

# TRANSCRIPT

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON VICTORIA'S RECREATIONAL NATIVE BIRD HUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

### Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Melbourne – Monday 3 July 2023

#### MEMBERS

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Jeff Bourman

Katherine Copsey

Bev McArthur

Evan Mulholland

Georgie Purcell

Sheena Watt

**WITNESSES**

Ms Beth Jones, Deputy Secretary, Regional and Suburban Development,

Ms Rachaele May, Executive Director, Emergency Management and Outdoor Recreation, and

Mr Mark Sandiford, Director, Outdoor Recreation, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the last of the hearings of the committee inquiry into the recreational hunting of native birds.

I will read out the standard statement. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you each please state your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

**Beth JONES:** Thank you. I am Beth Jones. I am the Deputy Secretary of the Outdoor Recreation Group in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

**Rachaele MAY:** Rachaele May, Executive Director for Emergency Management and Outdoor Recreation in DJSIR.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** I am Mark Sandiford. I am the Director of Outdoor Recreation in DJSIR.

**The CHAIR:** I might ask the committee members to introduce themselves, starting with Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Jeff Bourman, Eastern Victoria Region.

**Michael GALEA:** Michael Galea, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**Sheena WATT:** Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan Region.

**The CHAIR:** I am Ryan Batchelor from Southern Metropolitan and Chair of the inquiry.

We will hand over to you to make an opening presentation. I will note, just in case any members of the committee want to raise concerns about the number of slides, which came up at an earlier part of the hearing: it is okay. We have said it is okay – I did. Over to you.

**Beth JONES:** Thank you. Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the committee for inviting us to present to you today. You have met my colleagues here. I wish to acknowledge that we are gathered on Wurundjeri country today and pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging.

**Visual presentation.**

Just in terms of a bit of a very brief opening statement, just really to provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the minister and the department as they relate to native bird hunting, I will outline a little bit more about the policy and the regulatory context, legislative context and some of the decision-making pathways

that pertain to native bird hunting and also outline very briefly the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* as a key policy document – thank you, Rachael – noting of course that the committee has been on a journey on many of these issues over the last few months and weeks.

Recreational hunting, fishing and boating, as you know, fall under the responsibility of the outdoor recreation minister, who is Minister Sonya Kilkenny. The portfolio includes boating, hunting and fishing, and the GMA and the Victorian Fisheries Authority also fall under that purview as well. The Minister for Outdoor Recreation solely administers the *Game Management Authority Act*, which really establishes the Act and its objectives and the powers and functions of the GMA. Under general orders, the Minister for Agriculture, the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Outdoor Recreation jointly administer key legislation and regulations relating to native bird hunting under the *Wildlife Act*. DJSIR is here to really support the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in her portfolio responsibilities as they relate to the portfolio. This includes a range of functions, including developing policy and legislation, providing advice on legislation and regulations and the preparation of a whole range of legal notices, which you would be familiar with in terms of modifications to the hunting season or regulating the native bird hunting space. We also provide advice to the minister on the administration of the GMA. Obviously in doing so we work across government, and as you are well aware too, there is quite a rich legal environment that sits around this space. In terms of our role, I would most notably bring your attention of course to the *Wildlife Act* and the *Wildlife (Game) Regulations*. The implementation and development of those are led by us. The Act of course provides an overarching framework for what is permissible under the Act, and the regs are, I suppose, more the rules around bag limits and season length et cetera.

You are also pretty familiar with this environment, but this slide really describes the process for the setting of or any modifications to the duck and quail seasons. I will not walk through it in detail just because I know it has been the subject of quite a bit of your consideration, but obviously it starts with advice that comes in from the GMA, it makes its way to the responsible ministers and decisions are taken. If there are modifications to the default seasons, they are approved under a section 86 notice that is gazetted and tabled in Parliament, and that is essentially the process. That is a process that is followed before the season starts. A very similar process is followed during the season for any further modifications for things like wetland closures, as you are familiar with as well.

Just finally, the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* is really the principal policy framework for hunting in Victoria at the moment, which also guides native bird hunting as well. It articulates government's commitments to safe, responsible and sustainable hunting. It is developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders. The implementation of that is led by DJSIR, but there are a range of departments and agencies who have responsibilities under the plan. There are three objectives of the plan: one around informing and educating, one about collaborating and partnering and one about monitoring and research. There are around eight actions that relate to native bird hunting, and you have heard about some of that work that is underway in terms of wounding reduction, with the adaptive harvest model baselining a whole range of activities in this space.

I think I will leave it there, particularly given that we have lost the slideshow. Hopefully, Chair, that just provides a bit of a snapshot of an overview of the roles and policy context which DJSIR operates within.

**The CHAIR:** It does. Thank you very much, Ms Jones. We will, I am sure, get into many of those things over the course of the next 50-odd minutes. The *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* – I have a memory of our briefing. Someone – it may have been you; it may have been the GMA – mentioned there had been an evaluation done. Is it correct?

**Beth JONES:** Not of the current plan.

**The CHAIR:** Right.

**Beth JONES:** The current plan is still underway, so it is chapter 2, if you like. There was a chapter 1. There was a review undertaken of the first chapter.

**The CHAIR:** So there was –

**Beth JONES:** Correct.

**The CHAIR:** And do we have that?

**Beth JONES:** I believe that that has been –

**Mark SANDIFORD:** The review sits in a brief to the minister, and we need permission to get that across just to check for executive privilege and so forth. But it was reviewed for the Minister for Agriculture at the time.

**The CHAIR:** That does not answer my question.

**Beth JONES:** So, no, it has not been provided to you then.

**The CHAIR:** Can we have a copy of it?

**Beth JONES:** We can take that on notice and provide a copy.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Are we in the process of reviewing and updating the *Wildlife (Game) Regulations*? They are a 10-year thing.

**Beth JONES:** The *Wildlife (Game) Regulations* are due to sunset in September of this year. At the moment there is a process under consideration for the remake of those.

**The CHAIR:** That obviously has not been completed yet, I would have thought.

**Beth JONES:** Correct.

**The CHAIR:** Have you done a RIS?

**Beth JONES:** I might just throw to Mark, and he can talk a little bit about the history of some of the consultation that has been done with respect to those.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** The current consideration is already on a one-year extension. It needed a further extension. At the moment what we need to consider is we have lots of moving pieces in play at the moment, including the committee and including the *Wildlife Act*. In terms of what recommendations we put to the minister as to which directions she might want to take with the regulations prior, there was quite a bit of consultation in terms of what remade regulations might look like. Obviously they need to be contemporised – they are 10 years old et cetera – but also it is an opportunity for some reform on some of the matters that you have touched on – for example, the testing of hunters, lead shot, there is a whole suite of issues that we were considering in there at that time.

**The CHAIR:** So there has been a one-year extension, and they are due to expire in September.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** We are currently on the first extension that we got, and now we need to consider, in the light of all the moving pieces, where we go.

**The CHAIR:** Did you complete a regulatory impact statement for the last extension?

**Mark SANDIFORD:** No – no formal RIS.

**The CHAIR:** Because it was not required for the one year – but you will be for the next substantive –

**Mark SANDIFORD:** If we were to substantively remake the regulations, we would be required to have a RIS.

**The CHAIR:** What I am trying to find out is if you have done a RIS, the extent of that and whether that is available to assist the committee's deliberations or not.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** I apologise; I am not being clear. We required an extension to the regulations, and we did not conduct a RIS. We did, however, conduct quite a lot of internal and external consultation on what that might look like. We are now in a position where we might need a further extension, but what form that would look like – if it was to be a substantive remake of the regulations, we would need to put out a RIS.

**Beth JONES:** In answer to your question, there is not an existing RIS.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Is there a consultation summary report of the last iteration that would assist the committee?

**Mark SANDIFORD:** There is no formal report, no.

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry to totally change track. One of the other things that occupied a lot of our time earlier in the proceedings was the economic contribution of hunting. We have obviously got the RMCG consultation. I do not think we need to go over that again. Is that all we have got in terms of an evaluation of the economic impact, the economic contribution report? Is there any other work the department has undertaken, other than that, to assess hunting's impact on the Victorian economy?

**Beth JONES:** No. As far as I am aware that is the only report that the department has commissioned. I will just note, however, that was done in 2019, and it updated a previous study that was done in 2013 of a very similar ilk. But in terms of something other than that that has been commissioned by the department – no, I am not aware that anything else exists.

**The CHAIR:** More broadly, does the department have any information or data that could assist the committee in understanding different types of tourism or recreational activities and their economic impact on regional Victoria? Obviously that report was very focused on one type of activity. The assessment the committee is trying to do is to understand that activity in the context of everything else, but we do not have the everything else.

**Beth JONES:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Is there anything you have got that would help us understand what other sorts of economic activity occur in regional Victoria, specifically relating to recreation and/or tourism and its economic effects?

**Beth JONES:** Tourism is within our department, so I am very happy to take that on notice and find out to what extent they have information.

**The CHAIR:** I just feel that that is a big miss. There is a critique, which I think is warranted, of the scope of what that report can tell us, and we have had some advice from the Parliamentary Budget Office that has assisted our deliberations in that, so I am a little hesitant to have that be the only piece of evidence we have about one of our terms of reference. Anything else you have got about the importance of tourism to regional Victoria and the economic effects of outdoor recreation activities more broadly would be really, really helpful. The other is on economic development. Having had a quick look through the visitor economy plan and the experience plan that the department has produced, outdoor recreation is mentioned maybe once or twice, but hunting is conspicuously absent from those documents. I was wondering if you had any reflections on that in the context of the economic importance of hunting to the Victorian economy.

**Beth JONES:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. You talked about the Experience Victoria plan that was just recently announced by government. I suppose, to answer your question, there are probably two contexts I could point to in terms of government, in terms of where this fits. The first one is a range of outdoor recreation strategies and plans, and the other one would be the Victorian experience economy. Government certainly has got an intent to drive time in the outdoors, people getting outdoors, given the nature-based experiences, given the physical and mental wellbeing impacts of that, and given the benefits to regional economies. Also in terms of tourism, the tourism experience plan talks about five pillars which the plan is built around. One of those is around nature-based experiences, and so I suppose that certainly provides a context for a range of outdoor recreation activities. You are right, it does not call out hunting, nor does it call out rock climbing or mountain biking or camping or hiking or anything else. I suppose that document is very much a framework and the individual focus on different opportunities in different places and their significance to regional economies can vary with different places, and I suppose also some of the ways in which the combination of different experiences and opportunities could unfold in different places. So I am not sure if that answers your question, Chair – I think that is the context for those things.

**The CHAIR:** Probably. Mr Bourman.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation. In the GMA's 2023 ministerial brief on the duck season, there is advice about research being conducted into a 'sustainability window', which will include 'a minimum population level below which no harvest should occur'. Can you advise the committee who is conducting that research, what stage it is at and when it will be publicly released?

**Beth JONES:** Mr Bourman, I might just defer to Mark in relation to that work.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** I am sorry, do you mind repeating the question?

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Sure. There is some research being conducted into a sustainability window that will include a minimum population below which there should be no harvesting of animals occurring. So the question is: where is that at, who is doing it and will it be publicly released to the best of your knowledge?

**Mark SANDIFORD:** It is a question we would have to take notice. We will have to go back and ask the GMA where that is at.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Okay. So it was the GMA doing it, was it?

**Mark SANDIFORD:** Yes.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Yes. Thank you. Yes, I will take that on notice, thank you. The sustainable hunting action plan 'commits to developing and implementing wounding reduction action plans for waterfowl, quail and deer'. We know that the Minister for Outdoor Recreation is refusing to release the waterfowl plan, which I think is actually not really great. Are you aware of any practical impediments to the waterfowl wounding reduction action plan being released?

**Beth JONES:** No, Mr Bourman, I would say that that action plan was provided to the minister in May for her consideration, and it is under consideration. It is as simple as that.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Okay. Thank you. I do not know if this has just been covered, but we will go through it anyway. The SHAP commits to conducting another economic study in 2024. There has been wide criticism of the substitutability question that was added to the last study but was not in the one before that. We do not see that question about any other industry; it has always struck me that this question was included at the behest of people with an anti-hunting agenda. Can you shed any light on how this question got included in the last study, and on whether it will be included in the 2024 study?

**Beth JONES:** Mr Bourman, I will pass in a moment to Mark who was on the team when the 2019 study was conceived, just to answer that part of the question. In terms of the 2024 study, there is obviously a commitment of the SHAP to do that. There will be a view to wanting to make sure there is a level of continuity in terms of trends in comparison with what has happened in the past. But I do think, in terms of the scope of that 2024 study, that has not been written yet, so there is an opportunity perhaps to look at additional things should government wish to do that.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** That is fair, but it is kind of coincidental that here we are with a native waterfowl hunting inquiry, and the year before we had a substitutability question pop up out of nowhere. But anyway, I am not putting words in anyone's mouth.

**Beth JONES:** I will throw to Mark, who was there when that was conceived.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** I think, back to Beth's point, we have the 2013 work, the 2019 work was published in 2020 and we want similar work for 2024. So one of the things that we would be looking for in those studies would be to do a comparative analysis across 'What were the changes between those years?' et cetera.

In terms of the substitutability questions, I cannot point to a specific person or a specific reason that they were put in, but it was of interest to us to say, 'Well, if there was a decline in hunting or if there was a policy change in the hunting space, what might that mean in terms of that expenditure?', because it is quite large and it is quite meaningful in some regional LGAs and so forth. That would be the only reason it was put in there.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Thank you. I am just getting information, actually. The wounding reduction action plan was actually finalised in October of last year, so it has been somewhere before it got to the current minister. The

wildlife game regs were to expire 11 September last year and were extended out until 11 September this year. As far as I can tell, no side of the argument has been consulted. I think Animals Australia were complaining and I know the hunting organisations have been complaining about no consultation. We have just nine sitting days between now and 11 September. I do not even know if you can answer this. Will there be regulations in place on 12 September to regulate hunting after this year? We are getting awfully close to the time where something is going to have to happen.

**Beth JONES:** Yes. Mr Bourman, Mark talked before about some of the consultation that has been done around that and the history in terms of the extension that we have got for the current regs. Yes, they sunset in September, and yes, plans were put in place to ensure that they are in place by September. How that will occur is currently being considered by government.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I guess it is a comment and there is not much you can say to this, but I think we are so close now that even if we decided to review them, I do not think there is enough time to actually consult with either part. I guess we are going where we are going. That finalises me. I have got a minute left; that will do. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. I just want to spend a little bit of time looking at the economic contribution report that has been provided and just a couple of issues that I think we have canvassed with previous witnesses but I want to test the department's view of as well. Within that report the gross economic contribution is very prominent in terms of the infographics and so on, and I just want to test your view on how useful the gross figures are as compared to the net figures in that report.

**Beth JONES:** I think the report has been useful and instructive, certainly, and I think you heard from the GMA this morning about some of the baseline and the monitoring and information that we have been trying to introduce into this space to be able to better make evidence-based decisions. That particular piece of work was commissioned from the point of view of trying to get an understanding of the direct economic impacts of hunters, particularly in terms of regional economies. It is not a comprehensive aspect of the entire story, as you have heard, but it has been instructive in terms of understanding where that activity occurs and where the concentration of benefit is. It has certainly been useful too in understanding areas and further gaps in information and areas where we might want to find out more information. Certainly we have been coming from the point of view of the more information the better, and there will be a future opportunity to look at that. Just back to your question – sorry, Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** The gross figures, particularly when I am looking at that report and I see self-reporting by hunters that 96 per cent of them are also interested in other recreational activities – you have already noted in opening remarks that this is a contribution study, not an impact study, and so it would be my reading of that report that those gross figures are not going to magically disappear were duck hunting, for example, ceased in Victoria.

**Beth JONES:** Yes. I might throw to Mark in a minute to talk about it. Back to the substitutability, there was a bit of a range of consideration of what might happen in terms of the questions that were asked in the 2019 report. Mark, I might just get you to elaborate briefly on that.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** You are correct in saying that there are other outdoor activities that hunters might take part in, so if there was to be no more hunting, the money does not disappear. What we were trying to understand there was: what might that look like on the other side of it? So in theory, if you go to that discretionary funding going into, say, white goods, that means imports, that means less money into the economy, or if it is going into camping, fishing, boating or whatever, that is what we were trying to get an understanding of.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Yes. Thank you. I have had a look through. I was mostly interested in not the gross figures, which are very prominent but I do not think, as we said, are realistic in view of money that might go elsewhere; I could not find net figures for the LGAs in the report. I do not think that it goes down to that level of detail. There are gross figures for some LGAs, but there are not net figures available in that analysis for particular LGAs.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** That is correct.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. And of course in the gross figures that are quoted in that report, there are breakdowns by animal type, but the gross figures for LGAs – there are separations, for some, of ducks, but there is not a net figure for ducks per LGA.

**Beth JONES:** Correct.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. I also then just wanted to touch on the documents that Mr Batchelor was referring to around other activities that we are seeking to promote in Victorian recreation and tourism and just touch on some of the evidence that we have heard from community members around the usability of local resources, namely wetlands, during hunting season. Some of the other activities that are available in the outdoor category – I would say that hunting is particularly exclusive in terms of its operation as a use. When you are looking at other activities in the outdoor category, are there any other outdoor activities that require the exclusion of the general public or other outdoor users?

**Beth JONES:** I would say it depends on how individual activities are practised and whether people do them alone. I know lots of friends who like to hike alone as opposed to hike in a group or camp alone or camp in a group, so I suppose I would observe that how people practise those activities varies across a range of activities according to the preferences of individual people or the setting. I guess they are pretty general comments that I am making, but in terms of 'Is that any more individual than other activities?', I think it really depends on the setting and the situation and the people. I think there is obviously a range of different legislation and safety considerations that sit around particular activities as well that may or may not affect how they are practised on the ground. And of course outdoor recreation activities are many and diverse, and the views of the community and participants on which ones are better or should be in the right places is obviously a very, very subjective perspective.

**Katherine COPSEY:** I just could not practically think of another example that requires so much regulatory effort and also has a similar opportunity cost in terms of closing areas off for other usage.

**Beth JONES:** Without knowing a lot about how all of the other activities are regulated, I would say, you know, certainly just because of the nature of the activity too I suppose, it has got a range of particular considerations and situations around it, so –

**Katherine COPSEY:** Have you done any analysis of the opportunity cost of hunting generally or duck hunting specifically in terms of the other activities that it prevents from occurring?

**Beth JONES:** No, the department has not commissioned any research of that type, and I am not aware of anything particularly comprehensive that would fit that description.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. That is my time.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe on notice, if you are able to have a dig around: are there any other sorts of recreational activities in Victoria that would have a similar regulatory framework that requires the exclusion of other persons from a location for the purposes of undertaking that activity? We have heard a lot about fishing; I am not aware that there is an exclusion zone around fishers, for example. But maybe on notice if you could have a think about –

**Beth JONES:** Certainly, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** if there is anything else that sort of has a similar framework around it, that would be useful.

**Beth JONES:** Yes, we can. Certainly.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for joining us this morning. I would like to ask about the sustainable housing action plan, the SHAP report –

**The CHAIR:** Hunting. Different department.



**Michael GALEA:** Hunting, not housing. It is only Monday too. Wrong inquiry. The *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* report, forgive me. How much funding has been allocated for hunter education?

**Beth JONES:** For hunter education specifically – just give me a moment, Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Sure.

**Beth JONES:** I will see if I have got a particular figure for you in relation to hunter education. So according to the figures I have got here, Mr Galea, around about \$300,000 has been allocated towards informing and educating for hunting specifically as a part of some SHAP funding that was allocated for the implementation of the plan.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. So that is over the life of the SHAP?

**Beth JONES:** Correct.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. Thank you. And how have you measured the impact or success of those education measures?

**Beth JONES:** So Mr Galea, what I would say is those activities are ongoing at the moment and, I think, very similarly to some of the evidence you heard from the GMA this morning, some of them are around baselines and improving practices. There will certainly be review and evaluation undertaken as a component of SHAP 2, and certainly, from what you heard from the GMA this morning, that is an evolving space too in terms of the way in which they are looking at, I guess, the difference some of those activities are making. But because the SHAP has still got a year to run, we are not in a position at the moment to give any sort of evaluation data at this stage.

**Michael GALEA:** Sure. Fair enough.

**Beth JONES:** But there is certainly a view to that.

**Michael GALEA:** That will be done as part of that process?

**Beth JONES:** That is correct.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. And I understand that there are education modules, online training modules, as part of this. Do you have any data as to how many times they have been used?

**Rachaele MAY:** Can we take that on notice, because I think that data would be held by the GMA because it is through their website? So we could certainly go back and check.

**Beth JONES:** I am sure we could assess hits and all that sort of stuff, so we can take that away.

**Rachaele MAY:** Yes.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. And also, just briefly, on page 15 of that report too it discusses the release in 2022 of the game regulatory reform road map. Has that been released?

**Beth JONES:** No, that has not been released. That is still work underway, and I think that relates exactly to the conversation we were having before just in terms of the very dynamic nature of the regulatory framework which sits around native bird hunting, including the review of the *Wildlife Act*, the regs and obviously the work of this committee now. So work is underway, but has a road map been presented? No, and I would suggest that in light of all that is happening it would be prudent to wait.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. Sure. In terms of the Pegasus report into the GMA in 2017, has the current department or the previous iteration of the department conducted a review into that report in the last couple of years?

**Beth JONES:** No. There has not been a review undertaken of that report or the GMA in relation to that report, but as you heard from the GMA this morning, the work that they have undertaken to consider and

implement the findings of that report is available on their website. But, no, we have not conducted any particular review outside of that.

**Michael GALEA:** Sure. In that document you refer to their preliminary discussions with, as it was, the DJPR in terms of a ballot or permit system being introduced. Can you report on the status of those discussions, and have they led anywhere?

**Beth JONES:** I might throw to my colleagues just to see what current discussions we might be able to report on in relation to that.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** You asked the same question to the GMA this morning, and so we would need to go back to them to find out what point in time they have got to, so we will take that on notice.

**Michael GALEA:** So it is in the GMA's court, basically?

**Mark SANDIFORD:** Yes. They needed to have discussions with Parks Victoria on that, I believe.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. Thank you. Recommendation 1.2 of that Pegasus report talks about game-hunting licences and the need for regulatory changes to enable this. Has there been any progress towards the implementation of them?

**Beth JONES:** Again, just in terms of the specific detail of that, unless the team know, we might need to take that –

**Mark SANDIFORD:** No, I am sorry –

**Beth JONES:** We need to take that on notice. Sorry, Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** No problem. It might be the same for this next question too. Recommendation 3.1 discusses the development of an accountability framework in relation to duck hunting. Does this include the prioritisation of cultural heritage?

**Beth JONES:** Certainly, I do not think – sorry, Mr Galea, I would need to take on notice whether cultural heritage is specifically addressed in that. It is certainly a focus of the policies of SHAP going forward, but given that those actions are all kind of matters for the GMA, I would need to just confer with them to give you an accurate view of where they are up to. I would need to take that on notice.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. With the RMCG report, noting of course the estimated contributions on impact of duck and quail hunting in Victoria, although it has decreased are you aware of the broadscale costs of native bird management? So that is with GMA compliance for those purposes, whether it is for prosecution or wetland management, are you aware in broad terms of the costs associated with native bird hunting as well?

**Beth JONES:** In terms of the cost, I think a big indicator of that would largely be the output – as in budget output – in relation to hunting. We would need to probably extract – some of it is a bit general, so given that a lot of the actions and activities, whether it is compliance or education, sit across the range of hunting activities, we would need to probably do a little bit of work to ascertain to what extent exactly it is native bird related. It is pretty blended, and some of that is quite general. But I think the best indicator of that would be the budget output in relation to the administration of hunting.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. Thank you. Obviously this covers the economic contributions across hunting in Victoria. In terms of broader tourism strategies, has hunting been a significant part or a minor part of what you have sought to implement in those strategies for tourism promotion or any other related matters that you have done, as broadscale?

**Beth JONES:** So, Mr Galea, as far as I am aware they are not a specific feature of promotional activities at the moment. I am mindful that the *Experience Victoria* plan has come out, and it has been horses for courses in particular areas, but there is that focus on nature-based activities and promoting them, and government is certainly open to different opportunities that would sit around that.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Your answers to some of the other members of Parliament here indicate the nonsense of these mega departments, where the responsibility of duck hunting covers three ministerial portfolios. Wouldn't it be simpler if we had one minister in charge?

**Beth JONES:** Mrs McArthur, I would say that the general orders outline which ministers are responsible for what. They are decisions of government, Mrs McArthur, and I suppose, respectfully, it is our role to work with that and work with departments in support of the ministers who have those responsibilities.

**Bev McARTHUR:** We keep on hearing that it is somebody else's responsibility – 'Ask that body,' 'Ask that authority.' Seriously, it is very difficult. The sustainable hunting action plan includes a lot of funding for the *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy*. We heard from Mr Carter from the Dja Dja Wurrung about how important this is, and the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations wrote at length about this strategy in their submission. How much are we spending on this?

**Beth JONES:** Again, Mrs McArthur, it is difficult to quarantine exactly how much is spent on that just given that some of it goes across different activities. What I can say in terms of some specific costs is that as a part of the SHAP, the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan*, there have been some grants provided to traditional owner corporations for a range of pilot projects. There has been in the order of about \$1 million allocated to the implementation of those projects so far.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Can you give us on notice the details of all of that?

**Beth JONES:** Certainly can, yes.

**Bev McARTHUR:** And also the outcomes?

**Beth JONES:** Yes.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you.

**Beth JONES:** Noting, of course, Mrs McArthur, that those particular projects are still underway, but yes, we can give you some information on that.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Did your department make recommendations to the outdoor recreation minister around modifications made to the 2023 game-birds season?

**Beth JONES:** Mrs McArthur, it is our role to advise the Minister for Outdoor Recreation on a range of matters, and yes, we did give her advice in relation to the settings for the 2023 duck season and quail season.

**Bev McARTHUR:** So what is your understanding of why this year's season was modified, given you gave the advice?

**Beth JONES:** Mrs McArthur, the decisions in relation to the season this year were taken by government, so you would need to –

**Bev McARTHUR:** But what was your advice?

**Beth JONES:** Our advice was consistent with that of the GMA, so you would need to speak to the minister. But of course in making decisions ministers consider a range of inputs to their decision-making processes, one of which was the GMA's advice and one of which was ours.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Was there any scientific reason given?

**Beth JONES:** Mrs McArthur, I am not privy to the decisions taken by joint ministers in relation to the settings for the season.

**Bev McARTHUR:** That is exactly my point about these departments and ministerial responsibilities – always somebody else's responsibility. We have heard about information around informing season modifications that contradicts what the GMA is saying, so whose information takes precedence?

**Beth JONES:** Minister – sorry, Mrs McArthur. Apologies.

**Bev McARTHUR:** If only. I would fix it in 5 seconds.

**Beth JONES:** In relation to ‘Does information take precedence?’

**Bev McARTHUR:** Yes.

**Beth JONES:** No, the Act talks about the types of information.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You said the GMA make the decision.

**Beth JONES:** The GMA provide advice. They do not make a decision.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Okay.

**Beth JONES:** They have a role to provide advice to the minister. That is their role under the Act. They provide advice, and there are a range of inputs into any decision that a minister would take in relation to things. There is nothing in the Act that prescribes exactly what has precedence over anything else.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It sounds like *Utopia* on steroids to me. Is there any evidence at all that shows any decline in tourist activities in areas where hunting occurs during a season?

**Beth JONES:** I am not aware of any study or information. We certainly have not commissioned that, Mrs McArthur. I am not aware of anything.

**Bev McARTHUR:** We hear that various activities, maybe birdwatching which obviously is a major economic driver in regional areas – not – are going to be affected by duck hunting. But you have got no evidence to this point?

**Beth JONES:** No. I think we have talked about the scope of the previous economic analysis that has been done, and I do not have any evidence to answer your question.

**Bev McARTHUR:** So have you ever seen an upturn in economic activity where hunting is banned? Have you looked at what has happened in New South Wales, for instance? Or when you have closed down a wetlands or something for hunting, has the economic scenario improved?

**Beth JONES:** I cannot talk to that in terms of anything interstate. Mark, have you got any particular knowledge or information that might answer the question?

**Mark SANDIFORD:** We are unaware of any formal report that talks to what that looked like in New South Wales, for example.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Yes. We hear all this stuff, and nobody seems have evidence on anything. Geelong this year would be a good example. Once a wetlands system was closed to hunting, did they have a tourist boom?

**Beth JONES:** Mrs McArthur –

**Bev McARTHUR:** Perhaps you will take it on notice and find out, because this is critical to this whole inquiry: if you ban duck hunting, there will suddenly, miraculously be a tourist boom in an area where duck hunting is banned. Can somebody please supply evidence to this effect? You are covering three departments. Can you find out from three departments where such evidence might occur?

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur, the officials here are speaking on behalf of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. They can answer for themselves.

**Beth JONES:** Mrs McArthur, I am not aware of any data to suggest what happened as a result of that wetland being closed. We have not commissioned any work in respect of that.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you so much. Now, we also heard that mountain biking, rock climbing, trail riding and gold prospecting are all alternatives, but actually you are restricting that as well – or somebody’s

department, one of the three, is restricting that. You know, up in the Grampians, for example, you have got to walk on a designated track, or you will be fined if you do not. If you dip your toe in the water, you will be fined further. You are basically banning rock climbing. All these outdoor activities are being affected and closed down, so how are they going to suddenly, miraculously increase the amount of tourist activity in areas where duck shooting might be banned?

**Beth JONES:** I would say, Mrs McArthur, in relation to those things – you talk about rock climbing; I am assuming you are talking about in the Grampians National Park? I am not in a position to comment on that, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Who is?

**Beth JONES:** They are matters for DEECA or Parks Victoria.

**Rachaele MAY:** They are the lands manager.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Ms Purcell.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thanks, Chair, and thank you very much for appearing today. I want to talk about the wounding action plan. The wounding action plan commences with two full-page commendations from Denmark, who claim to be a world leader in wounding reduction, which we have heard consistently throughout this process. It does not mention that three of its neighbours – the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany – banned the shooting of the pink-footed goose about 40 years ago, which is obviously what the action plan was focused on, and it is, you know, trying to be transferred over to here, essentially, on different species. Together those countries have 10 times the population of the two countries, Norway and Denmark, that still shoot these geese. Do you think that the wounding action plan could be considered misleading?

**Beth JONES:** What I would say, Ms Purcell, is that I think all parties recognise wounding is a concern. The SHAP commits to a range of actions that look to minimise wounding across all forms of hunting, starting with ducks. In terms of ways in which we could minimise wounding, there has been a range of things considered, including looking to other jurisdictions for what has worked and what has not worked. It is not directly transposable of course, but you can take the insights from different places. I think it has been developed with a range of well-placed people sitting around the table being party to that conversation, so no, I do not believe it is misleading.

I guess what I would also say is: in relation to wounding reduction, there is no one answer either, so it is around the types of different ways in which that can be achieved. Looking at what has worked well or not in other parts of the world or other jurisdictions, I think, is relevant.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Did you ever consider focusing on an example that was, I guess, more relevant to here? Obviously the pink-footed goose is quite large; it moves in a different way to native waterbirds here in Victoria. Were there any other models that were looked at instead?

**Beth JONES:** So, Ms Purcell – and I will throw to Mark in a moment to see whether he has anything to add – just in terms of the working group that considered the development of that action plan, it was comprised of a range of people. I am not sure exactly what was and was not considered in relation to that work, but I will just see if Mark has anything additional to say in relation to that.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** I do not really have much more to add to it, other than the interest in Denmark. It has been quite a long journey for them in how they have gone about reducing wounding. And it was: what were the basic pillars, what was the underlying thing? When they looked at education, how did hunter culture change? What were the drivers there and so forth. There are not any, if you like, Australia-specific examples where that same process has been undertaken.

**Georgie PURCELL:** The ministerial brief stated that DJSIR is proposing a way to fund the wounding action plan. Could you tell us how much it will cost, how many years it will operate and who will pay for it?

**Beth JONES:** Sorry, Rachaele, did you want to –

**Rachaele MAY:** I was just going to say part of that is still under consideration by the minister. That is part of the advice that is sitting with her at the moment.

**Beth JONES:** It is there as a draft, as you know, so it will be a matter of considering that as a part of considering that information and any implementation that would sit around it, Ms Purcell.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you. I just want to talk about managing potential conflicts of interest within the department. When you are considering any sort of policy or implementation of a project that relates to shooting, do you ensure that people who are game licence holders are not involved in that process?

**Beth JONES:** Ms Purcell, it is incumbent on all staff, just as part of their normal course of duties, to have conflict of interest or declaration of private interest forms up to date and filled in in relation to the discharge of their responsibilities and to work with their managers to identify any potential, perceived or real conflicts and to put in place any management plans that are relevant to their situation. That is a practice that is undertaken right across our department.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you. I just want to talk about resources, because obviously assistance is provided to the Game Management Authority from a range of different departments to monitor the duck-shooting season. Your department is responsible for regulating the kangaroo harvest program here in Victoria. Are any resources taken away from the compliance efforts for the kangaroo harvest program when the duck-shooting season is underway?

**Beth JONES:** Ms Purcell, with the duck-shooting season, like anything, the scheduling of compliance activities changes with different activities across the year. There is a sort of core amount of work that is required to deliver those programs in accordance with their delivery schedules. There is surge activity that occurs in terms of increasing the number of staff that are participating in any particular activity. For example, in duck season there is surge activity that happens across the government to make sure that there are resources made available to ensure compliance. But those two activities are separately funded, and there are separate, I guess, expectations and implementation project plans that sit around both of them.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you. You might need to take this one on notice, but are you able to supply us all details on funding from the department for projects related to native bird shooting? For example, there has been partial funding of the Arthur Rylah Institute report from 1 July 2014, when the Game Management Authority was formed, to date.

**Beth JONES:** Yes, certainly, Ms Purcell. I will have to take that on notice.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Great. Thank you so much.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Watt.

**Sheena WATT:** Thank you. I am lucky last. Thank you all for being here. I have questions particularly around traditional owners. That is probably expected. I just want to firstly understand – would you consider tourism and ecotourism operations, including tours by traditional owners, as an outdoor recreational activity?

**Beth JONES:** I think that is a cultural activity. Part of a tourism activity could be an outdoor recreational activity, so I think it could be considered in a range of different ways.

**Sheena WATT:** Yes. I am just reflecting, then, on the earlier question by Ms Copsey about which activities would not be able to be undertaken or are limited. Given the opportunities identified by traditional owners for ecotourism – and we did hear from some organisations and representatives earlier – they do certainly feel quite limited in their operations during the season and are seeing quite a lot of damage and littering and other things that have affected them. It is probably something just to take on notice for your consideration later, but I want to ask particularly about signage and the destruction of sites. The 2016–20 plan saw 360 new signposts go up during that time. Were any of those around culturally significant sites or were they all around hunting and where to hunt and what to do? What are these signs all about? There are 360 more of them.

**Beth JONES:** I might refer to Mr Sandiford in relation to that.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** They were largely related to hunting and access, and what could and could not happen there, so not specifically about heritage.

**Sheena WATT:** Okay. And are there plans in this current 2021–24 plan to include signage relating to cultural heritage, and cultural heritage management –

**Mark SANDIFORD:** No, there is not.

**Sheena WATT:** protection and others?

**Beth JONES:** Not specifically, Ms Watt. What I would say is a large focus of the SHAP for this particular round is around working with traditional owners in terms of what is important for them at particular sites. And part of the four projects that I mentioned before –

**Sheena WATT:** Oh, to Mrs McArthur?

**Beth JONES:** yes – are around cultural management plans and particular wetlands or particular wetland sites, and what the aspirations of the traditional owners are for those sites in relation to cultural awareness and signage. So I would say there are certainly opportunities under those types of projects for it. But in terms of, are there specific plans for signage around cultural heritage, not that specifically, no.

**Sheena WATT:** Not specifically, okay. Because we did hear evidence around Lake Boort in particular, that there are some needs there for some more signage and a great number of sites have been destroyed and damaged. This is really quite concerning to me.

**Beth JONES:** Certainly what I would say, Ms Watt, is we are working much more closely under SHAP 2 with traditional owners in terms of what is important for them around the practice of hunting, both in terms of what happens on sites, but also the involvement of traditional owners in terms of self-determination opportunities around it as well.

**Sheena WATT:** Yes. Are there other bodies that you are working with as well? I am thinking about the Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council.

**Beth JONES:** Yes, so there is a traditional owner –

**Sheena WATT:** What are the mechanisms for where this is considered, apart from direct relationships with traditional owners themselves?

**Beth JONES:** We have got a traditional owner strategy that was also developed as part of SHAP 1 with traditional owners, with Parks Victoria and with a range of other government players. So that is a strategy that exists as well. It has been a much more significant focus of the last few years, just in terms of building those relationships and building understanding. I think there has been a big focus on trying to understand the aspirations and concerns for our traditional owners, or opportunities for traditional owners in terms of native hunting, and those two things have been, I guess, important foundational bits around that.

**Sheena WATT:** Is there any reporting that goes to your department or your area around the destruction of sites? Are there any reporting mechanisms – we heard from the GMA – that come through to you?

**Beth JONES:** Not –

**Mark SANDIFORD:** It would probably go to DEECA, because –

**Sheena WATT:** More so DEECA? Yes, I am happy to raise that when they come.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** it is public land.

**Sheena WATT:** I was just thinking about the actual economic damage to our state from the destruction of culturally significant sites, and then the damage to ecotourism and the development of our tourism and First Peoples' opportunities in particular.

**Beth JONES:** Yes.

**Sheena WATT:** So any investigations of these, or models of fines or other things, would sit with DEECA not yourselves?

**Beth JONES:** Correct.

**Sheena WATT:** Okay. I am very happy to raise that then with them. I did have some questions just about birdwatching. How advanced in our state would you consider the birdwatching industry? As a sector, an interest area, where are we up to? If we look to us and others, where are we at?

**Beth JONES:** I am not a particular expert on birdwatching, but we certainly work with BirdLife Australia; certainly we work with those authorities. I am not sure whether Mark can provide any particular –

**Sheena WATT:** I have asked a number of times: what are the sorts of investments that we need to make to really grow and flourish this as an opportunity for our state, economically? I want to know where we sit, firstly.

**Mark SANDIFORD:** I can only point to a few examples, like Werribee – the structures put up for people to do birdwatching out of the weather. But as a broad policy, I am not aware of any.

**Sheena WATT:** Is there any work that is being done by the department to really look at the growth opportunities for birdwatching?

**Beth JONES:** Ms Watt, I would use the opportunity to ask DEECA about that today, given that a lot of that is on public land sites.

**Sheena WATT:** Yes, I might take that to DEECA.

**Beth JONES:** Certainly in terms of the sustainable hunting action plan grants, some of them are around enhancing bird habitat and that has, I guess, an attraction for birdwatching as well. So there is a little bit of a link to the SHAP, but I think probably DEECA is the –

**Sheena WATT:** Yes. There is obviously a connection between the two –

**Beth JONES:** Correct.

**Sheena WATT:** and sometimes it is a challenge to work out the lines between the two.

**Beth JONES:** Yes.

**Sheena WATT:** With traditional owner economic development, where are we up to? Is that what you are going to provide to Mrs McArthur around the *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy*? You have said that there is this \$1 million investment. Is there anything else that you would want us to know about with respect to your traditional owner investment?

**Beth JONES:** I think more broadly with respect to traditional owners there is an Aboriginal economic development strategy that the department has, *Yuma Yirramboi*. We would be very happy to provide that too, which is I guess the broader context for our economic development opportunities as well.

**Sheena WATT:** Okay. I have got that, but thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** One last one from me. You are the policy agency with responsibility for game hunting. The Pegasus report was pretty eviscerating of the GMA. The GMA said today that they are doing a lot of work to fix the problems raised in Pegasus. I asked a version of this question to them, so I will ask it to you. How are you measuring the success of the GMA's change process to fix the problems that were identified in the Pegasus report? How do you measure that success, and how are they going?

**Beth JONES:** Yes. It is a good question, Chair. The Pegasus report was a pretty defining moment, and you have heard from the GMA about the capacity and capability that has been invested in trying to address those recommendations. As a part of our oversight of the GMA, they submit a business plan and an annual report et cetera to us that talk broadly to those matters. In terms of opportunities to evaluate how they are tracking, I think certainly the work that they have done has shifted them a long way. But in terms of the particular quantitative ways of measuring that, I cannot point to anything, Chair, that is particular in terms of a particular



review of the GMA or the progress they have made. But I do think the efforts they have put into making that shift are available on their website in relation to the recommendations, and to an extent through the business planning process that they submit to us each year, we can see where the focus of their activity is in terms of compliance and capability building and capacity building across the organisation. So it certainly is an ongoing focus of what they present to us and what the expectations of them are in relation to the implementation of the commitments that they have made in terms of building their capability and capacity post the Pegasus report findings.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Chair, like you, I have got one last question.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Given that we heard, I think, that goose hunting does not happen in Sweden –

**The CHAIR:** I am not wanting to put words in anyone else's mouth, but I think it was Denmark.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Denmark or wherever –

**Jeff BOURMAN:** It does happen in Denmark.

**The CHAIR:** It does happen in Denmark.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Does it? Could you perhaps take on notice what happens in Sweden as well, where there are no bag limits and no limits at all. How does that play out?

**Beth JONES:** That is fairly broad. What is the specific question I am taking on notice, sorry, Mrs McArthur?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Whether goose hunting is occurring in Sweden and Denmark, and how does that work? There are no bag limits or limits on hunting.

**Beth JONES:** Okay. I can take that on notice, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for joining us today. You will receive a copy of the transcript at some point to review.

The committee will stand adjourned for lunch for an hour.

**Witnesses withdrew.**