

DUCK-HUNT BAN WARNING SHOT

EXCLUSIVE - Alex White - Matthew Johnston
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More than 85,000 Victorian workers would be urged to down tools and walk off major government construction sites in Victoria if the Andrews government bans duck hunting.

Four key building unions – including the powerful CFMEU, ETU and unions representing plumbers and metal workers – have slammed a ban being considered by parliament and would “encourage our members to walk off government jobs, to attend political protests to defend their rights to outdoor recreation”.

A \$2m war chest has also been established to fund a campaign against any move to curtail recreational activities of members including duck hunting – a clear warning shot to government to not infringe on the pastimes of blue-collar workers.

The explosive Building Industry Group of Unions (BIG) resolution, which has also been backed by the Australian Workers’ Union and the Victorian mining union, was prompted by revelations in the Herald Sun that a state parliamentary inquiry was set to recommend outlawing native bird hunting by as early as next year.

Labor insiders said the inquiry recommendation would pave the way for Premier Daniel Andrews to call time on the pursuit, which is illegal in NSW, Western Australia and Queensland and has been advocated by the ALP’s left wing as well as the Greens and Animal Justice Party.

However, state secretary of the ETU, Troy Gray warned the Andrews government to not forget the interests of the workers that help them maintain power.

“There is four unions on the BIG, we speak as one and the members of the table have been around for a 100 years and we have built, financed and resourced the ALP,” he said. “I’ve never seen the support and determination within, not just our membership, but blue collar workers

in general in regards to this campaign and their right access outdoor resources.”

State secretary of the CFMEU construction division, John Setka, said union surveys showed a huge majority of members supported duck hunting. “Whether it’s Labor or Liberal, sometimes the only time they listen is when there’s a bit of people power, and people take to the streets,” he said.

“A lot of people sort of see it as the government just trying to ban everything, pretty soon we’re not going to be allowed to breathe.”

Members of the CFMEU, ETU, AMWU and the CEPU represent at least 85,000 workers on big government jobs, while other unions backing the plan represent thousands more.

Mr Gray added that a mass walk off would have huge ramifications for projects across the state and he called on Labor leaders to reject the parliamentary inquiry’s recommendation.

A Victorian Government spokesman said: “Given deeply held views on the subject, the parliament has established a Legislative Council Select Committee to examine recreational native bird hunting in Victoria.”

“We’ll wait for the Committee to do their work – which is due back to Government by the end of August.”

The final report from the duck hunting inquiry was due to be tabled by August 31.