com.au/hunting/wit-tests/><https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/licencing/waterfowl-identification-test><https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/hunting/duck/hunting-methods>

4. Duck hunters assist in environment conservation and the preservation of bird populations. Supporters of duck and quail hunting claim that the work these hunters do to conserve the environments needed for waterfowl to thrive is of great benefit to the survival of many species.

Supporters of duck hunting often claim that hunters help to preserve total waterfowl populations because of their efforts conserving wetlands. Jade Benham, Nationals MP for Mildura, has stated, ‘Trained and licensed harvesters have a positive effect on conserving and restoring wetland habitats and an extensive Liberals and Nationals minority report [from the Inquiry] recommended the continuation of bird harvesting in Victoria in a safe, responsible and sustainable way.’ <https://www.jadebenham.com.au/media-releases/common-sense-win-for-duck-hunting/> Similarly, Annabelle Cleeland, Nationals Member for Euroa, has argued that the decision to back away from a duck and quail hunting ban advantages birdlife. She explained, ‘I received hundreds of emails during the inquiry into duck hunting and it was clear the commitment that these hunters have to upholding sustainable and ethical principles. If hunters continue to revive and care for our wetlands as they have done, then our waterfowl will have habitat to breed and flourish into the future.’

<https://ncreview.com.au/2024/02/06/duck-hunting-to-continue-with-common-sense-changes/>

Many the pro-hunting submissions made to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements detailed the wetland conservation work that hunters have performed for many years. The Rushworth Field and Game Club stated in its submission, 'We are passionate about wetland management; we are also advocating for water allocations in certain wetlands where we believe the benefits to all native bird species to be enormous. Further evidence of our passion includes a very successful bird box and hen house, construction, and installation program this season. In conjunction with Shepparton Field and Game (SFG), [Rushford Field and Game] removed 20 old bird boxes and replaced with 50 new bird boxes. The RFG and SFG also constructed and installed 50 hen houses. The RFG have documented over 400 successful native bird hatchlings from the bird boxes and hen houses that were installed. This does not include the SFG hatchings. On many occasions the hen houses and bird boxes were utilised by separate breeding pairs.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

In an individual submission made to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements, Zorra Parmigiani noted, 'Duck hunters and hunters in general are conservationists; they have a vested interest in preserving wild places to the benefit of all wildlife and the population in general. Duck hunters have pioneered nesting boxes for a variety of duck species and thousands of those boxes have been erected and serviced throughout the state by hunter volunteers. Duck hunters have put time, money, equipment and effort into water management, funding water control structures, monitoring water levels, access roads, boat ramps, tree planting, feral animal eradication and the multitude of issues that go hand in hand with land management. Duck hunters have purchased and rehabilitated wetlands again for the benefit of all wildlife and the rest of the population, a prime example of this is the Heart Wetland project near Sale. The most important role that duck hunters play is that of guardian, they are the people who frequent the wetlands, they are often the first to report unwanted occurrences and changes in the environment, they fight for the preservation of wetlands.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements offered the following summary statement of the wetland conservation and species management work performed by game hunters either as individuals or as part of clubs. It stated, 'Many stakeholders described the conservation and wetlands restoration work undertaken and funded by hunting conservation groups, most of whom were volunteers. They noted that the projects are funded by volunteers and other donations. Key examples of key environmental works undertaken by volunteers included wetlands conservation, installation of nesting boxes, feral species pest management programs, weed species removal and tree planting.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

5. Duck and quail hunting are a boost to the Victorian economy.

Those who favour duck and quail hunting note the economic benefits these activities bring to regional and metropolitan economies.

Duck and quail hunting are said to boost rural and metropolitan economies through the purchase of hunting equipment and other supplies during the several months of the hunting season. A report released in June 2020 by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions titled 'Economic contribution of recreational hunting in Victoria' found that recreational hunting contributed some \$356 million per year to the Victorian economy and was responsible for generating 3,138 jobs.

https://djpr.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1948706/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.pdf The Victorian Minister for Outdoor Recreation, Steve Dimopoulos, has noted that duck hunting specifically contributes about \$65 million annually to the state's economy, which, he claimed, benefits local communities across regional Victoria. <https://www.mansfieldcourier.com.au/news-news/duck-shooting-given-the-green-light>

Approximately 49 percent of hunters surveyed in 2019 as part of a report on the economic contribution of recreational hunters to the Victorian economy live in Greater Melbourne and 51 percent live in regional Victoria and interstate.

https://djpr.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1948706/v.4Economic-contribution-of-recreational-hunting-in-Victoria-accessible.pdf This means that through purchasing camping equipment, protective clothing, guns and ammunition, hunters are likely to contribute to the economies of their home locations and (if travelling to Victorian wetlands) the regional areas they visit. Their food and accommodation are likely to be a benefit primarily to the areas where they hunt.

The recent 'Inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements' noted that most submissions from hunters stressed the many thousands of dollars they deliberately spent in wetland communities as part of their commitment to the regions where they hunted. Many submissions stressed the economic benefits that duck hunting offers for regional and metropolitan economies. In a submission made to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements, Mr Pedro Petropoulos noted through personal observation that both Victorian country towns and the local gun shops of metropolitan hunters suffered a loss of trade when hunting seasons were curtailed.

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490cf0/contentassets/52d7ffee53e5430bac8aa55a578d4c7b/submission-documents/005.-pedro-petropoulos_redacted.pdf In a pro-hunting submission to the Inquiry, hunter Jacob Wade itemized some of what he spent in rural towns while hunting. He wrote, 'Take into account that I would spend around \$250 per trip on fuel, food, etc. and I would do at least 10–15 trips a year, you are looking at a further three thousand dollars injected into the economy and that is just me!'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

The Inquiry also noted that duck and quail hunting are supported by many regional councilors. As an example, it cited Cr Ian Bye, Mayor of Wellington Shire Council, who stated, 'In Wellington we receive a significant community benefit from duck hunting each year, in the amount of around \$3.5 million per year. Even in the reduced season the spending was as much, talking to local suppliers, as it was in a normal season, so we still had quite a lot of people that were participating. Hunters travelling to our region provide significant economic advantages via accommodation, purchase of fuel and hunting supplies and additional ad hoc purchases in small communities closest to their hunting area.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

The Inquiry was uncertain about the capacity of nature-based tourism to replace the economic investment that hunters make in regional economies. Currently, given the dampening effect that the duck hunting season appears to have on other forms of tourism in wetland areas, it is not possible to say the extent to which nature tourism would substitute for the economic boost supplied by hunters. In addition, some submissions to the Inquiry stated that certain nature-based tourism locations like Winton Wetlands are yet to be economically sustainable without significant Victorian Government grants.

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/492214/contentassets/1dbd275555b9401a93f298ec115c421f/lc-native-birds-60-01_vic_rec_nativebirdhunting.pdf

Further implications

The Jacinta Allan Labor government in Victoria has been accused of making a political decision in allowing duck and quail hunting to continue in their state.

Analysis has revealed that six outer metropolitan seats could potentially be lost to the Labor government if duck hunting were banned. They are held by margins that are smaller than the number of registered hunters in each of these electorates. <https://tinyurl.com/yc3k3wm2> The decision has wider political implications than this, however, as there has been substantial union pressure on the government to continue to allow duck hunting.

In August 2023, an alliance of powerful trade unions said it would ban state Labor MPs from visiting projects and walk off job sites if Victoria decides to end duck and quail hunting. The coalition, known as the Building Industry Group of Unions (BIG), represents more than 85,000 Victorian workers and includes the CFMEU, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the plumbers' union. All four unions have key roles in signature government projects such as the Metro Tunnel and level-crossing removal projects. Many of these projects are already behind schedule and over budget. Further delays and cost blowouts could be politically damaging for the government. <https://tinyurl.com/48p9pesr> The potential banning of duck hunting has been cast by the four opposing unions in class terms. In a statement issued by the unions in August 2023, they claimed, 'A government that truly respected working people would not yield to niche, inner-city activists but support the working activities of those it claims to represent.' This statement indicates the dilemma for the Victorian Labor Government. It is seeking to retain the votes of both union members and those that are here being falsely described as a 'niche' minority of activists.

The decision to allow duck and quail hunting to continue is not without its own political risks. An estimated 11,549 Victorians went duck hunting in 2022 – just 0.17 percent of the state's 6.7 million people. By contrast, 66 percent of Victorians oppose duck hunting and 88 percent are concerned about the suffering of ducks. <https://tinyurl.com/3edcreh7> This is not the minority 'activists' issue that the BIG unions have represented it as. The issue is perilous because hunting is opposed by such a substantial number. It is also politically hazardous because it is an important concern for Greens voters and those current Labor voters who could direct their primary votes or their preferences to the Greens. The Greens claimed the inner-city seat of Melbourne, in 2014, and Brunswick, in 2018. They are targeting other seats such as Richmond and Northcote where they believe environmental concerns are important to voters. 2022 Greens candidate for Richmond, Gabrielle de Vietri, has noted, 'Voters are seeing major flooding events ... we've ... got fire warnings for summer. . . They are seeing that and that the major parties aren't doing anything about it. . . Looking at what [Labor] are

doing and saying, they can't get away with this kind of stuff anymore.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/nov/17/victorian-greens-set-sights-on-labors-inner-city-heartland-again> The Victorian Government appears to be trying to strengthen its environmental credibility through banning the logging of native forests; however, its decision to import native forest timbers from Tasmania has been widely criticised. <https://tinyurl.com/3w3rnppb>

The decision to allow duck and quail hunting to continue in Victoria will not be well received by many Labor voters in both metropolitan and regional areas.