

Coalition Against Duck Shooting

304/78 Eastern Road
South Melbourne, Vic. 3205
Reg. No. A 0018114R
T: 0418 392 826
E: info@duck.org.au
W: www.duck.org.au

3 January 2022

Facebook: Coalition Against Duck Shooting

Considerations for the 2022 Victorian recreational duck shooting season

No recreational duck shooting must take place in 2022 and the activity must be abolished.

The Game Management Authority (GMA) and Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI) are both failing Australia's native waterbirds.

Top ornithologist undermined

With climate change and waterbird numbers across eastern Australia down by some 90 per cent since 1983, it is easy to understand the Game Management Authority's urgent need to undermine the important scientific aerial surveys carried out by Professor Richard Kingsford, in order for the GMA to continue to falsely assert that duck shooting is sustainable.

The Kingsford annual surveys are the most valuable and comprehensible study of native waterbird numbers across eastern Australia. But because the dwindling number of Victorian duck shooters are threatened by Kingsford's reports, which highlight the severe downtrend in native waterbird numbers, instead the GMA and ARI have introduced Victorian helicopter surveys so they can control the numbers of birds reported.

The GMA has effectively side-lined the government's own experts on environmental conditions including climate change impacts and Australia's leading scientist on waterbirds and wetlands.

In 2021, the GMA brought forward the flawed, unscientific results of the preliminary "trial" survey of game birds in Victoria to allegedly justify changes to restrictions that it previously deemed necessary.

Now the GMA and ARI can come up with any figures that will suit their purpose to call a duck shooting season, and there is no one to question them.

By making this change, the GMA and ARI will always be able to call a duck shooting season because they will always supposedly detect millions of waterbirds on Victorian waterways.

2021 Victorian Fauna & Flora Guarantee Act

Under the Fauna & Flora Guarantee Act 2021 both the Australasian Shoveler and the Hardhead are listed as vulnerable. Yet both of these species are still categorized as 'game'. Why hasn't the ARI called to have these two 'vulnerable' native species permanently removed from the duck shooters' 'game' list? Or does the ARI always comply with the wishes of the GMA?

DELWP's Victorian Framework for Conserving Threatened Species states:

“The FFG Act places importance on prevention to ensure that more species do not become threatened in the future. The Act emphasises the importance of cooperative approaches to biodiversity conservation and recognises that all government agencies and the community need to participate in the conservation effort.

The Act’s objectives aim to conserve all of Victoria’s native plants and animals.”

If DELWP seriously want to avoid more species becoming threatened in the future, then it is imperative that recreational duck shooting is banned in Victoria. CADS’ rescuers continue to recover illegally shot endangered and vulnerable Freckled, Blue-billed and Musk Ducks (yet the Waterfowl Identification Test was introduced by the Kirner government in 1990 in an attempt to prevent these birds from being illegally shot).

All native duck species numbers are currently in serious decline so why would the GMA continue to allow their destruction by duck shooters? Surely, for compassionate and sustainable reasons there must be some point where the GMA draws the line and puts the welfare and survival of native waterbirds above the shooters’ desires.

We don’t expect the GMA to look after the interests of native waterbirds, but we would expect the ARI to do that very important job.

GMA fails wounded birds – no empathy

It is believed that following the 2016 duck shooting season, a senior GMA board member, put a stop to the RSPCA taking its high-tech mobile veterinary clinic to the wetlands to treat wounded native waterbirds. We have it on good authority that the RSPCA was told they shouldn’t be seen taking wounded birds from rescuers who were in the water illegally before 10am, because it was not a ‘good look’ for the anti-cruelty organisation to be accepting wounded birds from law breakers. Yet these wounded and suffering sentient native birds include illegally shot species and wounded game birds that have not been retrieved by any shooters or the GMA. (See footage of cruelty compilation: <https://youtu.be/aSQae7heehg> a wounded Pink-eared Duck: <https://youtu.be/92lbdVI9eCE> Lake Lonsdale cruelty 2021: <https://youtu.be/CAa1-7awR4Y>)

Volunteer rescuers and veterinarians have provided the only help for suffering wounded birds for 35 years and will continue to do so until duck shooting is banned. In Victoria today, there are only about 8,000 active duck shooters, compared to around 100,000 duck shooters on the wetlands in 1986 when the campaign to protect Australia’s native waterbirds began.

The RSPCA was removed from its primary role as regulator with power to investigate and prosecute duck shooters for alleged aggravated cruelty offences and was replaced by the GMA as the new regulator.

So now, the promoter of duck shooting that services its clients, the duck shooters, has become the sole regulator.

Given this alleged conflict of interest, it is no wonder that the GMA has failed to prosecute a single duck shooter for alleged cruelty offences, even when video evidence is provided.

Protected NSW and Queensland duck species must also be protected when flying to Victoria

When native duck species, which are fully protected in NSW and Queensland, fly interstate, they must remain fully protected. They should not be placed on the game hit-list when they fly to Victoria. This situation should be fully addressed when considering the 2022 duck shooting season, especially by

the Federal Minister for the Environment and we believe that intervention is needed on this matter under the federal EPBC Act.

This year, Professor Kingsford's aerial survey found: *Four major indices for waterbirds (total abundance, breeding index, number of species breeding and wetland area index, Fig. 1) continue to show significant declines since 1983. If 1983 and 1984 peak years are omitted, then 3 of the 4 major indices still show significant decline (OLS regression at $p=0.05$; variables 4th root or log transformed where appropriate; Table 1). Long term trends are more informative for predicting population status than year to year fluctuations.*

Total waterbird abundance in 2021 ($n=95,306$) decreased from 2020 and remains well below average: the 3rd lowest in 39 years. Waterbirds were most abundant in bands 3 and 5 (Figs 2 & 5).

Species functional response groups (feeding guilds) all showed significant long term declines (OLS regression at $p=0.05$; variables 4th root or log transformed where appropriate. Fig. 3; Table 2). Long term changes were also observed in decadal averages of total abundance, wetland area index, breeding index and breeding species' richness (Fig. 4, Table 1).

Wetland area index (150,803 ha) increased slightly from the previous year, but remains well below the long term average (Fig. 1). Some rivers and wetlands in the northern Lake Eyre Basin, including the Diamantina and Georgina rivers, held moderate amounts of water and supported low numbers of waterbirds. Lakes Torquinnie, Mumbleberry and Galilee held some water and moderate numbers of waterbirds; the largest concentrations of waterbirds were located in the Paroo overflow Lakes, the Macquarie Marshes and Lake Moondarra in the north (Fig. 5).

The Macquarie Marshes (Band 5) had moderate levels of water augmented by environmental flows, provided by the NSW Government and Commonwealth managed environmental water and supported considerable numbers and diversity of waterbirds. The Lowbidgee wetlands had moderate inundation (Band 3), and they supported moderate numbers of waterbirds with a breeding colony of straw-necked ibis recorded. Most wetlands in the regulated Menindee Lakes system were full, including outside the survey band to the north - Copi Hollow and Lakes Wetherell, Pamamaroo, Bijiji and Balaka were also full (Band 4). Overall, there were moderate waterbird numbers and breeding activity. The Tallywalka lakes system was dry (Band 4, Fig. 7).

Waterbirds were again widely dispersed (similar to the previous year); only 2 wetlands (Green Lake on the Paroo River (Band 5) and Prosperpine Dam (Band 10)) supported more than 5,000 waterbirds representing 13% of the total abundance. More than 48% of surveyed wetlands supported no waterbirds (includes wetlands that were dry).

Total breeding index (nests + broods) was 2,494 (all species combined), a considerable increase from the previous year (364) but still well below the long term average (Figs. 1 & 6). Breeding species' richness also increased with 9 species recorded breeding, but this is below the long term average and the ninth lowest on record (Fig. 1). Ibis comprised most of the breeding recorded (white ibis: 1071, straw-necked ibis: 1000), 83% of the total.

All game species abundances were well below long term averages, in some cases by an order of magnitude; six out of eight species continue to show significant long term declines (OLS regression at $p=0.05$; variables 4th root or log transformed where appropriate. Table 3). Grey teal ducks declined from the previous year (Fig. 13).

Waterbird indices across river basins had not yet responded to recent rainfall and flooding and generally reflected low levels of available of habitat and drought intensity in the preceding 4 years; 2021 abundance decreased, but wetland area rose in the Murray-Darling Basin compared to the previous year (Fig. 8).

Across Eastern Australia, overall abundance, breeding index and breeding species richness are positively related to available habitat (wetland area index). Conversely, declines in wetland area are likely to result in declines in waterbird abundance, breeding and breeding species richness (Fig. 9).

Selected species distribution and abundances are shown in figures 10-19; freckled ducks and plumed whistling-ducks are included for comparison with game species. Map plots in these figures show 2021 distribution and trend plots show changes in abundance over time (1983- 2021).

Breeding species' richness and breeding abundance increased considerably compared to the previous year; breeding largely occurred in bands 1 and 3 (Fig. 6) and comprised mostly of Australian white ibis and straw-necked ibis.

Conclusion

The 2017 Pegasus Report into the GMA's compliance and enforcement function was scathing of the Authority. The GMA exists to serve the interests of duck shooters, while over the last 35 years, concerned volunteer members of the public do the invaluable job of protecting and caring for Australia's native waterbirds at no cost to the Victorian government. (See ABC 7.30 PG 30 March 2017: <https://youtu.be/Ku-xDXCqW5E> and the ABC 7.30 PG 1 March 2018 Pegasus report: <https://youtu.be/Y7SxDa6MNV8>)

The GMA must factor in the increased threat that climate change poses to Australia's precious native waterbirds, including the impacts of more frequent and severe drought.

With climate change and waterbirds at dangerously low levels, a Victorian duck shooting season must not go ahead in 2022; otherwise the Game Management Authority will be exposed as just another climate change denier.

Laurie Levy

Campaign Director
Coalition Against Duck Shooting
Email: info@duck.org.au
Mobile: 0418 392826

Website: www.duck.org.au
Facebook editorials: Coalition Against Duck Shooting Facebook

Attached: Pegasus Report 2017