



## Submission by Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club to the Victorian Parliament Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

05 May 2023

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club is a group of more than one hundred active naturalists based in Castlemaine Victoria. Our members are strongly in favour of measures to protect our natural environment which has been severely degraded over the past two centuries. Part of that degradation has included the loss of wetlands and native grasslands with the corresponding massive decline in species that use these habitats.

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club believes that there should be a permanent halt to all wild bird hunting in Victoria as populations of wild birds are no longer able to thrive under this impact.

This population decline of native birds has affected all species of native bird that are on the schedule of game birds that can be hunted as well as many species that can't be legally hunted but will suffer from hunting activity in ways that will affect their survival. All native ducks have suffered massive population declines in recent years. This decline of around 75%<sup>1</sup> over recent decades has affected both game and non-game species and some former game species are now listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG).

The causes of these declines include climate change, degradation of wetlands and grasslands as well as hunting, however hunting impact is the one pressure that can be addressed immediately. The stopping of hunting will reduce disturbance of both game species and non-game species. It will result in increased survival of young birds and nests with eggs. Without hunting our birds will be able to feed without interruption. This is particularly important for migratory species which must build up fat reserves prior to migration.

Without hunting there will no longer be the problem of protected species being shot by mistake. Waterfowl often take flight in mixed species flocks which will include species that can't be legally shot. The spray of pellets from shotgun fire is indiscriminate so will potentially wound or kill non-target species<sup>2</sup>. When protected species are shot this has a disproportionate negative impact on their populations which are already below optimal survival levels. Without hunting there will no longer be the cruelty issue where wounded birds are not recovered and euthanised but are left to die in the wetlands and these impacts on threatened species will be removed.

While many of the issues around wild bird hunting relate to water birds there are also problems with quail shooting in grasslands. The most important of these is the misidentification of the target species. Only one species of quail, Stubble Quail, is on the schedule however there are other quail and button-quail species, as well as Plains Wanderer, which inhabit grasslands and could be misidentified as Stubble Quail in the second or so that the hunter would have to decide whether or not to shoot. All

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<sup>1</sup> BirdLife Australia website.

<sup>2</sup> The ABC has reported that submissions to the con-current South Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into duck shooting has estimated that up to 40% of birds that fall from the sky are wounded and not killed outright. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-23/rspca-beachport-duck-hunting-video-ahead-of-inquiry/102130602>

these other species are protected wildlife with the Plains Wanderer being listed as Critically Endangered under FFG. The risk of mistaken identity is extremely high in this situation.

Finally, we would contend that the total economic value of nature tourism (domestic and international) including birdwatching associated with our wetlands is far higher than the value of hunting. There are many more birdwatchers and naturalists in the community than there are hunters. Birdwatchers/naturalists spend similar amounts on their equipment as hunters. Both birdwatchers and hunters will spend similar amounts on transport and food.<sup>3</sup> All visitors to an area have an economic benefit to local communities however the number of nature tourists visiting wetlands during the hunting season will be greatly reduced and off-set spending by hunters as disturbance from hunting degrades the experience for other tourists. Discontinuing wild bird hunting will increase the economic gains from sustainable tourism activities.

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<sup>3</sup> BirdLife Australia 'Bird and Nature Tourism in Australia, KBAs in Danger Case Study Report' 2022