

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



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Hon. Lisa Neville

Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water

Parliament House, Spring St, East Melbourne, Vic 3002

17 Dec 2014

Dear Minister

Firstly, On behalf of the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club may I congratulate you on your appointment as Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water in the Victorian Government.

I wish to follow up on matters raised earlier this year with you, as Shadow Minister for Environment, pertaining to the restoration of Sanctuary status to Lake Linlithgow and the adjacent Lake Bullrush west from Peshurst in SW Victoria. These lakes had Sanctuary status since 1928 but the 1975 revision of the Wildlife Act is assumed by DEPI to have resulted in that status being overturned, allowing duck hunting.

You will have received from us much of the background information relating to this frustrating long-running saga. I have attached 5 letters which you may not have seen but which illustrate some of the confusion or obfuscation that has bedevilled this matter since 1975:

1. DSE (Hough 2005) – stating that legislation may be required to restore sanctuary status.
2. DSE (Hull 2009) – stating that the wetlands were Wildlife Sanctuaries, with hunting NOT allowed.
3. Minister for Agriculture & Food Security (Walsh, 16 July 2014) – did not address the issue of restoring the sanctuary status of Lakes Linlithgow and Bullrush.
4. HFNC to Minister Walsh (21 July 2014) – requesting a response to the issue of restoration of sanctuary status to Lakes Linlithgow and Bullrush and cessation of duck hunting there.
5. DEPI (Beaumont, Sep 2014) – responded on behalf of Minister Walsh to my latest request of him to address the central issue – he states that DEPI has NO plans to restore sanctuary status.

Duck hunters took advantage of the 1975 Act when they shot on Linlithgow in 1986 and 1987. Adverse publicity restrained them for a while and the series of dry years over the last 16 meant that there was often no water or ducks on Linlithgow in autumn. However, Bullrush has had water and shooters present. With a return to wetter winters the shooters will be back on Linlithgow. We had written many times to DSE over the years but have never received satisfaction (often not even a reply).

The lakes are of major significance for waterbird conservation in the region. For example, from 3000-5000 migratory Sharp-tailed Sandpipers have been recorded on these wetlands and the threatened Freckled Duck and Blue-billed Duck also feed there. We have surveyed birds there annually since 1983 and in 2008 published a book on Lake Linlithgow and adjacent wetlands. Along with a host of small wetlands there are many large wetlands that shooters have access to, including Bryans Swamp, Bradys Swamp, Lake Muirhead, Rocklands Reservoir and Mount William Swamp. Apart from the small Lake Hamilton impoundment, Yatmerone Swamp and Gooseneck Swamp there are NO wetlands in the region that are free from duck hunters and therefore all waterbirds have no significant refuge from disturbance by shooters.

Present legislation precludes the non-shooting public from open access to public land that hunters use during the 3-month duck shooting season. That restricts the public from ALL wetland frontages in our region in the best morning and afternoon viewing hours, unless they carry a gun and have a shooters permit.

While most of our members deplore duck hunting there is also opinion that it should be allowed on private land. Hunting bodies could acquire and restore wetlands for their hunting activities. Private wetland restoration would also contribute to significant carbon storage credits.

We respectfully request that you consider our case for restoration of the sanctuary status of Lakes Linlithgow & Bullrush and implement action to achieve that change. We are happy to meet with you, at a date and time convenient for you, to discuss or clarify any issues.

Yours faithfully

Dr Rod Bird

Secretary

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club