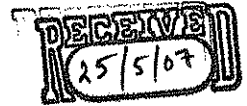


COALITION AGAINST DUCK SHOOTING

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SUBMISSION FOR THE INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REGIONAL TOURISM

The Kerang wetlands in northwest Victoria are classified as internationally important Ramsar wetlands. The area is also rich in Koori cultural heritage.

This area has the potential to rival Kakadu in the Northern Territory, but over the years no one in the Victorian Government has had the imagination to see the incredible potential of these wetlands.

In 1997, the Kennett government hired tourism consultants to prepare regional development plans. Advance Tourism prepared the 'Murray Outback Regional Tourism Plan' for Tourism Victoria (see attached). The section titled 'Nature Based Tourism' states:

"A major feature of the region is its nature based attractions. Being one of the region's major strengths, it should be given high recognition."

Section 7.17 of the Advanced Tourism report goes on to say:

"A significant drawcard not being fully exploited are the native birds, animals and endangered species of the region. ... There are also opportunities to see wildlife as part of guided tours, which offer greater interpretation."

"Birds are not only in abundance but there are many species, some of international significance."

Section 7.17.2 of the report discusses the promotion the Kerang wetlands.

"Between Cohuna and Lake Boga are a series of wetlands which support over 150 species of birds including migratory populations which travel from China and Japan each year. They are of world interest and covered by International Migratory Bird agreements."

"A management plan to develop their region is required. Support from NRE, Shire of Gunnawarra, local enthusiast groups, the regional tourism industry and perhaps service clubs should be sought."

Advance Tourism went on to recommend:

- 1 - *Native wildlife should be in the forefront of promotional activities.*
- 2 - *Further bird hides, walking trails and low impact visitor facilities should be developed in the Kerang wetlands.*
- 3 - *More should done be to capitalise on events involving nature.*

Victoria and its rural regions should capitalise on its wonderful wetland assets, as it does with the penguins at Phillip Island and Southern Right whales at Warrnambool. Tourism related to Penguins brings in about \$150 million each year to Phillip Island. The whales visiting Warrnambool, between June and October, bring in about \$20 million each year.

In the same way, Victorian country towns should be reaping the economic, social and environmental benefits of international wetlands tourism.

Currently some of these wetlands are classified as 'game reserves' and are used by duck shooters during shooting seasons.


Because hunter numbers have dropped, shooting seasons now provide no benefit to local regional businesses. A publican in north west Victoria interviewed by ABC radio in late 2005 said that nowadays the duck-shooting season makes no difference to his business, unlike years gone by.

A survey of Kerang businesses by a member of the Labor Party during the opening weekend of the 2005 Season also showed that there was no economic impact from the opening weekend.

Climate change, drought and more frequent El Ninos has resulted in parched, barren wetlands across the state and the numbers of native waterbirds in eastern Australia have dropped to seriously low levels. But many of the Kerang lakes only fill when artificially fed from the Murray River. If regulated correctly, these wetlands could provide a wonderful opportunity to help ensure the survival of native waterbird species as well as providing opportunities for a vibrant tourism industry attracting bird watchers and ornithologists from Australia and overseas.

Using the Kerang wetlands as game reserves is destructive and wasteful. The Murray Outback report clearly highlights that the magnificent resources of the area, the fauna and flora, are underutilized.

Victoria needs to adopt the recommendations by Advanced Tourism's 1997 report, as soon as possible. Ten years have already been wasted.



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