

# Victorian unions take wrong turn in campaign against duck hunting

By [Davey Heller](#) | 24 August 2023, 12:00pm | [9](#) comments |



Victoria is aiming to join several other states in banning the shooting of ducks (Screenshot via YouTube)

***After a history of campaigning for important social issues, Victorian unions are now engaging in Right-wing culture wars by opposing a proposed ban on duck hunting, writes [Davey Heller](#).***

KARL MARX [stated](#): "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce." In the past, Australian unions have launched industrial action against imperialist war, racism and to protect the environment. These actions sought to link the Australian workers movement to the best traditions of solidarity and internationalism.

However, today we see history repeating as farce as major trade unions representing electricians, plumbers, construction and metal workers in Victoria [threaten to strike](#) against a proposed ban on the hunting of native ducks. These union bureaucrats are feeding a Right-wing "culture war"

against environmentalists, fanning reaction in their ranks and diverting attention from the real class struggle.

The threatened industrial action takes place as the Victorian Labor Government holds a [Parliamentary Inquiry](#) into the duck hunting season. Half of Australia's state governments have already banned the hunting of native water bird species including NSW, WA and Queensland over concerns of animal cruelty and a long-term trend of declining numbers of native wetland birds.



[The Victorian Government needs to reconsider its duck hunting policy](#)

[Considering the amount of problems brought on by duck hunting season in Victoria, it's time for the Government to finally end it.](#)

The Building Industry Group made up of the Electrical Trades Union ([ETU](#)), Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union ([CFMEU](#)), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union ([AMWU](#)) and the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union ([PPTEU](#)) is organising against the ban. In March, eight hundred members of the ETU [walked off](#) a government construction job at the Metro Tunnel over the issue.



On 19 July, the same unions [paid for full-page ads](#) in the [Herald Sun](#) and [The Age](#) under the blaring headline, 'Outdoor recreation under attack'.

The ad whipped up fears of what was at stake:

*Outdoor enthusiasts deserve the right to relax, adventure and unwind irrespective of their particular recreational activity without being demeaned, judged, despised or looked down upon.*

*What will they come after and ban next? The Melbourne Cup? Riding dirt bikes on public land? All forms of hunting? Or simply taking your kids and the family dog to the bush? Everyone should be entitled to enjoy the outdoors without layer upon layer of ridiculous unscientific and ideological red tape.*

*Many Victorians who engage in outdoor recreation can see the writing on the wall — if they ban duck and quail season, what will they target next?*

In a [statement](#) issued by the unions on 17 August that again threatened industrial action, they wrote:

*'A government that truly respected working people would not yield to niche, inner-city activists but support the working activities of those it claims to represent.'*



[Duck hunting season: When too much dead wildlife isn't enough](#)

[The Andrews Government has announced another duck slaughter season in Victoria.](#)

Whatever one's opinion on duck hunting, the politics behind this union campaign are clearly Right-wing. There is more than a whiff of U.S.-style far-Right [Fox News](#) culture wars with dog whistles about the inner city "greenie" elites coming to "threaten your way of life" and "take away your freedoms". Such rhetoric has also been the mainstay of conservative politicians on the Right, utilised particularly by the National Party but also smaller parties like the [Shooters and Fishers Party](#).

In other public statements, the ETU and CFMEU leadership have cynically cited the harsh working conditions their members work under them as a reason why duck hunting must be defended as it is supposedly a release outside of work time for them.

This raises the question of why these union bureaucrats are not mobilising to improve these conditions instead of this distraction. The Metro Tunnel walk-off is particularly galling in the context of tunnel construction being linked to a rise in [deadly cases of silicosis](#). The CFMEU is also currently playing a soft hand on the thousands of silicosis cases arising from synthetic stone bench tops, only threatening to put a [ban on them](#) if the Federal Labor Government fails to act by July 2024.

In contrast to these current threats of industrial action aimed at the "threat of greenies", construction unions in Australia famously instituted the "[green ban](#)" movement of the 1970s. The very first green ban in June 1971 was actually put in place to save an area of native vegetation in Sydney known as "[Kelly's Bush](#)".

The reactionary posturing over duck hunting stands in contrast to the words of Jack Munday from the Builders Laborers Federation (BLF) in 1972:

*"Yes, we want to build. However, we prefer to build urgently required hospitals, schools, other public utilities, high-quality flats, units and houses, provided they are designed with adequate concern for the environment, than to build ugly unimaginative architecturally bankrupt blocks of concrete and glass offices."*



[CFMEU boss John Setka in the firing line](#)

[Something is not quite right in the John Setka matter, writes Frank O'Shea.](#)

Where are the unions' concerns today for the public housing tenants, like [Margaret Kelly](#), who was evicted from her home of 25 years on 18 August so that private developers could build luxury apartments? Talking tough to "inner city activists" is more expedient politically than challenging Labor and the big developers. There is no talk of industrial action over the housing and cost of living crisis currently facing the working class.

What is the political trajectory of the union bureaucrats trying to build their unions on such Right-wing campaigns? The CFMEU in particular has learnt nothing from recent history. During the [COVID-19 lockdowns](#), the CFMEU lobbied hard to keep construction open. In doing so, they fanned the flames of opposition to public health measures within their ranks.

Only days before their own offices were attacked by a fascist mob of anti-vaxxers, including some of their own members, the CFMEU leadership backed a [lunchtime protest occupation](#) of city streets by construction workers against public health measures. Apparently, the self-destructive logic of fanning reaction in the ranks is still lost on [John Setka](#).

Can we look forward to elements of the rank of file of these unions being wheeled out against future anti-war protests? In New York in 1970, construction workers viciously beat anti-war students in the "[Hard Hat Riot](#)". Whilst some of the unions involved in the threat of industrial action over duck hunting such as the ETU formally oppose [AUKUS](#), they are not organising their members over the issue. As the war drive against China deepens, can these union leaders be trusted not to turn their members against those who oppose Australian and U.S. imperialism?

The vast majority of the working class, including union members, have the potential to be at the forefront of the fight against war and for the collective economic and political rights of the working class. In terms of both the threat of war and the declining standard of living, we are clearly approaching a crisis point. We cannot let anyone divide and distract us from the real fight.

*[Davey Heller](#) is a writer and campaigner. You can follow him on Twitter [@socialist davey](#).*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Australia License](#)

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY**

PLEASE SUBSCRIBE AND SUPPORT IA  
subs start from as little as \$5 a month.

Support independent journalism – **PLEASE DONATE TO IA.**



**POLITICS** **VICTORIA** **ANIMALS**

**DUCK HUNTING** **unions** **strike** **Building Industry Group** **Electrical Trades Union** **Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union** **Australian Manufacturing Workers Union** **Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union** **ETU** **CFMEU**

Share Article

- 
- 
- 
- 
-



RECENT ARTICLES BY DAVEY HELLER



Victorian unions take wrong turn in campaign against duck hunting

After a history of campaigning for important social issues, Victorian unions are ...



Celebrating the end of 'Trumpism' after the midterms is a deadly mistake

The Republican Party's weak U.S. midterm results aren't a reason to drop our guard

...





## Medical whistleblower calling out COVID incompetence risks deregistration

In what could be a targeted act of political censorship, the Australian Health ...

- [view all 14 articles by Davey Heller](#)

**JOIN THE CONVERSATION**