

Submission to a New Animal Welfare Act for Victoria

'Please close your eyes and imagine how outraged you would feel if you arrived home and found that your beautiful dog had been shot by an intruder in the backyard and it's head and legs had been cut off and your dog's entrails were hanging out of its body. You would be shocked and traumatised and you would immediately call the police, telling them that this very sick individual must be caught and locked up to protect the safety of others. Well, that is exactly what duck shooters do to our native waterbirds during a normal duck shooting season. And it's why so many of our rescuers are traumatised every year. The situation is made even worse knowing that the Victorian Labor Government sanctions this brutality and ugliness by calling a duck shooting season,' Laurie Levy.

Shooting Australia's native waterbirds with powerful shotguns for recreational purposes resulting in around 100,000 wounded victims, is animal abuse on a gigantic scale.

As the Andrews Government states: *"Science demonstrates that animals are sentient. This means they experience feelings and emotions such as pleasure, comfort, discomfort, fear and pain."* (Animal Welfare Action Plan 2017), it is clear that the **recreational shooting of native waterbirds must be banned immediately.**

A dwindling number of recreational duck shooters, who today make up less than 0.2 per cent of Victoria's population, legally take control of the state's wetlands, rivers, streams and creeks and inflict unacceptable violence and cruelty on Australia's beautiful native waterbirds for three months each year.

With native waterbirds experiencing the same *pleasure, comfort, discomfort, fear and pain* that companion animals feel, duck shooting season must be immediately abolished.

For the last 34 years, concerned volunteer members of the public have risked their lives to protect and care for Australia's sentient native waterbirds. They have rescued thousands of wounded birds over the years and recovered thousands of illegally shot protected and threatened species. They have also provided mobile veterinary clinics on the wetlands staffed with volunteer veterinarians and vet nurses to help ease the unnecessary pain and suffering that our native waterbirds are forced to endure at the hands of duck shooters.

Labor Governments in other states accepted advice from their Animal Welfare Advisory Committees and banned the recreational shooting of native waterbirds in WA (1990), NSW (1995) and Queensland (2005), due to the unacceptable cruelty.

Since 1993, Victoria's AWAC continually recommend banning recreational duck shooting for the same reason, but its recommendations were ignored by consecutive governments.

It is unacceptable that one of the POCTAA regulators, the RSPCA, is prevented from investigating and prosecuting cruelty issues relating to the shooting of native waterbirds. Prosecuting duck shooters has been handed to the GMA. However, the GMA's regulator and enforcement capabilities came under scathing attack by the government-initiated Pegasus report in 2017-18,

following the Koorangie Marshes waterbird massacre when thousands of native birds were slaughtered, including hundreds of illegally shot protected and threatened waterbird species.

To our knowledge, in an activity where cruelty and suffering is rampant and unavoidable, there has never been a single prosecution brought against a duck shooter for cruelty.

It's difficult to understand why the government has so effectively nobbled prosecutions by putting the very body found guilty of incompetence by the Pegasus investigation, the Game Management Authority, in charge of prosecuting duck shooters over cruelty to native waterbird issues, while the RSPCA has been so disgracefully sidelined.

Both regulators of the POCTA Act, the RSPCA and the GMA, are following in the footsteps of the failed banking regulator ASIC, which failed to protect hundreds of thousands of the banks' clients from the greed and corruption that took place before a Royal Commission was called into the criminal behaviour of the bank's senior managers and staff.

It's time for a Royal Commission to look into the duck shooting issue and the failed POCTAA regulators, the RSPCA and the GMA.

There is a serious conflict of interest with the Chairperson of the GMA being a long-time duck shooter and a legal abuser of our native waterbirds. The GMA board members obviously lack empathy or fail to comprehend the realities of duck shooting and the appalling pain and suffering that our sentient native waterbirds are forced to endure.

It's no wonder an accuracy test was never introduced for duck shooters when the GMA Chairperson has openly admitted that he didn't know if he would be able to pass such a test if one was introduced.

Since 2016, the RSPCA has even been prevented from taking its high-tech mobile veterinary clinic to the wetlands to treat wounded birds. If it wasn't for volunteer rescuers and volunteer veterinarians and their dedicated voluntary staff treating the shocking wounds inflicted by duck shooters, many wounded birds would continue to suffer out on the wetlands for days or weeks without any help. Please view this 1-minute footage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRSyn-HoLYI>

Since Australia's native waterbirds are sentient beings capable of suffering and feeling pain, the Andrews Labor Government simply cannot allow another duck shooting season to go ahead.

The recreational shooting of native waterbirds is animal abuse on a very large scale – it's now time to put an end to this unacceptable violent activity for all time.

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