

# Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Ecosystem Decline

IT'S ABOUT THE VICTORIA OUR GRANDCHILDREN WILL INHERIT.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc is a not for profit association incorporated in April 2018 to promote awareness of the plight of our native waterbirds and rural communities and to highlight a better way.  
[www.regionalvictoriansOTDS.com](http://www.regionalvictoriansOTDS.com)

# Ecosystems = Health & Wealth

## Threats..

- ▶ 75% all emerging diseases are zoonotic (UNEP).
- ▶ The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat.. life depends on healthy ecosystems & biodiversity.
- ▶ Biodiversity worth 125 trillion USD (World Economic Forum 2018).
- ▶ Costs of unhealthy ecosystems: health care costs, costs of “lock downs”, lost tourism, rectification costs: captive breeding programs, costs of toxic clean ups (lead).
- ▶ Australia one of most vulnerable countries to climate change and ecosystem decline and sadly one of those with the most to lose..



Illegally shot Freckled Duck– thought to be one of the world's rarest ducks. Photo Sue Jeffers

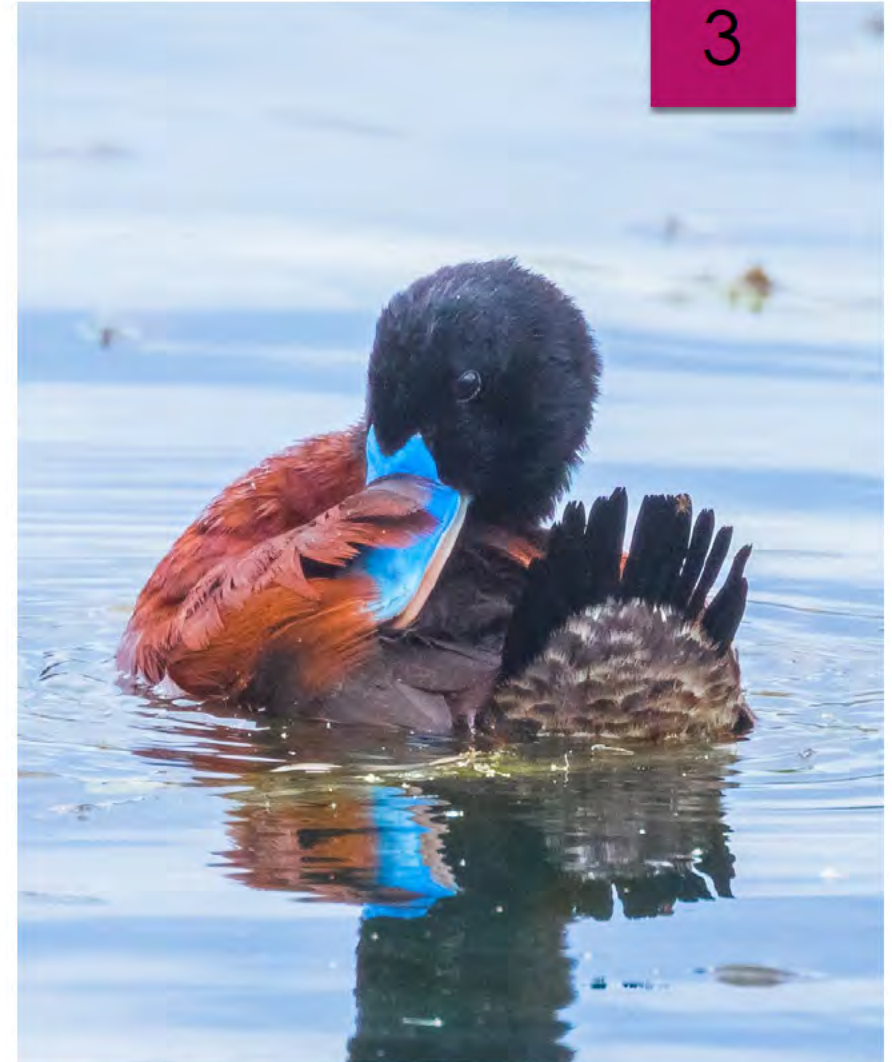


# Ecosystems = Health & Wealth

## Opportunity..

- ▶ Australia blessed with unique wildlife – biggest tourism drawcard (Tourism Australia “Consumer Demand Project”)
- ▶ Tourism contributes more than Ag, forestry, fishing, IT & media combined (Tourism Satellite Account). Nature-based tourism fastest growing component
- ▶ Birdwatching rapidly growing pastime globally. 866,000 domestic tourists birdwatched in Australia year ending December 2019
- ▶ Opportunity for Vic to be on par with NSW & QLD for domestic tourism \$\$

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Blue-billed Duck – unique to Australia.  
Photo Nalini Scarfe

TOURISM TO REGIONAL AUSTRALIA IS ON AN UPWARD TRAJECTORY WITH VISITORS INCREASING ON AVERAGE BY 5.6 PER CENT PER ANNUM OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

### DRIVERS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

Demand generators are what drive travellers to visit a location and are ultimately how an area or region builds presence and evolves to become a destination.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS



COMPLEMENTARY AMENITIES



INSTITUTIONS OF HISTORICAL OR CULTURAL VALUE



EXCITING ACTIVITIES



Tourism Australia set up the Consumer Demand Project in 2012 to better understand how global consumers view Australia and what most motivates them to visit. More than 125,000 travellers have been interviewed since 2012 in 17 markets across the world. This research highlighted that whilst many international visitors make travel decisions for rational reasons, such as safety, security and value for money, they also visit for emotional reasons.

Frequently cited motivators for visiting Australia include world-class nature and wildlife experiences, food and wine and aquatic and coastal experiences; many of which are best found in regional Australia.

These are the experiences that international visitors are seeking which, when overlaid with a strong domestic base, provides opportunities for investors to capitalise on the current and projected growth in tourism.

### Preference for Australian experiences vs International competitors



Source: Tourism Australia Consumer Demand Project



## Shooting native birds: an example of Victoria's failing.

- ▶ Ducks are good for ecosystems! - eat crop pests, algae and liver fluke.

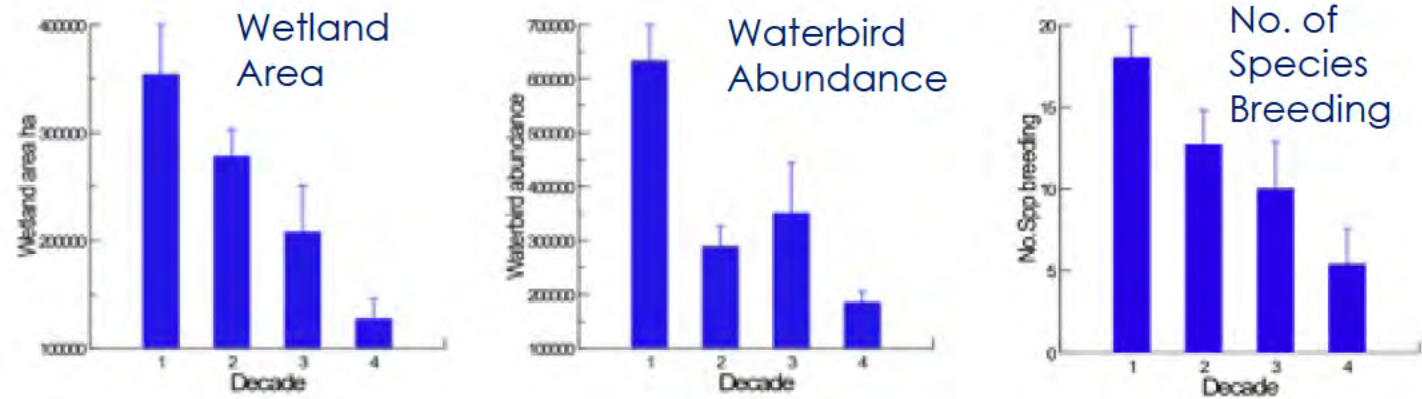


- ▶ Waterbird numbers down 90% since the 1980's.
- ▶ East Australian Annual Waterbird Surveys (EAAWS) = most extensive long-term scientific dataset. *"The most significant piece of data on bird numbers"* - Graeme Ford, CEO GMA.
- ▶ **2019 EAAWS:** All waterbird indices showed significant long-term decline. Lowest wetland index ever recorded. Little if any breeding.
- ▶ **2020 EAAWS** :Further fall ("game birds") of 23% from 2019 & little to no breeding despite rainfall. Over 48% wetlands had no birds. Waterbird numbers down further 50% in Victoria from 2019.

▶ “All game species abundances were well below long term averages, in some cases by an order of magnitude: five out of eight species continue to show significant long-term decline.” Prof. Kingsford

▶ “We’re going to see long-term declines exacerbated.” Prof. Kingsford

## Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey data 1983 - 2020



Previous Victorian governments have cancelled shooting seasons for less dire circumstances.



## The number of birds killed is far higher than published.

- ▶ Authorities' lack of knowledge of thousands of waterways where shooting allowed – only a tiny percentage are monitored.
- ▶ Lack of authorities understanding of what is present and what is shot before, during and after shooting seasons.
- ▶ “Harvest statistics” do not include wounded birds (add 25– 67% - Norton & Thomas 1994), birds left behind or ripple effect through the species of shooting one of a pair of monogamous birds or birds of breeding age.

Estimates	2014	2015 <sup>3</sup>	2016 <sup>4</sup>	2017 <sup>5</sup>	2018 <sup>6</sup>	2019 <sup>7</sup>	2020 <sup>8</sup>	Aver 2009 -2020
Licensed hunters	26,261	25,837	25,681	26,324	25,799	24,925	23,378	24,225
Total # hunter days	118,800	91,264	100,749	96,508	91,570	81,023	29,501	89,680
Total harvest	449,032	286,729	271,576	438,353	396,965	238,666	60,403	347,160

Number of birds reported killed is grossly underestimated.

Gma harvest estimates based on a phone survey of shooters, relies on shooters' memories and honesty.

# Impact of duck shooting to protected / threatened species?

**130 species of waterbirds including 39 threatened / near threatened species at risk of gunfire at our wetlands.**

Collateral damage includes:

- ▶ Box Flat 2013- 760 game ducks and 155 non-game birds were left to rot on the water in the first weekend (ABC March 2013).
- ▶ Toolondo 2016 - Dozens of rare and threatened birds during the opening of duck season (The Age March 2016).
- ▶ Kerang 2017 – Over 260 protected birds illegally shot in one reserve in one weekend (Bendigo Advertiser March 2017).

This is likely the tip of the iceberg as they are examples just from wetlands which happened to be monitored.



Impact of duck shooting to protected / threatened species?

Impact to protected / threatened species:

*“that is a separate question that can only be properly addressed by gathering robust data on the rates of non-target species being killed or injured by hunters. Such data does not exist and would be extremely difficult to gather”*

(ARI 2019 Report “Waterbird Susceptibility to Disturbance from Hunting”)

**Table 29** Number of specimens of non-game wildlife found dead around waters used for hunting during the 1993 duck open season. The data for birds collected by members of animal welfare organisations are counts made by CNR officers of birds delivered to CNR Heidelberg during the season.

Species	Collected animal welfare	Collected by CNR	Total
Freckled Duck <i>Stictonetta naevosa</i>	229	57	286
Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	242	35	277
Blue-billed Duck <i>Oxyura australis</i>	84	7	91
cormorant species	44	4	48
Black-tailed Native-hen <i>Gallinula ventralis</i>	0	43	43
Black Swan <i>Cygnus atratus</i>	29	14	43
Galah <i>Cacatua roseicapilla</i>	21	11	32
small grebes	19	5	24
Musk Duck <i>Biziura lobata</i>	19	1	20
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	14	1	15
Australian Magpie Lark <i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	0	13	13
corella species	7	5	12
ibis species	8	3	11
White-faced Heron <i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i>	3	6	9
Red-necked Avocet <i>Recurvirostra novaehollandiae</i>	6	1	7
Yellow-billed Spoonbill <i>Platalea flavipes</i>	0	6	6
migratory waders	1	4	5
Australian Magpie <i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	0	4	4
Silver Gull <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	4	0	4
tern species	0	3	3
Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>	0	3	3
raven species	3	0	3
Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	2	1	3
Dusky Moorhen <i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>	2	0	2
raptor species	1	1	2
kingfisher species	0	1	1
Noisy Miner <i>Manorina melanocephala</i>	0	1	1
Australian Pelican <i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	0	1	1
Fairy Martin <i>Coccyzus alba</i>	0	1	1
Little Friarbird <i>Philemon citreogularis</i>	0	1	1
Brush-tailed Possum	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>972</b>



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FOI Results show collateral damage.





Year	Collected by animal welfare	Collected by CNR
1988	152	152
1989	273	392
1990	374	80
1991	435	119
1992	250	94
1993	813	159



Non-game species found dead at a small number of duck shooting wetlands which were monitored.  
ARI Technical Reports.

Photos Kim Wormald



## It's not only ducks. The case for quail.

- ▶ Little data kept on abundance.
- ▶ Close resemblance to critically endangered Plains Wanderer.
- ▶ No accuracy tests required.
- ▶ Little monitoring – FOI showed only 13 compliance patrols for the 2020 season.





## The case for quail cont.

- ▶ Toxic lead ammunition:  
Estimated **5 tonnes pumped into Victorian environment (incl food growing fields) each season.**
- ▶ Lead poisoning cruel killer of threatened Blue-billed ducks, White-bellied Sea Eagles and more.
- ▶ Even South Australia banned quail shooting last two years.

***“..Australia has no comparable research despite widespread use of shooting, common scavenging by potentially susceptible wildlife species and people regularly consuming shot meat. We conclude that Australia has its collective “head in the sand” ...”*** CSIRO Publishing: “Heads in the Sand” Hampton et al, July 2018

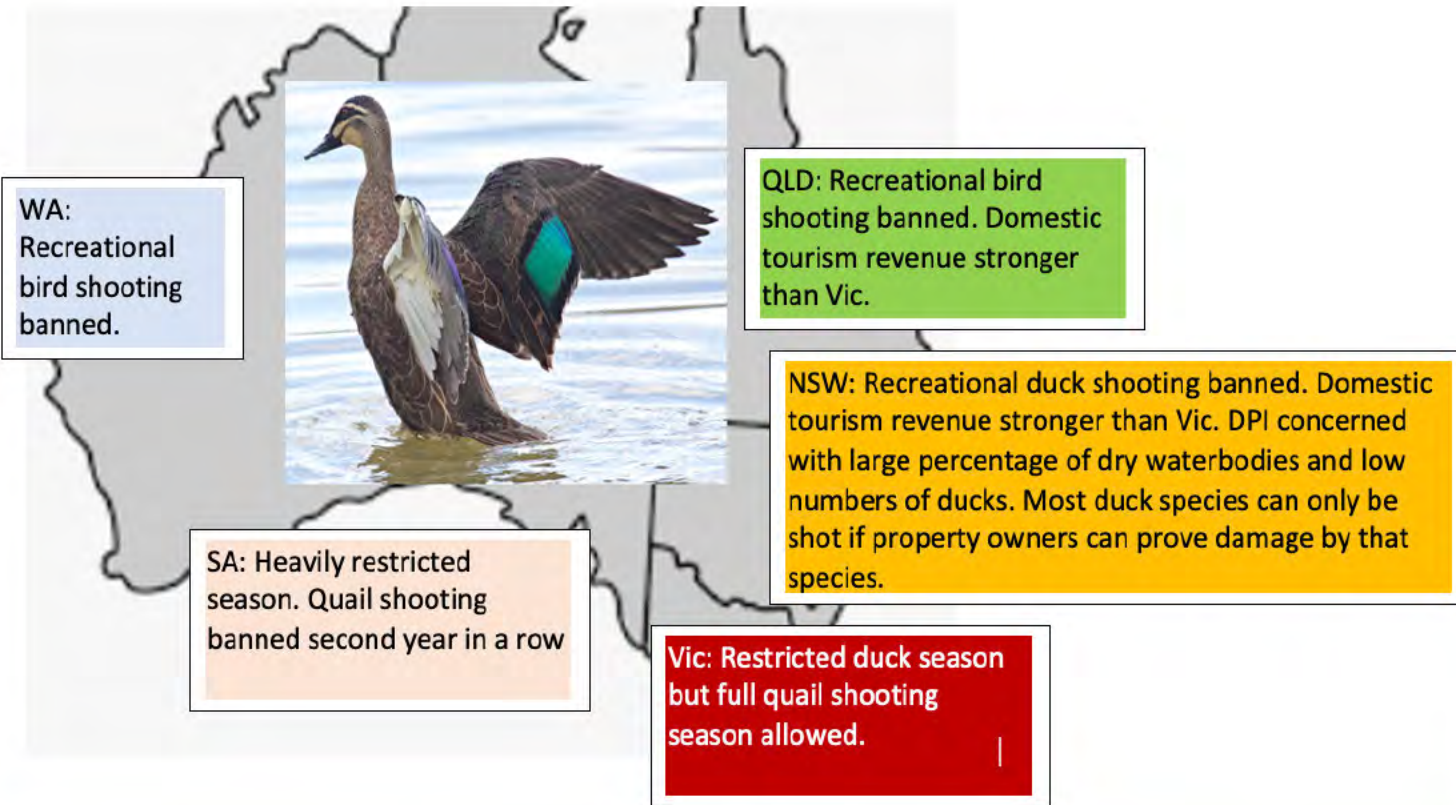
*“Lead is a carcinogen and can be associated with cancer, lower sperm counts, cardiovascular disease, kidney damage...”* Dr. Mark Laidlaw RMIT University

# A simple solution.

- ▶ Ban bird shooting in Victoria.
- ▶ Ensure those who benefit (recreationally or financially) from destruction of wildlife or ecosystems are not involved in influencing policy and
- ▶ Redirect taxpayer dollars associated with bird shooting to organisations and solutions which preserve our wildlife. (e.g. wildlife crossings, water provision).

Thank you.





Restricted or stopped around the states (except Tas).

## Lead Poisoning Common in Birds

- ▶ Leadshot poisons 1 million birds a year in Europe, killing them slowly and/or preventing breeding. (Dr. Ruth Cromie, International Migratory Bird Convention April 2018)
- ▶ *“The birds often cannot stand ... They usually have difficulty breathing. They cannot even open their beaks”* (Blue Mountain Wildlife)
- ▶ A 2014 study found 25% of eagles in the US were dying from poisoning – usually from lead ammunition. (Russell & Franson)



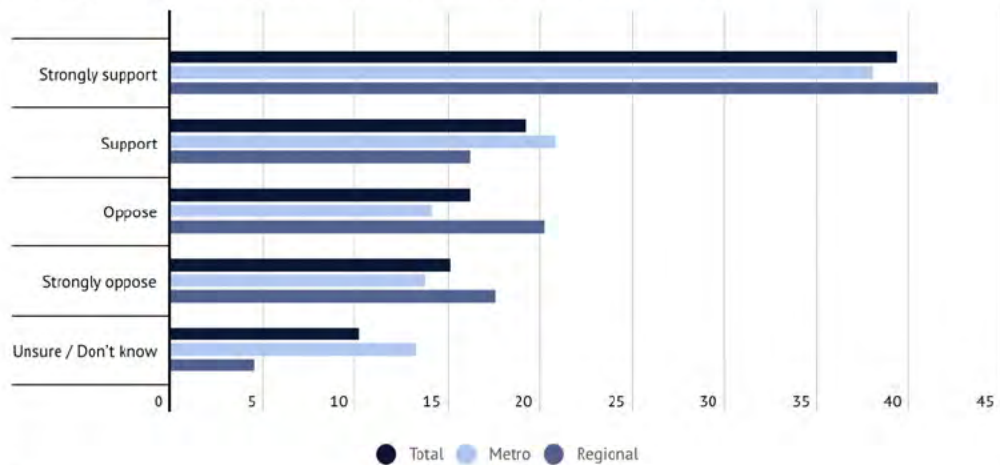
Photo Blue Mountain Wildlife

*“The science is overwhelming,” said Dr Myra Finkelstein, a toxicologist who studies lead poisoning in condors. “The answer is so clear that I wish we could just make the switch and protect human and wildlife health.”* (The Guardian March 2017)



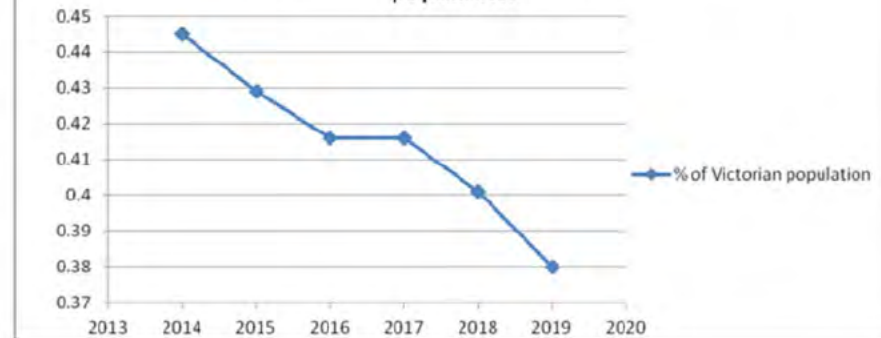
# Popularity of duck shooting.. ???

Would you support or oppose a ban on native duck shooting in Victoria?



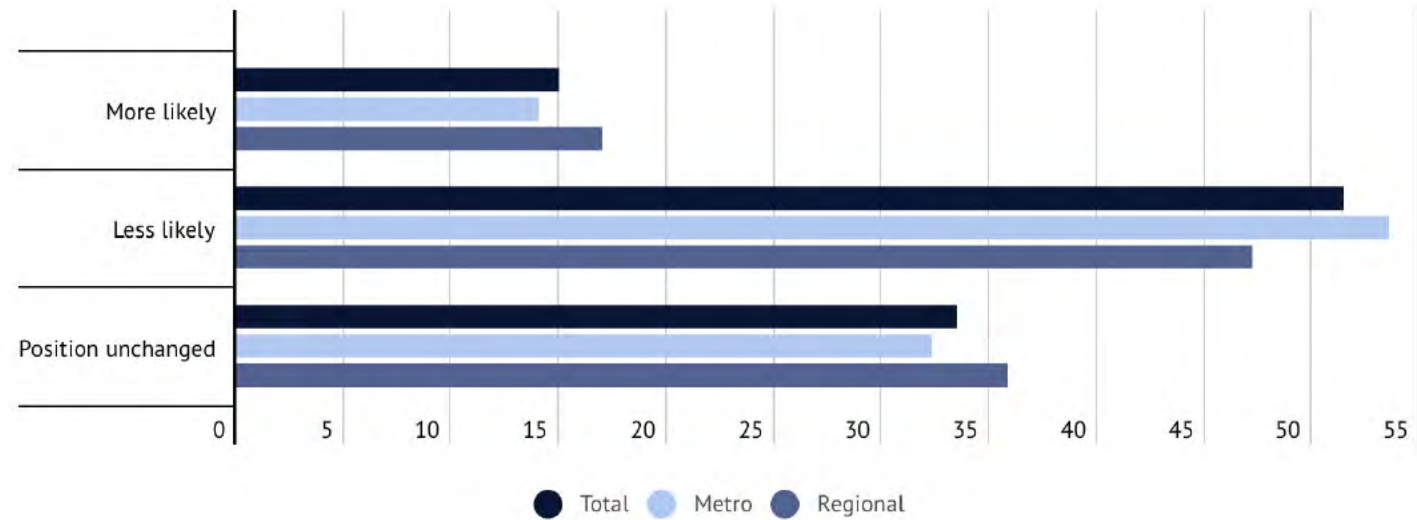
- ▶ Independent professional polls continue to show majority want it banned.

Licensed duck shooters as a percentage of the Victorian population



- ▶ Less than half of one percent of the population shoot birds.
- ▶ Compared to over 860,000 domestic birdwatching tourists. More domestic overnight tourists birdwatched than visited the reef year ending Dec 2019.

Would you be more or less likely to holiday in a regional town when duck shooting is taking place?



- ▶ Recent poll supports economists' prior reports.
- ▶ Shooting deters majority of tourists.



# Economic benefit...???

- ▶ Shooters (and government) lean on a survey of shooters – self admitted to be biased
- ▶ The survey itself shows alleged spend fell 46% 2013 to 2019
- ▶ The survey does not account for costs of duck shooting (e.g. costs of GMA, law enforcement, lost tourism, trespass, loss of productivity – working from home or sleep of shiftworkers)
- ▶ Compared to Phillip Island Nature Parks (\$498 million in 2014)
- ▶ Other independent economist reports ignored (e.g. The Australia Institute, VEAC, Dr Kirsty Jones of Monash University) which show duck shooting is detrimental to rural communities.
- ▶ No social/economic impact studies have been undertaken by government or GMA on anyone other than a small number of shooters
- ▶ The GMA Act requires GMA to have regard for all social/economic impacts. They have not done this. In fact they have ignored public complaints, residents' requests for exclusion zones and council's requests for exclusion zones.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: 12 September 2016

## **Nature Parks contributes \$498 million to Victoria's economy**

Phillip Island Nature Parks has significantly exceeded expectations of its economic contributions to the state of Victoria and the Bass Coast Shire region, according to the latest economic modelling of the Nature Parks' 2015/16 financial year result performed by Ernst and Young.

CEO Matthew Jackson said "The Nature Parks' overall annual economic contribution to the state of Victoria is a staggering \$498.2 million. This compares with \$402 million just two years ago, an increase of around 24%. Over 2,120 jobs across Victoria were also attributed to the Nature Parks' overall economic activity".



# Domestic Tourism Year Ending September 2020

## Victoria again lags NSW & QLD



Australian Government  
Austrade

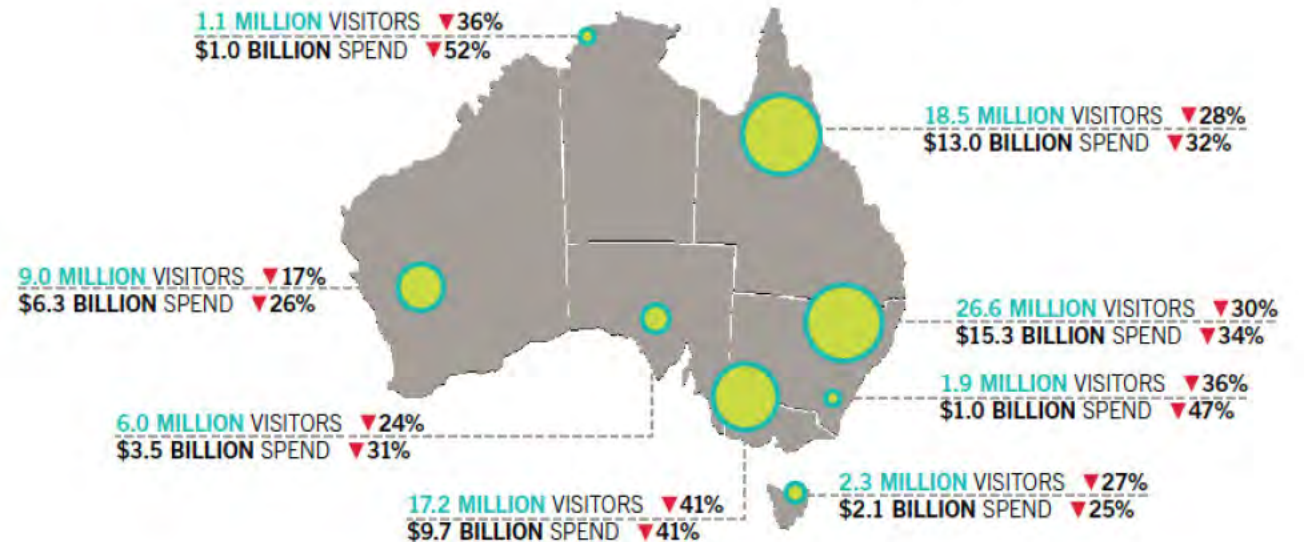


TOURISM  
RESEARCH  
AUSTRALIA

### STATES AND TERRITORIES

With COVID-19 effects from March 2020 onwards, all states and territories had a fall in overnight visitors and spend for the year ending September 2020 (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: OVERNIGHT TRIPS AND SPEND BY STATE, YE SEPTEMBER 2020<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> The sum of the total number of visitors for each state will be greater than the total number of visitors for Australia due to individuals who visited more than one state.

# RVOTDS Survey results.

*"This is not just an animal welfare issue but a human rights issue".*

- ▶ Over 80% held concerns for safety.
- ▶ Over 50% had never seen any authorities (the other 50% reported few/inadequate authorities).
- ▶ Over 90% do not believe duck shooting benefits their communities.
- ▶ None were consulted by GMA in any social or economic research.
- ▶ Over 25% reported children were upset/frightened.
- ▶ Over 90% reported suffering distress/anxiety from duck shooting near their homes.
- ▶ Over 30% reported adverse impact to animals/stock.
- ▶ Over 30% reported Issues with illegal camping, trespass, removing habitat, leaving rubbish, fires unattended.

*"We feel we aren't safe in our own back yard when the shooters are in the wetlands behind our house."*

*"..shooting too close to a retirement village. Dangerous and distressing"*

*"we often have shot pellets fall onto our roofs and if we are outside it falls on our heads."*

*"..firing across my boundary with shot gun pellets striking the house. One occasion saw a member of the family struck."*