

Victorian Agriculture Minister 'very concerned' after leaked report claims hunters are regularly breaking law

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By [Lauren Day](#)



PHOTO: A dead duck left by hunters at

[Koorangie State Game Reserve last year.](#) (Supplied: Coalition Against Duck Shooting)

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Hunters are regularly breaking the law in Victoria and the regulator in charge of policing them is failing, a leaked report has revealed.

Key points:

- Victoria's Game Management Authority has failed to enforce hunting laws, leaked report says
- The report found it was common for hunters to break the law
- Last year hundreds of protected birds were killed and more than 1,000 dead ducks dumped

The state's Agriculture Minister has labelled the report "very concerning" and refused to rule out shutting the Game Management Authority (GMA) down.

Last year's duck season was marred by a bloody opening weekend in which at least 260 protected birds were killed at the Koorangie State Game Reserve, near Kerang.

More than a thousand ducks were also left uncollected, including hundreds that were found buried whole at the wetland, [as 7.30 revealed last year.](#)

That chaotic weekend sparked a closure of that game reserve and an independent review of the GMA — the regulatory body that is supposed to ensure sustainable and responsible hunting.

7.30 has obtained a leaked copy of that review and its findings are damning.

The report by Pegasus Economics found "non-compliance with hunting laws is commonplace and widespread" and that "by any standard, the GMA has failed to deliver on its responsibility to enforce the hunting laws".

"The events at Koorangie Marshes, and earlier similar events at Box Flat in 2013, represent significant failures of a state regulatory agency to enforce the laws for which it is responsible and have seriously undermined the GMA's credibility as an independent and credible regulator," the report said.

It also found that even the GMA's own staff don't believe it can ensure compliance with the hunting laws or effectively punish those who break them.

Other criticisms include that the GMA focuses too much energy on managing protesters instead of policing hunters, that the licencing regime is ineffective and that the GMA sometimes "slides into advocacy and promotional roles that conflict with its responsibilities as a regulator".

Activists say report should end duck hunting in Victoria



PHOTO: Laurie Levy has been protesting the duck season for more than 30 years. (Lauren Day)

Long-time duck rescuer Laurie Levy said last year's season was one of the bloodiest he had seen in more than 30 years of activism.

He has been briefed on the Pegasus report and thought it would spell an end to duck hunting in Victoria.

"I had hoped that the report would force the [Agriculture] Minister [Jaala Pulford] to bring duck shooting to an end for all time," he said.

"The report was so damning of the Game Management Authority, I thought this can't go on. The Minister would have to look after our native water birds and close down duck shooting completely."

He said it illustrated there was effectively no-one policing the waterways and has called for drastic measures.

Apart from closing the season down, "the only other way you can introduce law and order to the wetlands is to bring the army in", he said.

"You can't do it through the police because the police are so busy looking after the public of Victoria," Mr Levy said.

"They don't have time to be on the wetlands, so you would have to bring the army in.

"But the Government could take the best option and ban duck shooting altogether, as three other states have done."

'We can only do what we can do', GMA says



PHOTO: Brian Hine says the Game Management Authority needs more resources and the help of shooters. (ABC News)

The GMA said the report is comprehensive and it is taking it seriously.

"The Board is supportive of the recommendations made," GMA chair Brian Hine said.

"We've implemented the ones that we can implement, that we have the power and resources to do now and they're in place and they'll be in place now for the forthcoming duck season."

However, he pointed out that the Authority has limited resources.

"It's a \$5 million budget and about 20 staff, so we need more, we need to make the best of what we've got," he said.

"We have an excellent very small team who have been working very hard for three years, since the establishment of the Authority, to ensure we have the right processes and procedures in place.

"We're not perfect, we're not there yet and we need help, we need help from hunters themselves. So it's really critical.

"We can only do what we can do. I think we're getting very good value for the relatively small budget and relatively small authority that we have."

Mr Hine said the GMA had already made a number of changes since last duck season.

The start time on the opening weekend is later, the licence testing tougher and hunters will now be breaking the law if they don't retrieve shot ducks or harvest their breast meat.

But Ms Pulford said the report is very concerning and will not rule out shutting down the GMA.

"I think today it's premature to speculate about the results of some work that we're undertaking as a government," she told 7.30.

"It is entirely possible that the GMA will not survive this process in its current shape, in its current form.

"The very first test that the GMA has to pass, they didn't get through so well."