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Victorian Government response to the
Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry
into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting
Arrangements Report Recommendations

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Overview

Recreational duck and quail hunting will continue in Victoria with important changes to ensure it remains safe, sustainable and responsible.

The Government will accept seven of the Select Committee's eight recommendations in full or in principle, in recognition that the Committee has identified several opportunities to improve the current settings.

While the Committee did not reach consensus in its report, the views of more than 10,000 Victorians and organisations were heard in the biggest response to a Parliamentary inquiry ever in Victoria.

Recreational duck and quail hunting is a legitimate activity, and it matters to thousands of Victorians who love the great outdoors, but it needs to proceed safely and sustainably. That's why we're introducing common-sense changes to make hunting even more responsible from 2025.

We are introducing changes that will strengthen the compliance and regulatory approach of the GMA, including additional Authorised Officers and new Cultural Awareness Officers.

Phased in from 2025, hunting licensees will be required to complete mandatory education and training, including cultural awareness training. This will be part of a greater focus on improving hunter proficiency and better animal welfare outcomes. The Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan will be implemented to drive down wounding rates.

As part of the process to review the Wildlife (Game) Interim Regulations 2023, the Government will also explore further penalties for hunters doing the wrong thing.

From 2025, Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) will be used as the scientific basis to set game duck hunting season settings. It will inform annual duck season arrangement decisions. The establishment of AHM puts Victoria in the position of world's best practice for game duck management.

The use of lead shot for game ducks has been banned for decades in Victoria and this ban will be extended to the hunting of stubble quail from 2025. Effective ways to reduce plastic pollution associated with game bird hunting will be investigated.

Traditional Owners will be closely involved in the future of recreational hunting. The Victorian Government is committed to the continued implementation of the Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy, and to explore other opportunities to build Traditional Owner participation in hunting, land management and conservation.

Traditional Owners will retain their rights to hunt and take native birds under relevant Settlement Agreements. Improvements to the reporting of damage and destruction of cultural heritage sites will be explored in close consultation with Traditional Owners.

Landholders will still be able to apply for permits to control duck and quail populations impacting agricultural and other land through the Authority to Control Wildlife system.

The Victorian Government recognises that Victorians enjoy a wide range of outdoor recreation pursuits. Whether Victorians choose hunting, fishing, boating, camping, hiking or biking, the Government's role is to ensure these activities can be enjoyed safely, responsibly and sustainably.

Victoria's Great Outdoors initiative is investing \$106.6 million in better campgrounds, walking trails, 4WD tracks and visitor facilities in Victoria's parks and state forests. We're also investing \$96 million to deliver better boating and fishing infrastructure and improving Victoria's waterways to keep families out on the water for generations to come.

A detailed response to the Select Committee Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements Report Recommendations is provided on the following pages.



Victorian Government Response to the Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements Report Recommendations

This response has been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines for Victorian Government Submissions and Responses to Inquiries.

The following key sets out the five categories of response, which are consistent with the Guidelines.

Key	
Support in full	All elements of the recommendations are supported
Support in part	Some elements of the recommendations are supported.
Support in principle	The Victorian Government generally supports the intent or merit of the policy underlying the recommendations but, does not necessarily support the method for achieving the policy.
Under review	Further analysis is required for the Victorian Government to determine its position.
Not support	The Victorian Government does not support the recommendation.

Recommendation	Type of Response	Response
1. That the Victorian Government ends the annual recreational native bird hunting season opening on all public and private land from 2024.	Do not support	<p>The Victorian Government is committed to safe, sustainable and responsible hunting. Recreational duck and quail hunting will continue in Victoria, but with the following changes to take effect from 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Use of the science-based Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) to guide annual game duck seasons. b) Improved animal welfare outcomes through implementing the Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan. c) Banning the use of lead shot in quail hunting.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) Improved hunter knowledge and skill through mandatory education and training for hunters, including cultural awareness training. e) Strengthened compliance, including further penalties for hunters doing the wrong thing. f) Greater recognition of Traditional Owners' knowledge and practice of hunting and land management, continuing to implement the Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy. <p>The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) will, in 2024, lead the remake of the Wildlife (Game) Interim Regulations 2023 to be completed by September 2024. This remake will involve a public consultation process. Government will make clear its intention to have more stringent requirements for hunting such as banning the use of lead-based ammunition and mandating training and testing to improve hunter proficiency and Aboriginal cultural heritage awareness.</p> <p>To reduce the rate of wounding, the Victorian Government is committed to implementing the Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan, beginning in 2024. The Plan has been informed by a Wounding Reduction Working Group, that included animal welfare stakeholders and an independent chair.</p>
<p>2. That the Victorian Government retains existing exemptions to hunt and control native birds under the Authority to Control Wildlife framework to control bird populations impacting on agricultural and other land.</p>	<p>Support in full</p>	<p>An Authority to Control Wildlife is an authorisation issued under section 28A of the Wildlife Act 1975 which allows a person to shoot, wilfully disturb or trap wildlife where it is damaging property, crops or other wildlife habitat or for the purposes of management, conservation or protection of wildlife. In Victoria, all wildlife is protected under the <i>Wildlife Act 1975</i>. It is illegal to disturb or destroy wildlife without an appropriate authorisation, licence or exemption.</p> <p>No changes will be made to the existing Authority to Control Wildlife system administered by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Landholders will still be able to apply for permits to control bird populations impacting on agricultural and other land.</p>

<p>3. That Traditional Owner hunting rights are retained under existing legislation.</p>	<p>Support in full</p>	<p>Victorian Traditional Owner groups have legal rights to access game and native species for personal, communal and cultural purposes.</p> <p>Traditional Owners will retain their rights to hunt and take native birds under relevant Settlement Agreements. Aboriginal Victorians will be involved in the design of ongoing native game bird hunting arrangements, and supported to explore opportunities take leadership roles.</p> <p>The Victorian Government is committed to strengthening collaboration and partnerships between government, agencies, Traditional Owners, hunters and the community to continue to grow safe, sustainable and responsible hunting.</p> <p>The Victorian Government will continue to invest in the implementation of the Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy (TOGMS).</p> <p>The TOGMS outlines a holistic approach to game management in Victoria incorporating Traditional Owner led knowledge and practice to promote healthy populations of animals on healthy Country and improved cultural, social, ecological and economic benefits for all. The broader actions in the TOGMS include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative Management: - Employment and economic opportunities - Recognition and respect <p>Development of the TOGMS was led by the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations in partnership with the Game Management Authority (GMA), DJSIR and DEECA to build Traditional Owner participation in hunting, land management and conservation. The TOGMS was finalised in June 2022.</p>
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<p>4. That State Game Reserves used for duck hunting be converted into Outdoor Recreation Reserves to provide greater access to outdoor recreation for all Victorians, with appropriate investment in camping, boating, and related infrastructure.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>	<p>Government is committed to supporting more people to spend time in nature, enjoying outdoor activities and exploring our parks and forests. Government has invested \$33 million to improving boat facilities across Victoria and \$12.4 million to providing fishing and boating access at Tarago Reservoir. Victoria's Great Outdoors is investing \$106.6 million in better campgrounds, walking trails, 4WD tracks and visitor facilities in Victoria's parks and state forests.</p>
<p>5. That the Victorian Government provides additional resources to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Parks Victoria to better control non-native invasive species.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>	<p>The Victorian Government is committed to improving the health and biodiversity of Victoria's wetlands, and creating opportunities for Traditional Owners to lead in caring for country.</p> <p>Through Biodiversity 2037 and a record investment of more than \$582 million since 2014, we're delivering the biggest ever investment in Victoria's biodiversity and environment.</p> <p>A series of large-scale conservation projects are underway to reduce the impact of pests, predators and invasive weeds at key locations across Victoria.</p> <p>The projects span from Victoria's far north-west, the Grampians, Gippsland and the Mornington Peninsula and benefit a range of threatened species including the Long-footed Potoroo, southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, Giant Burrowing Frog and the Eastern Bristlebird.</p> <p>To date, the Icon Species Program has supported 19 species through a range of activities like habitat protection, translocation and predator control for species including the southern bent-wing bat, the orange-bellied parrot, southern right whale and the plains wanderer.</p> <p>We are committed to protecting Victoria's most threatened species and ensuring they have a bright future in our changing climate.</p> <p>These projects are part of that commitment to improve biodiversity and will help us deliver our ambitious environmental agenda – to ensure Victoria's environment is healthy, valued and protected for years to come.</p>

<p>6. That the Victorian Government amends the Victorian wildlife framework to discontinue the use of lead shot for all types of bird hunting and undertakes further investigation into plastic pollution and other forms of wetland degradation as a result of hunting.</p>	<p>Support in full</p>	<p>The use of lead shot in the hunting of game ducks in Victoria has been prohibited for more than 20 years.</p> <p>DJSIR will lead the remake of the Wildlife (Game) Interim Regulations 2023 and seek to ban the use of lead based ammunition for Stubble quail. Options to find compostable versions of shotgun ammunition currently based on non-compostable plastics will also be investigated.</p>
<p>7. That the Victorian Government reviews the process to report damage or destruction of Aboriginal cultural heritage and introduces additional protections for these sites including appropriate signposting and a review of the current penalties for cultural destruction.</p>	<p>Support in full</p>	<p>The Victorian Government is committed to protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and supporting strong Traditional Owner corporations. The <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> includes a range of enforcement provisions to provide protection for Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria. These provide appropriate penalties and clear powers for Authorised Officers and Aboriginal Heritage Officers.</p> <p>DJSIR will work with Traditional Owners, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the GMA, DEECA, and Parks Victoria to investigate appropriate enforcement and penalties for non-compliance with cultural heritage protections, and damage and destruction of cultural heritage.</p> <p>DJSIR, GMA, DEECA, the DPC and Parks Victoria will work with Traditional Owners to identify improvements for the reporting of damage and destruction of cultural heritage sites, and opportunities to improve signposting where appropriate.</p> <p>For the 2025 season, additional Authorised Officers and Aboriginal Heritage Officers will deliver stronger on ground presence to enhance protection of cultural heritage sites.</p>
<p>8. That the Victorian Government requires hunters participate in an Aboriginal cultural heritage awareness education program.</p>	<p>Support in full</p>	<p>From 2025, hunters will be required to complete Aboriginal cultural heritage awareness training and testing.</p> <p>DJSIR will work with Traditional Owners to develop a suitable education program, which may cover topics such as cultural heritage significance, Aboriginal heritage legislation, types of artefacts and practices to protect cultural heritage.</p>