

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON VICTORIA'S RECREATIONAL NATIVE BIRD HUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Melbourne – Thursday 29 June 2023

MEMBERS

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Jeff Bourman

Katherine Copsey

Bev McArthur

Evan Mulholland

Georgie Purcell

Sheena Watt

WITNESS

Mr Rodney Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Dja Dja Wurrung Group.

The CHAIR: I declare open the committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements. Could everyone, including me, please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that any background noise we have is minimised.

Can I begin the hearing by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands we are meeting on here today and pay my respects to elders past and present and welcome any Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders who are joining us in today's proceedings or watching the broadcast. I welcome any members of the public gallery and those watching live on the broadcast, and I remind all those in the room and all members of the committee to please be respectful in these proceedings.

Welcome, Mr Carter. I will just read out a brief statement about your evidence, and then we will get going.

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, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearings. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

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

Rodney CARTER: Dhumar. Wawa. Rodney Carter. I am the group CEO for the Dja Dja Wurrung.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I might invite you to make an opening statement, if you would like, of about 5 or so minutes and then I will introduce the committee and then we will start asking you some questions.

Rodney CARTER: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee, for allowing me to be present today to talk to our submission. You would note, though this inquiry is to look into hunting as it is described through legislation for the state of Victoria regarding those listed game species, our submission talks I think more broadly to the importance of being a hunter – a hunter as such holding a very significant place within society, within a family, as a provider of sustenance to people. We also describe in the submission the importance for us as First Nations people – but extending that to us as humans – of the need for us actually to be in landscape, to be at place, to be connected beyond how we view country and species, very much like botanical gardens and zoological places of interest.

For far too long I think my people have been displaced and excluded from prominence and responsibilities to care for country. We have seen at the recent COP 15, the international discussion on biodiversity and its losses, that the global scientific world has come to the realisation that integrating the involvement of First Nations people is actually critical to the success and survival of many species and also with ecosystem function. As Dja Dja Wurrung we believe that we have an inherent right to be able to be present in landscape and to, at our choosing, be fortunate to be gifted things from country. The hunter is also seen as something beyond symbolism. It is something important to do to respect the ancestral spirits, which take many forms, such as ducks. This is what you are discussing in this inquiry, and we think it is really important that we can go beyond the legislative requirements and the regulatory frameworks around hunting.

There is something I think that is deeper and more meaningful that gets lost in us being the regulators of societal activities for people. Of course we need those frameworks to hold everyone to account and ensure that there are behavioural elements that are conducive to being good and being proper at community, but also I think, in the enjoyment that I have seen through my life and being associated with the wider community that hunts, there is an incredible affinity and care I think for the take. Somewhat for me it is very clear about the respect for ancestral spirit and me being gifted something from country, but we see with the wider community, as licensed people undertaking activities, there is a similar connection, because I think it is an ancient

connection for us as people. And maybe the majority of citizens do not see that because they have been taught, trained, to understand that, you know, we go to supermarkets and that is how we hunt for and gather our food. I do not think that we should be so harsh and restrictive of people when they want to choose to do something that I think is important for their spirit.

I would probably just close my opening statement with: I think – with the brilliant respect that the state has afforded First Nations people – that my descendants and I will enjoy hunting for all time. If the inquiry and the government can somewhat see it in their mind to afford other Victorians the opportunity – and visitors to our homelands – to be able to enjoy something similar, I think truly it can be managed. The one critical problem that we are faced with, not just in this state but globally, is our cleverness and how we have, to our detriment, modified the homes of plants and animals. Conservation as it is described is about the human interaction with the environment – the use and the gifting – and I believe that the solution for us going forward is to pay better attention to the wrongs and the things that we have done in the past that have brought us to this position, to make really challenging discussions around activities such as hunting. Again in our submission we talk to the importance of habitat improvements. I think, as we found out about three or four years ago, with the sixth phase of extinction processes that have begun globally, science tells us we cannot stop that. I think we would be childish in our thoughts to think that immediate absences of species that are currently at threat from other pressures is not helpful. I think giving back to the environment conservation activities are part of the solution.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Carter. I might ask members of the committee to introduce themselves and then I will ask the first set of questions.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Evan Mulholland, Northern Metropolitan Region.

Bev McARTHUR: Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region.

Jeff BOURMAN: Jeff Bourman, Eastern Victoria Region.

Sheena WATT: Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan Region.

Georgie PURCELL: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: I am Ryan Batchelor from the Southern Metropolitan Region and Chair of this inquiry. I am going to start the questions. We will each have a block of questions and we will ask them in turn over the course of the hour. Thanks very much for coming along today and congratulations on your election to the First Peoples' Assembly.

Rodney CARTER: I am very honoured.

The CHAIR: It is going to be a very exciting couple of years. I want to just ask some questions about the *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy*, which was obviously announced by the state and the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Groups a couple of years ago now. What are your views on the strategy and some views on how well it is being implemented?

Rodney CARTER: I think the strategy is as effective as the resourcing available for the implementation. For the Dja Dja Wurrung, we were very fortunate to be an applicant for some of the grant funds associated with that strategy. I think we were deserving in the way that we framed habitat conservation improvement activities and we targeted the Tang Tang state game reserve. For us it has significant cultural values so we have a great interest in that area, but we were respectful of the regulation around that as a form of place that can be accessed by the public for hunting. We wanted to communicate ourselves, our culture, so our interpretive signage and improvement regarding fences. As a first of its kind, we created a car park at that area adjacent to the reserve and not in the reserve and that was about people going into that place to hunt or for other recreation activities having less of an impact by being at that place.

The strategy itself – we challenged the bureaucracy at the time. We wanted to frame it around hunting, and for us, as I said in my introduction, there is something special about the hunter and hunting and being at landscape, I think, to connect with species. For me that is ancestral spirits. But to be gifted like sustenance, so whether you are gathering plants or having to take the spirit of an animal so that you can eat, I think that is really important

for us as a people. Unfortunately we could not frame that in the *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy*. We had to stick to the lane around game as a species that is listed for the legal take of hunting in Victoria.

The CHAIR: I am interested in that a little bit. What more or differently would you have done if you were not needing to challenge the bureaucracy, in your words.

Rodney CARTER: Yes, I think it would have given us the opportunity to talk about other species. There is a real flip to the way that we would look at what is take from the world in terms of my emotional and cultural need, and so country actually gifts you things because you care for country. Then if a certain animal has to lose its life in your hunting, everything that precedes that has to be of the highest order and respect. I think we would have been able to frame that and talk about a whole range of species that are listed in the *Wildlife Act* in Victoria.

The CHAIR: So you were in the – sorry, I just want to interrupt. In the development of the strategy, you were essentially confined to talking about game –

Rodney CARTER: Constrained, yes. And you will see in the strategy that there are hints and glimpses of what we are talking about, as in the respect for ancestral spirits. But our strategy fell from and through the resourcing of the state's game management strategy, and I think it was a lost opportunity, through the Chair. Going forward I think there is an opportunity for my people, because of the respect from the state – we will continue to be hunters and gatherers; it is part of our DNA. It is unusual that societally others will not experience what their ancestors actually did.

The CHAIR: So do you think that a next generation of the strategy would benefit from being broader than just about game species?

Rodney CARTER: I think so. There are many strategies through the federation's collaboration with First Nations groups that now are beginning to share, actually, things in our minds that we have never been able to express before. I think, as First Nations people, we are so much better placed to articulate how our ancestral and our traditional knowledge can actually fit into a modern world and be useful. So renewable energy, climate change, how we bring Djandak Wi fire to landscape, how we give water spirit and consumption of water –

The CHAIR: So in many respects it would be better if – if you agree with these words, I do not want to put them in your mouth – that a traditional owner hunting strategy or framework would benefit from being separate to the question of game?

Rodney CARTER: I think so. It is just sensible that you look at the world as it is, holistically, not in a lane. And I think we have had to do that because of the regulation associated with hunting. In Victoria, it is very clearly defined through legislation: hunting is an activity associated now with the game management Act, it is also described in the *Wildlife Act*. Everything else is destruction.

The CHAIR: Okay. I appreciate that. Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for appearing before us. Just following on from the Chair's theme, do you believe then that common ground found by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in hunting has a part to play in reconciliation? Further, do you think the idea of only allowing hunting by Indigenous Australians is counter to the principles of reconciliation?

Rodney CARTER: That is a very interesting question, Bev. I think it would, insofar as it would create a form of division. If I have got an ancestral recognition by the state of Victoria, as an example, and I can continue an activity, and now there are other citizens of the state that have enjoyed a licensed activity for generations, I do not think it would be bad in that they would be hostile towards us; I think they would maybe just feel sad for that, not to be able to continue a tradition. As we would all know in terms of whatever things we grow up with and we learn as children as traditions, as the way we behave and do things, when we are stopped from doing those things, Bev, it is not a really positive sort of feeling. In part probably why we are so challenged around this hunting discussion is that it is really about taking from some people something that they have enjoyed and they are so emotionally connected to, which I think is a great thing.

Bev McARTHUR: So you therefore think that while allowing the Indigenous population to hunt, as you traditionally have done, that opportunity should also be given to others who are not part of the Indigenous population?

Rodney CARTER: Insofar as, Bev, I think for us and our leadership to be in a greater commanding position of what country can afford us – can gift us – and then to allow others to enjoy that. There is the ability of country in the quantum it can provide, and that is why we have limits through the regulation of this as a public activity. But I definitely think in a sense there is enough for all, insofar as we need to understand when we need to be abstinent and do not take. That for me culturally shows the greatest respect and intimacy to the health of country.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you. Your submission talks about the situation in other jurisdictions where ducks are treated as pests and the problems that brings, particularly the lack of constraints like season lengths and bag limits. What advantages do you see in how we do things in Victoria, where hunting is managed in a pretty tight regulatory framework?

Rodney CARTER: We have found through our powers and functions at the moment, with the legislation and regulations, that we can put constraints around this licensed activity. What I have seen and participated in and experienced in other jurisdictions is the management of pests. Native animals are not pests, but most of the regimes that you will see are actually around management of pests. What you will see is there is very little restriction then around the amount of take. In particular with New South Wales – and a lot of Victorians do this – when there is growing of rice in agricultural areas, basically they want zero ducks at those paddies where they grow the rice. It is not as bad as, I think, a slaughter, but the impacts, then, upon those species are extremely significant. Counter to that, if we did not then take in Victoria, it is actually going to be of no net positive contribution to the management of species. I know we need to focus on our jurisdiction, but we also need to have a familiarity with other jurisdictions and what they are doing. This can be advantageous, I think, when you have got rules. Maybe people do not want rules for a lot of things that we do, but we need to be mindful of what is happening elsewhere.

Bev McARTHUR: And probably the ducks are not cognisant of borders, really, are they?

Rodney CARTER: No, they are not.

Bev McARTHUR: Something that this committee could recommend is an uplift in education for hunters. From a Dja Dja Wurrung perspective, do you think that would be a good idea? And do you think that there is a cultural and country element that any new or updated educational material could include?

Rodney CARTER: Yes, I think so. It would be exceptional to help us societally: what we need to do to be reconnecting or understanding our connection to the world. There is a fact sheet, and I am very honoured to be informing that information around the protection of our cultural heritage at areas designated for hunting. The more that we can educate people – I think it is important. The state's *Biodiversity 2037* strategy talks about connecting Victorians to nature, and that can take so many forms. It is not just the bushwalk or camping out, it is connecting with species. I just add, Bev, that one of the things that we have seen from our ancestral knowledge is that most, not all, of the threatened or endangered plant species are species that have been cultivated by my ancestors – that is, human interaction, where you till the soil. What we have done for the last 200 years is identify species decline – really good scientists. We look at it and put fences around things and say, 'Don't intrude on that. Don't go there,' where really it needs human interaction, what my ancestors did: cultivate the soil, separate tubers. Sorry, I talk too much.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you so much. Thank you.

The CHAIR: No, no, no. You are fine. It is just her time has expired, so we are going to go to Ms Purcell.

Bev McARTHUR: End of me, not end of you.

The CHAIR: End of her, not the end of you. Ms Purcell.

Georgie PURCELL: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Mr Carter. I am interested to know how your position as a group in support of recreational duck shooting was formed. Are you here today speaking as an individual or on behalf of the entire group?

Rodney CARTER: I can speak as both. I qualify me speaking for our group by framing it around our contribution to the state's *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy* and also around our legal recognition to be able to hunt and gather. That was framed initially through our recognition settlement agreement and the Governor in Council authorisation orders, and with the review of our recognition settlement act it is now the natural resource agreement with the state of Victoria.

Georgie PURCELL: I am more interested in knowing how you formed the position as an organisation and as a group. Is it a consensus view in support of recreational duck shooting? I am aware that you are a duck shooter. I am just wondering if that is a consensus.

Rodney CARTER: I am a hunter. I am sorry, I do not understand the question.

Georgie PURCELL: What was the process to form this position that you are presenting to us today in support of duck shooting?

Rodney CARTER: It is based on what we do as a community, as a group and as members to be able to hunt. Everything you see in my submission is really framed around our rights and recognition. So it is nothing outside of what, as a group, we have previously discussed and authorised.

Georgie PURCELL: Okay. I am interested because we will be hearing from First Peoples later today that have a different view to yours. We hear often about Indigenous sacred sites being damaged during duck-shooting seasons, including the destruction of scarred trees. Have you seen evidence of this?

Rodney CARTER: Yes, I have.

Georgie PURCELL: And what is your view on that?

Rodney CARTER: It is terrible that those things happen in the destruction of cultural heritage. Broadly, when we look at the harm to cultural heritage, there are a lot of other types of legally sanctioned, regulated activities that create more harm to my heritage. That does not prove, in a sense, that if somebody is hunting or doing these other activities that it is good that they are harming heritage. It is significant, but it is not as significant when compared to the state when we regulate and do development and planning and how those things impinge upon the harm to heritage.

Georgie PURCELL: There are already existing exemptions for traditional hunting, and it is my understanding that is not what we will be considering with this, so how come there is such significant concern around the recreational season?

Rodney CARTER: I think it is extremely unusual in that it is a legal or licensed activity at the moment, which for my people, in a sense, is something we will enjoy no matter what. We think it is important in our advocacy and leadership that we support the continuance of something that is culturally significant to us that other Victorians enjoy. There is so little, I think, as Victorians, that we can enjoy of what I and what my ancestors enjoyed. I think it provides a unique opportunity for a pretty difficult discussion around the regulation of something that ancestrally is really important, as I said earlier about hunting, the hunter, the respect of ancestral spirits and then the take. It is so unusual for me to even be able to be here and express these views and opinions with you.

Georgie PURCELL: I do not believe this was mentioned in your submission – forgive me if it was – but you were formally a wildlife officer, which would now be a GMA officer, as it was before they were in existence. Why did you put such a significant focus in that time on targeting rescuers instead of shooters who were doing the wrong thing?

Rodney CARTER: For me there were people that were committing offences, in the way that it is framed. What was of real importance to me was the potential harm that can come to those people, being in those public places – in a sense being at the front line where people are discharging firearms. Unfortunately, I was at Lake Buloke on the day that there was that lady – and I cannot remember her –

Georgie PURCELL: Who was shot in the face.

Rodney CARTER: Yes. For me that was extremely horrific. It was as much about people committing offences and doing wrong things. But I think there is a time and a place for many protests and the way that we express opinions. I do not think being in places where people are discharging firearms is as safe as it could be if you were on the steps of Parliament doing other things. So for me that was really important.

Georgie PURCELL: So just to be clear, you claim your concern was around rescuer safety?

Rodney CARTER: Principally, yes.

Georgie PURCELL: There were numerous instances where illegal behaviour was reported to you as an officer –

The CHAIR: That is time, Ms Purcell.

Rodney CARTER: Sorry?

The CHAIR: That is just her time. If you want to finish answering the question, you may.

Rodney CARTER: Can you describe that again?

Georgie PURCELL: I had not finished my question. There were numerous instances where illegal behaviour was reported to you in your capacity in that role on the wetlands, which were ignored, to then target rescuers. Could you explain why that was the case?

Rodney CARTER: Every time it was brought to my attention, whether it was reported by somebody else or I was present, being respectful of my appointment as an authorised officer, I followed that through. I did.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you, Mr Carter. Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Hello. Thank you so much for being here today. I have questions about the, is it Tang Tang wetland? I am actually very interested in that model. Is it an ambition of you and your group to expand your partnership work around wetland management and game reserves across Dja Dja Wurrung country?

Rodney CARTER: Thanks, Sheena. We are extremely interested in this idea of landscape improvement remedification. So the Tang Tang Swamp was an opportunity, because of the game management strategy, to show others what we can do. The resourcing unfortunately comes through the game management strategy for the state. We have similar plans at other state game reserves currently on country. If we look at what we have done at Tang Tang and the improvements there, they are replicable and transferable to other wetland features for us. For us it would just be sensible to be doing that, given that for us in central Victoria it is an extremely modified landscape because of the minerals exploration. We call it upside-down country.

Sheena WATT: Okay. Do you know of any other traditional owner groups across the state that have similar interests in working in partnership around game reserve management?

Rodney CARTER: It has been really hard, I think, for some groups to be able to mobilise an action and implement aspirations and desires to do activities on country. I do not think Dja Dja Wurrung is unique, but I think we have got a high degree of capability to do certain things, yes.

Sheena WATT: Okay. You mentioned earlier that you are involved in a range of different governance forums around management of country. Are there any that you want to highlight to the committee for consideration? I note you talked about a cultural heritage management group. That to me, given some of the questions from others here, lends itself to understanding a little bit more about what it is that the state has established when it comes to the management of cultural heritage on state sites. Is there a body that does that? What are they called? Who runs them? I just have some questions about that that I would probably want to –

Rodney CARTER: Sorry, I do not fully understand the question.

Sheena WATT: You know, there is like a cultural heritage management group that you are involved with.

Rodney CARTER: The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council?

Sheena WATT: That is the one.

Rodney CARTER: Yes.

Sheena WATT: So that includes management of cultural heritage on wetlands and state game reserves as well?

Rodney CARTER: When an Aboriginal corporation is appointed with a statutory function to be a registered Aboriginal party, that gives them the opportunity then to be more closely involved in the protection of their cultural heritage. The Dja Dja Wurrung – because hunting is described in our recognition and settlement agreement and activity, we thought it was really important that we described it in a fact sheet, the importance for the protection of cultural heritage.

To Georgie's question before: to discharge a firearm at any tree is probably not necessarily good for the tree. Definitely if it is a culturally modified tree, a scar tree, that is not good for that in a cultural sense, and it becomes harm to heritage. When the public go and camp at these locations – and our ancestors had mounds, our camp sites – and then people are camping and intruding on those areas, that creates erosion pressures. So it was important for us to be communicating to people as hunters in those areas: do not shoot the tree; do not camp at these locations. We have seen an improvement from that, but also a better understanding by Victorians that hunt of the importance to protect and respect culture and heritage.

Sheena WATT: But there is still more work to be done to improve hunter understanding and adherence to that.

Rodney CARTER: Always. Definitely.

Sheena WATT: Okay. That is lovely. I am particularly interested in that. I am not sure that we have actually received a submission from the Victorian Aboriginal cultural heritage council, but it might be something for us to consider and follow up in our later work.

Are there any other traditional owner groups that you can shed a light on when it comes to ambitions around wetland management? I know I asked it earlier. I am just thinking we did go out to Sale and we know that Heart Morass out there have a really good relationship with GLaWAC, and we did not have an opportunity to hear from GLaWAC down in Sale on Monday. Do you come together? Are there some sort of groups that come together to discuss cultural heritage on state sites? How do you organise and share information, knowledge and resources around the work that you do? Because clearly I think your group is a leader amongst our state, and there is more to be done. So if you have got any insights to share on that – is it done through the federation, or how is that done?

Rodney CARTER: Yes, it is done through the network with the federation. There are six of the representative organisations, peoples, in the state that are part of the federation. That becomes a useful forum to discuss these things. In particular on cultural heritage there is an annual forum where all of the registered Aboriginal parties come together and frame the agenda over a couple of days – what needs to be spoken about and spoken to. They are practitioners within cultural heritage. The managers at the registered Aboriginal parties every couple of months they do meetings around their operations, so they share experience. The networking is reasonably good. I think in what we have seen – and I can qualify this, being a council member since the Act was brought in; for nearly 17 years I have been involved – the resourcing is suitable to a minimum standard. It is not adequate I think to be at the highest order for the protection of cultural heritage. For over a decade, Sheena, we have strongly advocated that there needs to be more resourcing to the people around heritage.

As I was saying to Georgie before, every day there is harm and destruction of cultural heritage, and that cannot in its uniqueness be replaced. So it is a significant loss, not just for my people but for all Victorians. We are just not as bad, as blasé – but, you know, stuff is getting destroyed that we cannot replace. It is the most significant ancient culture in the world. Everyone talks about this, but it is just so easy for us to let things sort of be destroyed.

Sheena WATT: That is my time. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Thank you so much. Thanks for speaking before us today; it has been really insightful. How does hunting contribute to both the care for country and an abundance of species?

Rodney CARTER: It is everything that is not about the take. I think that is really important for hunting. I think, to be true to the spirit of what a hunter is, it is all the things that happen before the hunt, in a sense – so conservation activities, habitat improvement activities – and I think just being more aware because you go to a location to see species that are present and maybe form an opinion about species that are absent and should be at that location.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Excellent. You stated that an absence of human involvement rather than better human involvement is needed. Could you clarify what kind of involvement you believe is necessary for effective water and wetland management?

Rodney CARTER: I think to have the description of what is needed at a site is through a plan, to do the planning, and then to have available resources to enact that plan – I think for most of the wetlands we have got in Victoria, not all – through our structures and control of systems around water that we can deliver. I think we have seen degrees of success in the state on wetland management. I think unfortunately wetlands, as important as they are for biodiversity and ecosystem function, do not get the attention that they truly deserve. That is disappointing, not just for me, I think for all of us as Victorians. I think species decline in terms of plants is not always easily solved. Tang Tang is an example. We have introduced cultural fire to that area, and when we go there with our programs we actually cast seeds. What we are doing there, just by interaction with fire, is bringing more seeds to country. So I think we can be clever about these moments in the time and resources we have got at locations to be doing things.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes. In a recent hearing we had an animal rights activist attempting to speak on behalf of traditional owners, and he referenced you by name as being associated with Field and Game.

Rodney CARTER: Yes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: My understanding is you actually negotiated the native title agreement for the Dja Dja Wurrung. I am not suggesting for a second that you have to justify some of the things that we hear about you, but in a similar vein to Ms Purcell's question, what would you say in response to that criticism and your representation here?

Rodney CARTER: Yes, I think it is really good that as a people we can express opinions, and we would never want to stymie and stop that from people. I do not come here – or the things that I do in my life – expecting to be appreciated, to have friendships and that sort of stuff. I can only express in my heart and mind what is important to me and my people. For me, I think, Evan, there is true honour in that, and I will never suggest that I am better than somebody else. That is why I think it is important to respect the individual when they want to express themselves. In some instances, I might need to defend myself and try and qualify and put evidence behind why I do, why I believe in my actions, and I will always be accountable, Evan, to that.

I am no saint or angel, but I do not think I have been a terrible person in my life. And when I was an authorised officer, I saw people – you know, hunters, protesters – really bad people. They are just bad people anyway, you know, aside from the hunting. They are the people that we would not want to be associated with. And then a lot of times I would see hunters and protesters who were really good people. The majority are really good people that believe in their heart about something, that you should do this or you should not do this. And for my mind it is not about judging them in the truest sense, but we need to be held to account, all of us, of the laws and the responsibilities around behaviour for us as a people.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Well, congratulations on your election to the First Peoples' Assembly.

Rodney CARTER: Thank you.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I think that probably goes a long way to showing how representative you are. And thanks for the work that you do.

Rodney CARTER: I got six votes, supposedly, the first time around. This time I got a few more, so I must be doing something better.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Well done.

Bev McARTHUR: We like numbers.

Rodney CARTER: You do.

Evan MULHOLLAND: That is all from me, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mr Bourman.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for appearing before us, Mr Carter. I took some notes during your opening statement: 'as humans we need to be connected to landscape', 'affinity and care for the take' and 'important for their spirit' and so on. Do you see the hunting, including the hunting of ducks, as mere shooting, as Ms Purcell basically said – that you are a duck shooter, not a hunter – or do you see it as more than that?

Rodney CARTER: I see it as more. But to your point, Jeff, I see in a sense some hunters that are just shooting –

Jeff BOURMAN: Absolutely. I do not dispute that.

Rodney CARTER: and I think what we will find from better sharing and communicating to each other of the respect associated with the hunt and hunting – for me that is the beautiful nature of being at place. To discharge a firearm is just the means to an end to have sustenance, and I think for hunting and hunters, all of that stuff that precedes it – a bit to Evan's question before – is what is really important. And I see many, many people as hunters like that. They connect, they understand and have the greatest respect, because if it is not there tomorrow, you can no longer be the hunter, so then you do not take more –

Jeff BOURMAN: Than it can give, can be given.

Rodney CARTER: Than it can give.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you for that. It is a very interesting perspective, because – and I think you have half answered this question, but I will go there anyway – if recreational hunting is banned, the ducks will be culled under permits. Do you think the respect for the animals will be lost when they are now a pest or need to be controlled as opposed to hunted?

Rodney CARTER: I would hope it is still there, but from what I have seen it is a different environment as an activity if that is a way to describe it, Jeff. And now it is actually clearly about destruction. It is about removing. It loses I think that emotional element that is important for us as humans to do something. It becomes more clinical. And that is not the way that all behave, but I think it is conducive to that. And at the moment because of regulation and restrictions – as much as people protest around that or disagree – I think it is okay. We have got a structure here in Victoria that is quite old and quite unique compared to other jurisdictions, and as I said earlier, Jeff, I think part of the solution and/or problem is: how do we put more into the front end around habitat improvements and conservation to make country more well?

Jeff BOURMAN: Actually I might make a comment that you might want to respond to as well. It is interesting – I have not lived in Victoria all my life, and through the educational part of this inquiry I have come to see scar trees and things like that, which going back into private land I have seen in other places and not appreciated. Do you think perhaps education about cultural heritage sites where they are, just in relation to duck hunting – we will keep it kind of narrow. Do you think an educational part of that could be a way towards – I mean, you never reduce destruction, unfortunately, it is just the nature of the beast – mitigating any damage to cultural heritage stuff just by pure ignorance?

Rodney CARTER: I think what happens through the education is just a greater awareness and appreciation of that value that now is a little bit transferable to me as a person and/or a people. So you are there, say, hunting as an example at a state game reserve, now you learn something about cultural heritage. I would like to think

then that you are better for that and then indirectly it is better for me and my people because the opportunity might not have arisen otherwise.

Jeff BOURMAN: I saw a scar tree at Heart Morass. I had been to Heart Morass before and whilst the caretakers there, the Field and Game people from that area, knew what it was, I did not – not that I was likely to run around with a chainsaw there. You are not allowed to have chainsaws and things like that. But I think maybe some appreciation of what is and what is not cultural heritage, rather than just what looks like some bark removed from a tree, would go a long way. As I said, it is more a statement than anything. It is just an awareness I have picked up. I am running short of time.

I was at the launch of the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* at, and forgive me if I butcher the pronunciation, Bunjilaka at the museum when Minister Thomas announced some of the funding for the *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy*. I understand that you worked with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations in the development of that strategy. You speak about many things, but I was also reading into the answers you have given. Do you feel you were boxed in by bureaucrats trying to push their own agenda rather than letting the traditional owners have their own head during the sustainable hunting action plan?

Rodney CARTER: I would say yes, Jeff, but for Dja Dja Wurrung and now our recognition and settlement agreement, for the last 10 years we have fought really hard in the advocacy of what we believe should, could – and I think because of climate change – must sort of happen. Increasingly through our recognition now we can actually do things. We can do things that are really useful for the wider community and then by design of our culture, Jeff, that are seen as actually beautiful, practical and unusually unique. I think we are teaching the bureaucracies around that to help them in what they need to do as the implementers of what the elected arm of government wants to happen through laws and positioning strategies and policies. So I think the system itself would always need some form of improvement, and you could say that of probably any system. But I think we command such great respect from the bureaucracies and others in what we do that I feel extremely proud.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you. Just a bit of a clarification: in relation to the action plan, the government gave a fairly narrow view of what it wanted out of that, is my understanding. I guess I am asking you – yes or no – do you feel that the bureaucrats were helpful or less than helpful due to their own agenda in general? I mean, we are not going to point fingers at specific bureaucrats. We do not have the time or the inclination.

Rodney CARTER: I have been a public servant, so I have been at the brunt of this, where other servants have personal opinions and views that are not conducive to good policy implementation that the state wants. As much as I can have an opinion, when you are the servant I think you do what you are employed to do, and if you cannot wear that I think you need to move on.

Jeff BOURMAN: I was a police officer once and I understand exactly what you mean.

The CHAIR: Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Mr Carter for being with us today and sharing your perspective and your wisdom on this topic. I just want to go to a couple of issues that – I have read through the submission and just want to touch on a couple that are not raised in there if I could. Specifically the information that we are getting now around wounding rates – I think we are starting to get more and better detailed evidence around wounding, so I am interested in your views on the current levels of wounding that we are seeing and I guess those impacts from the season that persist well outside the season, animals that are injured during the process. What would be your perspective on current levels?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. I think wounding, for me, is framed around the unfair, cruel destruction of an animal, because what eventually happens is that the animal will die, and it dies through an extended process that I do not think it deserves and would need. For me personally, as a hunter, it is important that if I have the intent and I do the action of taking an animal's spirit, I need to see that to its completeness in a way you might describe as 'humane' so that I am true to my own beliefs and values. What we will see, though, through these activities is that it definitely is not a perfect world, Katherine, and by virtue of the activity there will be a percentage of animals that do not have that highest order of respect, unfortunately. I know the state has put a lot of effort and/or resources behind improving efficiencies associated with hunting, and they describe that as improving the lethality of the activities, that you get to the final solution of an animal's destruction. But it is not perfect, like many things, I think, in the world.

Katherine COPSEY: Yes. And we have had some witnesses before this inquiry sort of imply that it is acceptable for birds to go on with – you know, to be hit with shot and then go on and live a happy life. That is not a perspective you would share?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. It is not acceptable.

Katherine COPSEY: Okay, thank you. Also an issue I wanted to touch on is, again, we are putting a lot of resource and effort into trying to locate endangered species in the lead-up to seasons opening. However, unfortunately as we have heard before this hearing, we do continue to see endangered species impacted and taken. We had the terrible example of the, I think it was a shoveler that had been shot, butchered and stowed in a tree hollow, from this season. What would be your perspective on the adequacy of our identification of endangered species and their location, beforehand?

Rodney CARTER: I think it is the responsibility of the person that has the licence to be knowledgeable enough as the licensing requirements demand of us. I think to be a person that is fortunate to have a firearms licence, it is not just a legal requirement, I think it is an ethical requirement that you do not discharge that firearm unless you know and can describe and identify your target. In instances where it is clear that a not-allowable species has been shot, I think for us as people in society, these need to be held to account. And I would sort of qualify that, Katherine, insofar as there are good people trying to do the right thing – they should not be judged upon the behaviour of an individual, of someone else, in this imperfect world.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I think I have time for one more. Just another aspect, we do continue to see other impacts around, you know, not just on the animals but littering, plastic shell cases and so on. I am particularly interested in your view on lead shot and I suppose we have heard around some of the food chain impacts that the use of lead shot can have; do you have a view on those sorts of environmental impacts that persist beyond the season?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. I think with lead, historically that has been a material that we have used societally in many areas. For the use with shotgun cartridges and for shooting, I do not think we need to be allowing lead shot at all. Purists and some shooters will argue the point around the ballistic nature of pellets that are made from lead. For me, even when I shoot with targets, I use non-toxic ammunition. I have been using steel for such a long time. I do not think it makes me any better as a shooter in discharging a firearm, and it definitely does not make me any worse. So I do not think we should tolerate putting toxic materials into landscape when we have got alternatives.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I think that is my time.

The CHAIR: Mr Carter, thank you very much for coming in today. The time for your evidence has concluded. You will shortly be receiving a draft copy of the transcript to review before we publish it. The committee will take a short 5-minute break.

Witness withdrew.