



**Biodiversity
Council**

Submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Select Committee Inquiry into Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

21 May 2023

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. The Council was founded by 11 universities with the support of Australian philanthropists.

The Biodiversity Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback into the Parliament of Victoria's Select Committee Inquiry into Native Bird Hunting Arrangements.

The Biodiversity Council does not support a continuation of recreational native bird hunting in Victoria in light of the factors, threats and declines listed below.

We note:

The Victorian Government has committed to improving the outlook for all species

- The Victorian Government's own Biodiversity 2037 plan (p.20) commits to:
'a net improvement in the outlook across all species by 2037 with the expected outcomes being that no vulnerable or near-threatened species will have become endangered'.

Trends in waterbird abundances across Eastern Australia

- Long-term surveys of waterbirds such as the Eastern Australian annual survey are essential for collection of biodiversity data <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41597-020-0512-9>, tracking trends in dependent biodiversity and informing understanding of risks and impacts. As this is one of the few long-term data sets (40 years) on Australia's biodiversity, covering almost one third of the continent, it is critical that it continue to inform all decision-making in relation to freshwater dependent biodiversity and risks.
- Waterbird numbers from this survey across more than 50 species have declined significantly since annual aerial surveys began in 1983, particularly across the Murray-Darling Basin. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.13743>
<https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/wr08034>
- These trends have affected all waterbirds, not just species of waterbirds considered to be 'game species'. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.13743>
- Much of this decline is primarily due to water resource developments, the building of dams and extraction of water and development of floodplains, reducing breeding and feeding habitats for waterbirds.
- This is backed up in the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability's State of the Environment Biodiversity Update 2021 Report (p.25):
 - Long-term surface water availability in Victoria has declined, and is projected to continue due to climate change, increasing pressure to allocate more water to human consumption in response to population growth and agricultural development, rather than the environment.
 - The many threats facing Victoria's rivers and wetlands are leading to declines in the abundance and distribution of native fish, frog and waterbird species.

Direct impacts of duck hunting

Threatened species are among those shot and injured during the recreational duck hunting season

- Under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (Vic), Victoria has one Endangered native duck species (the freckled duck), and a further four classified as Vulnerable to extinction (the musk duck, blue-billed duck, hardhead duck and Australasian (blue-winged) shoveler). While these species are protected from hunting, Zoos Victoria reports that its vet teams have treated (and invariably had to euthanise) individuals of these species during hunting season.

Culturally significant species

- Also among species exposed to harm from hunting are culturally significant species, including Yumburra, the Pacific black duck <https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/wr9810659>
- Yumburra is a culturally significant species to the Yuin people.
 - (Please refer to the Back to Country submission to this inquiry)

Other impacts of the presence of humans and hunting dogs

- Human disturbance as a result of a hunting season results in waterfowl altering their movement and habitat use (eg finding food), and is associated with other negative effects such as reduced reproductive output and breeding success, and population declines. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301479721012329>
- The Victorian Government has acknowledged the negative impacts of hunting on threatened species with the closure of the Lake Connewarre State Game Reserve for the rest of the 2023 season to enable the safe release of critically endangered orange-bellied parrots. As the statement announcing the closure states: *Hunting activity close to a known orange-bellied parrot location has the potential to interrupt important feeding and flocking activities, causing stress, and may cause abandonment from the site.* <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/media-releases/lake-connewarre-closure>
- Other threatened species inhabit the wetlands used for duck hunting, including aquatic mammals, reptiles, birds and amphibians.
- The presence of humans and hunting dogs in wetlands can result in damaged habitat, disturbance to other threatened species, and lead shot being left in the environment <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/about-epa/publications/1681>