

Appendix 1.

Restoration of Sanctuary status of Lake Linlithgow & Lake Bullrush.

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club submission to SGSC

December 2016

Summary of main points:

1. Sanctuary status was conferred in the Game Act 1928.

This status was allegedly lost in the 1975 revision of the Wildlife Act. Hunting began there in 1985 and sporadically thereafter, with major impacts on Lake Bullrush from about 2013, shooting of Freckled Duck in 2014 and the dispersal of 50 Brolga in 2015. Whether sanctuary status was lost has been a matter of opinion that needs to be resolved by an independent body (e.g. VEAC), who should also consider environmental issues.

2. There are NO natural wetland sanctuaries for waterbirds in our region

DELWP & Game Victoria have not followed the prescription for refuges that was stipulated in Criterion 2 of the 1992 Strategy for the Review of Wildlife Reserves. *Each major hunting wetland must have at least one major refuge within a distance that permits waterbirds to move from hunted waters to the refuge without causing significant stress.* In 2015, in response to our notice of 50 Brolga at Lake Bullrush, the Game Management Authority 'offered' the Brolga and migratory waders Krause Swamp as a refuge – a small dry swamp the birds could not use 200 m from shooters on Lake Bullrush. Lake Bullrush in 2015 was the only major wetland in the district with any water – allowing hunting there was not in the spirit or letter of the regulations.

3. Sanctuaries are needed for wildlife conservation:

- Wetland habitats are shrinking because of climate change and series of dry years leaving little or no water in the lakes and swamps in summer/autumn. This is illustrated by data for Lake Linlithgow where the average water depth in February over the last 17 years (1999-2015) has been 14 cm compared with 158 cm for the 15 years before that (1984-98). Fortunately, Lake Bullrush is less prone to drying out and offers waterbirds some feeding/roosting habitat.
- A total of 126 bird species have been recorded at these lakes, among those are 60 species of waterbirds.
- Waterbirds, including migratory waders and Brolga, have fewer places available for feeding or resting undisturbed by hunters. This is important in autumn when hunters continually disturb tiny waders such as Red-necked Stints and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers that are attempting to prepare their bodies for their long flight to Siberia.
- Lakes Linlithgow & Bullrush are major feeding grounds for endangered migratory Sharp-tailed Sandpipers & Red-necked Stints; flocks of up to 5,000 birds occur there. The waders are protected under JAMBA (Japan) and CAMBA (China) Aust. Migratory Bird Agreements and arrangements are made to protect their habitat.
- Lakes Bullrush & Linlithgow have long been sanctuaries for Brolga, an endangered species in Victoria. These wetlands are an autumn flocking site, vital in the lead up to the breeding season. Hunting evicts Brolga from such sites and disperses them.

4. Recreational needs:

Residents and tourists need access to natural wetland reserves where shooting is not permitted. Under current duck hunting regulations, people who do NOT carry a hunting licence may in future be excluded from wetlands open to hunting from the hours of dawn to 10 am & 4 pm to dark – prime time for birdwatchers and fisher folk!

5. Impact of restoring the sanctuary status of Lakes Linlithgow & Bullrush on duck hunting:

Restoring Sanctuary Status to Lakes Linlithgow & Bullrush will have very little impact on duck hunting opportunities or economics in the region.

All of the large wetlands in the region (including Lake Kennedy, Bradys Swamp, Bryans Swamp, Rocklands, Lake Bolac, Lake Muirhead and Tower Hill) are open to hunting, as are almost all of the river frontages, 'Unoccupied' Crown Lands, and privately owned wetlands.