

THE COALITION AGAINST DUCK SHOOTING

Submission on Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change.

Waterbirds are in decline in Australia and around the world making it imperative that Australian native waterbirds are protected by legislation in Victoria.

On the front page of The Age, June 5, 2007 it stated that there was an 82% decline in waterbird numbers in eastern Australia from 1983 to 2004 (Sources: Australian Greenhouse Office; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; State of the Environment report; Water Services Association of Australia.)

Three states have banned the recreational shooting of native waterbirds - WA in 1990, NSW in 1995 and Queensland in 2005.

But eight species of Australian waterbirds are removed from the Victorian 'protected' list for three months annually when seasons of recreational duck shooting commence. (Black Pacific Ducks, Hardheads, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Mountain Ducks, Australasian Shovelers, Pink-eared Ducks and Wood Ducks.)

Over the past 20 years the numbers of licensed duck shooters in Victoria have dropped from 95,000 to around 21,000 today, although only a few thousand are actually active wetland shooters. Most retain their licenses to justify owning a shotgun.

The majority of the public (70%) now want this activity permanently stopped (AC Nielsen poll, 2003).

Professor Richard Kingsford, (University of NSW), has conducted aerial surveys of waterbird numbers and habitat across eastern Australia since 1983. His statistics show an alarming decline in waterbird numbers since 1984 and reveal that 2006 was one of the driest years on record with limited habitat available. The wetland area index was the lowest on record and total waterbird numbers were the second lowest on record. The total breeding index was the lowest ever recorded and some waterbird species, including Australasian Shovelers and Chestnut Teals were at or near the lowest recorded numbers in 23 years.

Australian waterbirds are facing a crisis, which is why a moratorium was called on recreational duck shooting in Victoria in 2007.

It is important that the Victorian Bracks government does not grant taxpayers' money to shooting organisations which will result in the inevitable destruction of native waterbirds and loss of biodiversity. The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority recently provided Field and Game Australia with a grant enabling the purchase of Hearts Morass in Gippsland. Field and Game Australia should be prevented from shooting birds on this land. Government grants must result in benign use of Australian wildlife such as nature-based tourism.

The Kerang wetlands in northwest Victoria are classified as internationally important Ramsar wetlands and have huge potential for nature-based tourism. The area is also rich in Koori cultural heritage.

These wetlands could rival Kakadu in the Northern Territory, but over the years no one in the Victorian Government has had the imagination to see the potential of these wetlands.

In 1997, the Kennett government hired tourism consultants to prepare regional development plans. Advance Tourism prepared the 'Murray Outback Regional Tourism Plan' for Tourism Victoria (see attached). The section titled 'Nature Based Tourism' states:

"A major feature of the region is its nature based attractions. Being one of the region's major strengths, it should be given high recognition."

Section 7.17 of the Advanced Tourism report goes on to say:

"A significant drawcard not being fully exploited are the native birds, animals and endangered species of the region. ... There are also opportunities to see wildlife as part of guided tours, which offer greater interpretation."

"Birds are not only in abundance but there are many species, some of international significance."

Section 7.17.2 of the report discusses the promotion the Kerang wetlands.

"Between Cohuna and Lake Boga are a series of wetlands which support over 150 species of birds including migratory populations which travel from China and Japan each year. They are of world interest and covered by International Migratory Bird agreements."

"A management plan to develop their region is required. Support from NRE, Shire of Gunnawarra, local enthusiast groups, the regional tourism industry and perhaps service clubs should be sought."

Advance Tourism went on to recommend:

- Native wildlife should be in the forefront of promotional activities.

Further bird hides, walking trails and low impact visitor facilities should be developed in the Kerang wetlands.

3 - More should done be to capitalise on events involving nature.

Victoria and its rural regions should capitalise on its wetland assets, as it does with the penguins at Phillip Island and Southern Right whales at Warrnambool. Tourism related to penguins generates around \$150 million each year on Phillip Island and whales visiting Warrnambool between June and October, bring in about \$20 million each year. In the same way, Victorian country towns should be reaping the economic, social and environmental benefits of international wetlands tourism.

Currently some of these wetlands are classified as 'game reserves' and are used by duck shooters during shooting seasons. Protected birds are always illegally shot (including rare and threatened species such as the Freckled Duck) and the wetlands are left strewn with spent cartridges, beer cans and bottles, plastic and general rubbish as well as unburied toilets. According to T. Roster, a leading US ballistics expert, up to 30% of birds are wounded rather than killed outright.

Because hunter numbers have dropped, shooting seasons now provide no benefit to local regional businesses. A publican in northwest Victoria interviewed by ABC radio in late 2005 said that nowadays the duck-shooting season makes no difference to his business, unlike years gone by.

A survey of Kerang businesses by a member of the Labor Party during the opening weekend of the 2005 Season also showed there was no economic impact from the opening weekend.

Climate change and on-going drought has resulted in wetlands and breeding habitat for waterbirds drying up. However, many of the Kerang wetlands can be artificially filled from the Murray River. This provides an opportunity, if regulated correctly, for the establishment of habitat to help ensure the survival of native waterbird species as well as opportunities for a vibrant tourism industry attracting bird watchers and ornithologists from Australia and overseas.

Using the Kerang wetlands as game reserves is destructive and wasteful. The Murray Outback report clearly shows that the resources of the area, the fauna and flora, are underutilized.

Because of climate change, more frequent El Ninos and the on-going drought, the Bracks government must put a stop to its destructive policy of allowing Australia's native waterbirds to be shot for recreational purposes. As the country now faces a new era of global warming it is essential that all efforts go towards protecting our biodiversity. Victoria needs to adopt the recommendations of Advanced Tourism's 1997 report, as soon as possible.



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CP0016 Appendix A
Murray Outback Regional Tourism Development Plan
Prepared by Advance Tourism.