

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



PO Box 591, Hamilton, Victoria, 3300
hamiltonfnc@live.com.au



Hon Jaala Pulford
Minister for Agriculture & Minister for Regional Development
Level 20, 1 Spring St, Melbourne, Vic 3000

26 May 2017

Dear Minister

re. DUCK HUNTING Lakes Bullrush & Linlithgow & the GMA

Thank you for your response of 12 May 2017 to our letter of 06 April 2017 concerning this matter, however there are some issues that arise from your letter that we wish to comment on.

We were aware of the policy factors that are considered when making decisions on whether to close a wetland or leave it open to hunters. The content of the policy that GMA follows is not the problem but the failure to interpret it adequately and then adhere to it is the problem we face.

For example, you mention the case where about 100 Brolga on Lake Muirhead in 2017 was the trigger to ban shooting on that lake, because '*these Brolga displayed bonding and pre-breeding behaviour*'. That was precisely the case in 2015 when 54 Brolga were present on Lake Bullrush, yet they were dispersed by the GMA, and there was no appropriate habitat for them to go to. Clearly, the GMA ignored appropriate 'policy' in that disgraceful episode. We do not believe that the GMA has an adequate representation of members who have an interest in conservation. There does NOT appear to be a satisfactory balance and we would hope that failure can be addressed in future appointments.

In the case of allowing shooting on Lake Linlithgow in 2017 in the presence of 500-600 Blue-billed Ducks, only a '*a low hunter activity*' was expected. So, the demand was low and the number of game species present was very low (less than 20% of the total waterbirds on this large lake). Hunters tell us that few ducks would be shot if boats were not allowed but the disruption would still be considerable because of the actions of the few hopeful but frustrated shooters who turn up. Furthermore, this lake is regularly used by the public, who should not be exposed to hunter activity. It was a very strange decision to allow any shooting there. We are concerned that a local duck hunter promoted that outcome. Had there been a better balance on the GMA that outcome may have been avoided.

We are aware that the State Game Reserve system began in the 1950s as a result of drainage schemes on private and public land. That did prevent the loss of some wetlands. Those wetlands that remain have a prime role in wildlife conservation – the fact that they are also used for duck hunting should not be considered the main function. Unfortunately, there are few, if any, sanctuaries where shooting is banned and that should be rectified.

Your statement that some '*52.4% of licensed duck hunters already hunt exclusively on private property*' is interesting. It provides some weight to our thesis that, if duck hunting is to continue in Victoria, it should only be on private land. Shooting associations could easily restore large wetlands on private land and operate away from the public gaze. Those who control the properties would be better placed to control the atrocious behaviour of some shooters (e.g. the Kerang Marshes outrage).

Lastly, we might comment that although the government is committed to '*supporting a safe, sustainable and responsible approach to game hunting*' the evidence is plain that the 150 staff from GMA, PV, DELWP, DEJTR and Police have not been able to stop the illegal slaughter of wildlife during the opening of recent duck hunting seasons and there appears to be little follow-up later in the season, so the public does not know what has happened. Were it not for TV and other sources, the public would not have any idea of the actions of some shooters who will fire at anything.

Yours faithfully

Dr Rod Bird
Secretary

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club