

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



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Mayor and Councillors
Southern Grampians Shire Council

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Dear Councillors

The Hamilton Field Naturalists Club requests Shire support for the restoration of Sanctuary status for Lake Linlithgow & Lake Bullrush, significant wetlands for waterbirds in the Shire.

This submission gives a summary of the HFNC's interest in these Lake Reserves since the formation of the club in 1958, the apparent loss of Sanctuary status in 1975, and the importance of the issue (App. 1).

HFNC has been involved in restoration of the native vegetation at Lake Linlithgow from 1975 to 2005. It has surveyed waterbirds at various times from 1960 to 2016, with annual surveys every February since 1985. Seasonal surveys were also made from 1987-93 and 2006-08. The history of the lake, its management and use has been given in a publication in 2008: *History, fauna and flora of lake Linlithgow (Jenawarra) and associated wetlands in south-west Victoria* (R Bird, S Clark & M Gunn).

Sanctuary status to the Lake Reserves was conferred in the Game Act of 1928, but supposedly lost in the 1975 revision of the Wildlife Act. These wetlands are major feeding grounds in summer and autumn for large flocks of migratory waders, and are also a flocking site for Brolga, also displaced by hunters, most recently in 2015. There are now no sanctuaries on Crown Lands for wildfowl in our region.

The wetlands also cater for major recreational boating/windsurfing activities when there is a sufficient depth of water, and have always been a place for picnics and a major attraction for bird-watchers.

HFNC made submissions to the Minister for Conservation, Forests & Lands in 1985 and was informed by the Minister (Hon. Joan Kirner) that Lake Linlithgow sanctuary *can still be regarded as such, under a savings clause in the new Wildlife Act 1976, [but] it is not possible to prosecute for the shooting of game species due to a technicality in the new Act...When the areas are consolidated as a Lake Reserve, together with Bullrush Swamp, it will be possible to gazette regulations over the reserve. A regulation prohibiting hunting in the reserve will be considered at this time.* Despite many submissions in the 1990s & 2000s, nothing has changed.

In 2014 we wrote to Peter Walsh (Minister for Agriculture & Food Security). Mr Peter Beaumont (Executive Director Land Management Policy, DELWP) responded on his behalf, stating: *I can confirm that there is no current intention to confer Sanctuary Status on Lake Linlithgow and Bullrush Swamp, or prohibit duck hunting in those areas.* In 2014 we wrote also to the then Minister for Environment (Hon. Lisa Neville) regarding the restoration of sanctuary status to these lakes. Instead of considering the environmental issues our request was referred to Mr Beaumont, with a predictable response! There are conflicting views on the legal, technical and environmental issues involved (see Appendix 2), but the duck hunter lobby in DELWP has no intention to resolve them or to restrict hunting opportunities.

The Shire of Southern Grampians is (or was) the managing authority for the southern half of Lake Linlithgow. The lakes are not "*unoccupied Crown Land*" (as stated by Minister Walsh in 2014).

There would be very little economic impact of banning shooting on these waters, since all of the large wetlands in the region (e.g. Bryans Swamp, Bradys Swamp, Lake Bolac, Lake Muirhead, Tower Hill and Rocklands) and almost all of the rivers and all 'unoccupied Crown Lands' are open to hunting.

We respectfully request that the Southern Grampians Shire Council supports the restoration of the Sanctuary status of the Lake Reserves of Lake Linlithgow and Lake Bullrush. We suggest that objective may be best sought by supporting a submission by HFNC to the Minister for Environment requesting the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) make an independent evaluation of this matter.

Rod Bird
Secretary, Hamilton Field Naturalists Club