

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON VICTORIA'S RECREATIONAL NATIVE BIRD HUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Melbourne – Friday 16 June 2023

MEMBERS

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Jeff Bourman

Katherine Copsey

Bev McArthur

Evan Mulholland

Georgie Purcell

Sheena Watt

WITNESSES

Mr Barry Howlett, Communications Manager,

Mr David Laird, Hunting Development Manager, and

Mr Daryl Snowdon, Conservation and Pest Management and Training Development Coordinator, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria).

The CHAIR: Welcome to the next session of the inquiry into the recreational hunting of native birds here in Victoria.

All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that witnesses provide during the hearing is protected by law, so 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 the 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 available and publicly posted on the committee's website.

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

Barry HOWLETT : Barry Howlett, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria).

David LAIRD: David Laird, SSAA Victoria.

Daryl SNOWDON: Daryl Snowdon, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria).

The CHAIR: Thanks very much for coming. I might ask if you want to make an opening presentation of about 5 minutes with as many or as few slides as you would like in that time, and then I will get the committee to introduce ourselves and we will ask you some questions.

David LAIRD: Thank you. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. As mentioned, my name is David Laird. I am the Hunting Development Manager at SSAA Victoria. With me are Barry Howlett, our Communications Manager, and Daryl Snowdon, who is the association's Conservation and Pest Management and Training Development Coordinator. Daryl is also an accredited shotgun education program trainer and sat on the waterfowl wounding reduction working group in that role. I sat on the working group through my role in SSAA Victoria.

SSAA Victoria represents 43,000 paid-up members. The association is the leading body in Victoria representing the interests of recreational hunters and shooters and is a leading provider of hunting and firearm training for recreational, occupational and corporate stakeholders.

The association has provided a detailed submission to this inquiry, including the draft waterfowl wounding reduction action plan as an index. I trust that the members of the committee are familiar with the association's submission, so I will not spend our somewhat limited time going through it in detail now.

The association does consider the waterfowl wounding reduction action plan is a critical part of the logical path forward for duck hunting in Victoria. It is informed by international best practice, which is not a bad thing, but it is a uniquely Victorian plan developed by an expert panel covering the broad range of interests and chaired by an acknowledged impartial expert. The other critical path forward is the continued development of the interim harvest model leading into an adaptive harvest model.

Hunting is not everyone's cup of tea. That is fine. We are not saying that it has to be or even that you have to like it. However, some people not liking something is not a valid reason to prevent those who do like it from doing so. It is recognised that participating in hunting activities does come with responsibilities. The association

also recognises that change is the one constant. This committee has the opportunity to recommend positive changes that address genuine concerns among sectors of the community whilst providing a sustainable path forward for legal and ethical duck hunters.

The association has made 11 recommendations to this inquiry. To reiterate, those recommendations are:

- The Select Committee should acknowledge that native bird hunting is a well regulated, beneficial activity that should continue.
- The Select Committee should acknowledge that the Game Management Authority (GMA) has undertaken a significant restructuring since the release of the Pegasus Report in 2017 and that the GMA has the appropriate governance and policies in place to manage both actual and perceived conflicts of interest.
- The Select Committee should acknowledge that the Waterfowl Identification Test (WIT) must be successfully completed before hunters are licensed and clarify that the assertion that licensed hunters have not successfully completed the WIT is false.
- The Select Committee should note that modifying seasonal bag limits is the most effective method of manipulating the total harvest and that altering the length of the hunting season has an unnecessary negative impact on hunters.
- The Select Committee should state that a well-regulated game hunting season in Victoria in the twenty-first century has no demonstrable impact on the populations of game species.
- The Select Committee should recommend that the GMA develop a transparent and objective procedure for managing the potential impacts of game duck hunting. Game hunting stakeholders, such as hunting organisations and Birdlife Australia, should be involved in this process, and the closure of public wetlands should –

always –

be a last resort.

- The Select Committee should recommend that the Minister for Outdoor Recreation immediately endorse, fund and implement the Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan.
- The Select Committee should recommend that the government acknowledge Victoria's position as Australia's best practice game management leader.
- The Select Committee should recommend that the government continue using the interim harvest model (IHM) and fully fund a transition to an adaptive harvest model within three years. Furthermore, future seasonal arrangements should be determined based on the IHM recommendations and announced via the GMA website no later than the 31st of December in the year preceding the upcoming game duck season.
- The Select Committee should recommend that the government restricts protestors' capacity to hinder the lawful conduct of duck hunters.
- The Select Committee should recommend that future economic reports remove speculative and irrelevant questions about substitutability. Alternatively, the committee could recommend that every government-sponsored industry economic report include similarly framed questions about substitutability.

We welcome your questions in relation to the submission or any other relevant matters where the committee members feel that we may be able to offer assistance for the inquiry in addressing its terms of reference.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. I might ask committee members to introduce themselves, starting with Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Me first? Right. Gentlemen, thank you for being here.

The CHAIR: No, no. Can you just introduce yourself.

Bev McARTHUR: Oh, introduce myself.

The CHAIR: I am not letting you have the call first, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Oh. Hello. I thought it was back to budgets. It is Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region. Sorry, Chair.

Jeff BOURMAN: I am Jeff Bourman, Eastern Victoria. Just for openness, I am a member of the SSAA.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria Region. Hello, gentlemen.

Michael GALEA: Michael Galea, Member of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sheena WATT: I am Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan Region.

Georgie PURCELL: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Ryan Batchelor, Member for Southern Metropolitan and Chair of the inquiry. I might start where I started with Field and Game, which is: how many threatened or non-game birds do you think are acceptable to be harmed during a hunting season?

Barry HOWLETT: I will lead in and see if you blokes want to finish: acceptable – ultimately none.

The CHAIR: Do you think it is inevitable?

David LAIRD: That other species or other –

The CHAIR: Yes.

David LAIRD: Realistically, yes.

The CHAIR: Yes. Okay. And how actively do the SSAA members or the organisation participate in the reporting of the presence of threatened or non-game birds on hunting reserves?

David LAIRD: We do not do that in a formal way that we report that to the GMA or anything like that, but any reports that we get back through the GMA we certainly share with our membership as soon as we possibly can through our social media and through our website.

The CHAIR: So you do not encourage your members at all to report the presence of non-game or threatened species to the proper authorities during the season?

Barry HOWLETT: We have not to our knowledge had any requests to do so. Probably Daryl or David might be able to talk about the wetland closure process that Peter Menkhorst has developed, that includes BirdLife Australia and GMA monitoring wetlands, and how that process is triggered. That is probably more of an answer to that question. The short answer is no, we do not actually encourage people to report.

The CHAIR: Do you support the closure of wetlands during the season using the section 86 powers?

David LAIRD: Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay. I want to talk now about wounding, because the wounding action plan was a key part of your submission, and the draft plan was attached and clearly is identified as being one of the key ingredients that you see as being part of a sustainable hunting system. The wounding action plan at its core I think in the draft that is presented to us gets to the issue that minimum standards of hunter skill are required to reduce wounding. What do you think that level of skill is, and how do you think the current crop of game licence holders meets that in proportional percentage terms?

Daryl SNOWDON: I think the data shows that they do not reach that level. There has not been a level set within the plan. There is a component of mandatory testing, but the actual level that we measure at has not been set yet. If you look at overseas practice, the level is not particularly high. If we go to the shotgun education program, which I have been a leader in since 2012, we do do some testing. We do some testing at 20 metres, 30 metres, 40 metres et cetera, and we believe that we need to get people to that pass rate at that 30-metre mark, which is where we think the effective distance for hunting ducks is.

The CHAIR: But the draft plan as it is presented, which you support, does not include those minimum standards?

Daryl SNOWDON: It does not have the minimum standard in the action plan, no.

The CHAIR: No, so we do not at the moment have a standard by which to assess the minimum skill that we think hunters should meet to effect a reduction in wounding?

Daryl SNOWDON: The action plan itself is the preliminary measure; it is the first step. So it is the plan. It does not outline all the details of each stage of that, so it does not have a benchmark as such, no.

The CHAIR: Do you think that hunters need to demonstrate their proficiency more than once?

David LAIRD: It is an interesting question.

Daryl SNOWDON: It is.

David LAIRD: There are so many variables. Some hunters are hunting all the time and some hunters are engaged in simulated field training in the off-season, so those people are regularly practising and others not necessarily as much. I suppose an imperfect analogy would be your drivers licence: you do it once, and then there is an expectation that you have those basics and then it is up to you to drive and utilise those skills and continue on. We have not got a strong opinion either way, but with any of those sorts of things we really want to make sure that the requirements are what is required but they are not unnecessarily onerous.

Daryl SNOWDON: I guess you can look at it with the licensing. So I hold a number of licences for boats, motorcycles and cars. They are all one-off tests, so if you meet a benchmark, I guess that is probably – you have met the benchmark.

The CHAIR: Under what further conditions do you think hunting licences should be suspended or revoked?

Daryl SNOWDON: Sorry, what was the question?

The CHAIR: Well, you said that you think proficiency is acceptable to establish once and that like other licences, misbehaviour or non-compliance is the demonstration that people are not proficient. At what point and for what reasons do you think it would be acceptable to revoke a licence?

Daryl SNOWDON: I think if you are not compliant with the regulations, you should have your licence revoked. It is the same with driving a motor vehicle; if you break the law enough times at a high enough level, you lose your licence, and if you do it enough, you are put in prison. I think it is no different.

The CHAIR: Do you think the level of compliance activity and enforcement currently undertaken by the GMA is sufficient to determine whether the number of game licence holders in Victoria can have that monitoring of their activities achieved?

Daryl SNOWDON: I think the monitoring where it is at the moment is a lot better than it has been in the past. Both our association and other hunting associations have pushed in the past for higher compliance activity and for more funding in the GMA for compliance activities. We have always supported that.

The CHAIR: So would you support more compliance staff and activities on wetlands?

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly.

David LAIRD: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: What do you think would make a more effective GMA?

Barry HOWLETT: That is an interesting question. I think they have actually come a very, very long way since that Pegasus report in 2017. I think that has made a more effective GMA. I think having a very strong CEO as they have got, really good leadership and a good independent board has made a very strong GMA and a very effective GMA. I think continual improvement along the path they have gone – their compliance strategy in recent years has turned 180 degrees and their governance has turned 180 degrees. I think having the government appoint a new strong chair to replace the good, strong chair that has left would be a very good start.

The CHAIR: That is my time done. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you, gentlemen. I am very interested to pick up on some of the themes that you have been running. I am interested in the 86 powers and the closure of wetlands, and I know there have been some in my Eastern Victoria Region and even some down on the coast as well. I know that there has been talk in the media that some people have been advocating for successful closure of them. As a person, I am interested to understand – and we have heard –

Jeff Bourman interjected.

Melina BATH: and taking credit for the closure of 16 wetlands – what has been your involvement in any of those closures. What do you feel is your role or responsibility in terms of any closures, and how have you been working with the GMA in respect of those closures?

David LAIRD: The GMA advises us that there are issues that have arisen, and we tend to have meetings about that and discuss the individual wetlands and who has raised the concerns. There is a scientific paper by Peter Menkhorst that looks at disturbance levels, and that is supposed to be taken into account with this. Unfortunately, the process is opaque to say the best. We are very unsure what results we get in different circumstances and actually why they occur. We want to see, and it is one of our recommendations, that there is a clear, objective set of circumstances where wetlands are closed. We do not oppose wetlands being closed in all circumstances, certainly not where there are legitimate concerns and issues there. We fully support that, and we have supported wetland closures in the past. This year there has been a whole lot, and the whole thing seems to have been highly politicised, and that is a concern. If there are genuine scientific or welfare concerns that we need to address in particular areas, we are more than happy for that to happen. But yes, otherwise, no.

Daryl SNOWDON: I might just add quickly to that that the disturbance report contains trigger levels, and we do not –

Melina BATH: Sorry, I missed that.

Daryl SNOWDON: The report contains trigger levels, so a level of birds on the wetland which would trigger a response, and some of the things that are getting onto the list now do not meet the trigger levels. So if they do not meet the trigger levels, they should not be discussed, even as far as –

Melina BATH: And is this part of that opaqueness that you were mentioning?

Daryl SNOWDON: It becomes a political process.

Melina BATH: So if they do not meet a trigger level, we are not applying science to the operation of the closure of wetlands. So therefore, and with respect to hunters, how do you meet a benchmark as well in terms of your responsibility? The 86 is in effect a suggestion; that is what you are suggesting.

Daryl SNOWDON: We are suggesting that to put them on the table for discussion they should meet a trigger level, and once they meet that trigger level the discussion should be had, and closure should be the last resort. So there are other management mechanisms, but it seems closure now is the number one mechanism used.

Melina BATH: And just following up on that, what are some of the other –

Daryl SNOWDON: Partial closures of wetlands, restriction of motorboats, closing the areas to hunting et cetera. You do not need to close the entire wetland all the time for everything.

Melina BATH: Beautiful. Thank you very much. And picking up on something you said, Mr Howlett, you seem to be quite pro or positive to GMA – that the GMA has evolved over time. In the past I would have said that maybe SSAA have not had that close a relationship with the GMA or had the same warm feelings toward the GMA. How would you describe your relationship now? What is that?

Barry HOWLETT: Quite professional, I suppose, we would describe it. I would not characterise it quite that way. I would say you would not have to go very far back into our comms to see us being critical of certain decisions of the GMA. I would like to think that the association gives credit where it is due and also gives criticism where it is due.

Melina BATH: Thank you. That is good. And I would like to thank you, in your submission, for producing the Victorian draft of the waterfowl wounding reduction action plan with words and actual pictures, because I remember that the original one that was provided and that we were able to access via the minister was all redacted, so that was –

Jeff BOURMAN: It had blanked out pages.

Melina BATH: Yes, that is right, blanked out pages. So thank you for that. What I am interested in is on page 3 of your submission you speak about a SSAA-commissioned report. I want to understand a bit more about that report. It says, and I am quoting your submission, you:

... commissioned research early this year that clearly shows that most voters in key marginal electorates oppose a ban on duck hunting and that a good proportion would shift their votes away from Labor if the Government proceeded with a ban.

So we are talking about key marginal electorates. I challenged the RSPCA on a report that was done in 2012 with 500 people by the Australia Institute as being very, very wishy-washy. How can we think that this might be of use to this inquiry, and how is it a reasonable report?

Barry HOWLETT: Look, we have actually put the methodology behind the report in the submission. We commissioned Eric Goddard at Community Engagement, who is a very well credentialed researcher. There would be people on this committee who are very familiar with Eric's work. I think it is quite credible. Yes, it answered a question that we thought was pertinent. So we have seen all this research before and we heard some cited today about the gross number of Victorians and how they feel about an issue. Obviously that research has been commissioned to make a political point, which is that if you ban duck hunting it will be a winner. What we have noticed is that the key political question, which is 'How does this win or lose seats?', if it has been asked it certainly has never been published. So we went and looked at seven marginal Labor-held seats and we focused on outer metro and regional seats, because that is where the high concentration of duck hunters is. We wanted to research that key question: how would it affect seats?

Melina BATH: So did you overlap votes with the duck-hunting fraternity?

Barry HOWLETT: We looked at large numbers of duck hunters and looked at marginal seats where they lived, to see that. We basically found that had Labor gone to the 2022 election, for example, saying they were going to ban duck hunting, the seat of Bass most likely, on our figures, would not have gone to Labor.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Mr Bourman.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation, gentlemen. The RSPCA said that they worked with various stakeholders. They said they sent something to the Field and Game people and never received a response. Did they ever send anything to the SSAA Victoria?

David LAIRD: Certainly not to my knowledge.

Jeff BOURMAN: I have seen criticism of the waterfowl wounding reduction action plan – that it is a Danish model and irrelevant to Victoria, and it also took the best part of a decade to see any results. Can you give me some comments on that, please?

David LAIRD: There is nothing wrong with basing something on world's best practice, and the Danes have certainly done that with that modelling, but as I said in the introduction, the waterfowl wounding reduction action plan in Victoria has been specifically designed for Victorian conditions. So they have certainly looked at what was happening in Denmark – what they achieved and what they needed to achieve, positive outcomes – but at the end of the day this is a Victorian model.

Jeff BOURMAN: Have you got any data to show that from, I guess, the Danish model, which you can provide?

Daryl SNOWDON: Yes, certainly. We can provide that on notice. Not a problem at all.

Jeff BOURMAN: On notice. Excellent. Thank you. Your organisation has participated in economic surveys that the committee has been looking at. How do you see the economics of duck hunting in rural areas? How do you see that as important?

David LAIRD: I suppose if we are referring to these surveys that the government has done, I think going back originally the intent of those was to show whether the government investment in the Game Management Authority – in licensing, in compliance – was actually worth the investment they were putting in. I think regardless of what the figures are that come out these days, they still clearly show that for every dollar the government puts in, they are getting a return on that investment. Probably there is a lot of speculation about economics – if you ban duck hunting, then suddenly all these mythical ecotourists will come out of the

woodwork and turn up and visit these wetlands. Look, this does not have to be an either-or scenario. I mean, in wetlands at the moment duck hunting occurs for three months of the year. Those wetlands are available for the general public for the other nine months, and outside the restricted times they are available during the duck-hunting season. We do not see huge numbers of people visiting those wetlands. We have an example of Winton Wetlands, an area that was closed for hunting. It is supposed to be this ecotourism hotspot. It is on the major highway between Melbourne and Sydney. I think to date the government has thrown millions and millions of dollars in there, and we certainly have not seen any evidence of a huge demand, of visitors going and visiting those areas. If you start looking at some of the smaller wetlands in the state game reserves, they are lovely areas in their own right, but they are not areas that are going to encourage tourists to go and visit those places.

Jeff BOURMAN: We have touched a little bit on the traditional owner game management strategy. Does the SSAA have anything to do with that?

Barry HOWLETT: Yes, we were certainly involved in its inception and in the early days, in consultation with the federation of traditional owner corporations in the development of that strategy – certainly at a very peripheral level, because it is very much a strategy that was developed by the federation and by the traditional owners. We were at the launch of the strategy, and something that struck us very hard was the fact that the government had launched this fantastic strategy and not funded it. Our experience over a long period of time is that you can have the best strategy in the world, but if there is no funding attached, it is not going to go anywhere. About a year after that or perhaps a bit less, when Minister Thomas was looking at announcing the sustainable hunting action plan, number 2, we advocated very hard for her to include funding for that traditional owner game management strategy to bring it to life.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you. One of the things that keeps coming up, and you guys touched on it earlier too, is substitutability. The arguments I have heard about substitutability are that people will go four-wheel driving, they will go camping, they will go fishing and all that. It has been my experience – and whilst I have been shooting for more years than I care to imagine, I have not been much of a duck hunter – that people that go duck hunting or hunting in general tend to four-wheel drive, tend to camp, tend to fish already. Do you have any comments you would like to make on substitutability as a valid sort of point as to what will happen should duck hunting be banned?

Barry HOWLETT: I think it is a statement of the obvious that people who fit the typical profile of a duck hunter, which is working-class people, will pretty well spend the income that they make. I think that is a pretty simple statement of the obvious. I saw one of your earlier witnesses was asked a similar question and made a very good point: they will spend it, but they will not spend it in the same place. So it might not matter at a macro level, at a gross state product level, but if you are not going to spend that money in a pie shop in Kerang and if you are going to go fishing and spend it at McDonald's in Rosebud, I am sure that is great for McDonald's in Rosebud, but it is not much chop for the bloke who has got the pie shop in Kerang.

Jeff BOURMAN: No, exactly. I have basically got 30 seconds left, so I will move on. I am finished, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thanks, Chair. Good morning. Thanks for joining us. I should note, though, whilst I am not a member of the SSAA, I did, along with other members of Parliament, get the chance to visit your range at Little River this year. If I might start, on page 6 of your submission you cite that the majority of Australians do not oppose game hunting and then draw from that to say that there is no social case for the abolition of native bird hunting. Do you agree that there is a difference between people's attitudes to hunting as a whole and to hunting of native birds?

Barry HOWLETT: Superficially, yes, we would agree with that.

Michael GALEA: You also said in your submission that the RSPCA has a conflict of interest in terms of their dual role. Do you see the GMA as having a similar conflict of interest?

Barry HOWLETT: I do not see the GMA as the same sort of organisation. The GMA is purely a government statutory authority. We have certainly seen that criticism continually levelled at the GMA, that you cannot be both a regulator and a promoter. We never see that criticism levelled at VicRoads or the Victorian Fisheries Authority or any of a number of government statutory authorities. It seems to be discrete to the GMA.

And again going back to that development of GMA since Pegasus, post 2017, our understanding of their compliance strategy and the way they have effectively separated their functions – it is probably a better question for the GMA than us on the detail of that, but from our perspective they have effectively separated those functions.

Michael GALEA: Okay. You have also recommended in your submission that there should be further restrictions placed on animal rescuers on the wetlands. I note that this year Lake Buloke was one of the wetlands that was closed. I know we have already discussed the issues of closures, as to whether that is the best approach or not. That was closed following reports from those animal rescuers. Without those animal rescuers there, would that wetland have been closed, in your opinion, and do you think there would have been a further risk to those restricted birds that were being shot?

Barry HOWLETT: I am not sure. Animal rescuers may claim that; that may or may not be true. We were certainly at Lake Buloke on opening with GMA and with animal rescuers – if that is what you accept they are. With any number of people at Lake Buloke we witnessed a large number of freckled ducks that we were watching and certainly pointed out to the GMA officer at the same time that, yes, there was a large number of freckled ducks. And a large number of wetlands are closed, and maybe the others can speak to how that process works, with GMA and BirdLife monitoring a large number of wetlands.

David LAIRD: Probably just on the protester activity, I mean, we are not opposed to people protesting. They have got the right. They have got their particular view, and we accept that and respect that. What we do not accept is their actions where they actually hinder hunters in the execution of their activities. If they are outside the water as per the regulations and they want to stand there and look at things and do whatever, that is fine, but we have a problem when they actually start to confront hunters and get into their areas.

Daryl SNOWDON: And I will just touch on the risk to those birds. Yes, we were there. Yes, we did witness a large number of freckled ducks, and yes, we did discuss that with GMA on site. VicPol were there as well. Were they at risk? At risk from who? There were three hunters on a lake that is 15 kilometres long and 5 kilometres wide. I think they were fairly safe. I do not think there was a lot of risk for those birds, no.

Michael GALEA: I think we are aware of at least one and possibly others being shot.

Daryl SNOWDON: Not at Lake Buloke.

Michael GALEA: No, okay. Would there not be still that risk, though, if we were to further prohibit the access of protesters, of this awareness being raised and then compliance action taking place as a result? Because I understand you and the SSAA might be very keen on compliance, but I am not sure how many hunters would then be saying, 'I want you to close this where I'm actually hunting.'

Barry HOWLETT: My experience – and Daryl and David are probably more experienced than I – is that you count birds with spotting scopes from the shore, and I do not think anyone is proposing that any member of the public be excluded from standing on the shore with a spotting scope.

Daryl SNOWDON: Those birds were not seen by rescuers out on the water. They were seen from the shore. I was there. I was standing with them, and we were witnessing them when they were filming.

Michael GALEA: I am sure others will have that debate as well. In relation to the public polling on, I think, page 26 of your submission, firstly, would it be possible to get a copy of that polling data on notice?

Barry HOWLETT: We would be happy to provide most of it. The only caveat I would put on it is there is some polling there about the personal popularity of individual members, which I would doubt they would want made public, so we would reserve the right to redact that.

The CHAIR: I am sure we can confine ourselves to the issues rather than the personalities – same with the RSPCA, and they gave us their details.

Barry HOWLETT: Yes. I am happy to provide it, other than that.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. That will be great. I understand obviously there are some political aspects to it. Do you think, though, that the views of voters in marginal seats should be considered to be more important than the views of voters across the state?

Barry HOWLETT: I think if you are making an argument that this is a political issue – and I think anyone commissioning research on it and anyone who is paying any attention to duck hunting in Victoria, particularly in 2023, would be pretty well aware that it is a political issue – politicians deal in votes and seats.

Michael GALEA: One of the questions, correct me if I am wrong, was that you asked people if they would support the continuation of duck hunting in a way that would protect or guarantee the protection of native species. Is that something that is even possible?

Barry HOWLETT: At a large scale, yes. If you want to take it down to, ‘Could there be native species?’ – well, ducks are native species. It comes down to your definition of protection, I suppose, doesn’t it, but if we are talking about sustainability then absolutely not only is it possible; it is practised. If we are talking about a non-target species inadvertently getting shot, then I think we have discussed that it is probably not possible to drive that down to zero, but it is certainly always possible to keep reducing that level.

Michael GALEA: If I can, with the 3 seconds I have left, positions on lead shot for quails?

Barry HOWLETT: We will follow the research. We will follow the science.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much, Chair. Barry, how difficult is it to humanely dispatch ducks?

Barry HOWLETT: In my personal experience, not very difficult. Daryl is probably far more experienced at duck hunting than me. He has been doing it since he was a wee lad.

Daryl SNOWDON: I knew I would get asked this question in front of a large group of people at some stage. I have worked with GMA for the past 10 years on this issue. It was a very sensitive issue when we formed the working group to develop the guide for humane dispatch. That guide was developed in conjunction with Animals Australia and RSPCA, I might add. I was not working for SSAA then – I was working for another organisation – but I was part of that process. It is quite a simple task. The education part of it is the hard part. How do you demonstrate how to dispatch a duck without dispatching a duck, and which one of us wants to have a YouTube video of us killing ducks? While, yes, it is quite simple, it is quite difficult to display in that way. We have looked at using decoy ducks et cetera, trying to do it, and we have done some animations and various things. It is a very hard thing to show without actually doing it on a duck.

Bev McARTHUR: But the actual process is quite simple?

Daryl SNOWDON: It is quite simple.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. That is totally in contrast with what the RSPCA were trying to –

Daryl SNOWDON: I do not think the RSPCA have killed too many ducks with their hands –

Bev McARTHUR: No. I do not think they have left Fitzroy. Do you agree with the RSPCA that wounding is the biggest issue in duck hunting?

Daryl SNOWDON: Yes. Quite simply, sorry, yes, I do. I think that our number one concern for the future and the continuation of duck hunting is the wounding issue, yes.

Bev McARTHUR: We keep on getting this kind of view that hunters are really there just for the thrill of it. Do you eat your ducks when you kill them?

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly. While, yes, we eat our ducks – I am a duck hunter, I hunt rabbits, I hunt deer, I hunt various species and they all end up on my table; we eat game food at my house two or three times a

week – the driving force behind hunting is the enjoyment of the outdoors and the enjoyment of the hunting activity. It is not about killing. It is about spending that time in the outdoors, and yes, it is an enjoyable pastime.

Bev McARTHUR: And do most duck hunters eat the ducks they kill?

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly. Why else would they go hunting?

Bev McARTHUR: Exactly. I am wondering that myself. Can you give us any sort of insight into something we have heard about protesters stealing downed birds?

Daryl SNOWDON: It is certainly something that used to happen in the past. I have witnessed it myself.

Bev McARTHUR: Really? Tell us.

Daryl SNOWDON: In my previous role at another association I spent a lot of time on the opening weekend of the duck season for the last 10 years. They are out in kayaks illegally – before the legal time they can enter the water – for the one reason –

Bev McARTHUR: So they are breaking the law, effectively.

Daryl SNOWDON: Not ‘effectively’; they are certainly breaking the law, and many have been prosecuted in the past. They are there for one reason, with canoes: to outrun the hunters or the hunter’s dog to get those birds.

Bev McARTHUR: It would be dangerous, wouldn’t it?

Daryl SNOWDON: Of course it is dangerous, putting yourself in the line of fire, yes, and –

Bev McARTHUR: Stupid actually.

Daryl SNOWDON: I am not going to go that far, but protesters have been injured in the past. One was injured at Lake Buloke in 2011.

Bev McARTHUR: Can you tell us about the waterfowl identity test – training shooters and testing them? Can you just tell us about the process? It is quite a high bar, isn’t it? If you pick one non-game species, you will be ruled out.

Daryl SNOWDON: The bar has been raised a couple of times.

Bev McARTHUR: Tell us what you would do to pass the test.

Daryl SNOWDON: Officially all you had to do in the past was turn up to a GMA office and sit the test. Now you have to actually complete some online training modules before you sit the test. The bar has been raised to a point now where a large percentage of hunters are failing it – prospective hunters. They are not hunters at that stage; they are sitting the test for the first time to become hunters. There is a huge proportion of those that are now failing. I believe the numbers are in the 80 per cent sort of region. For that very reason Sporting Shooters and Field and Game Australia both run training programs which are fairly vigorous programs. They are not teaching prospective hunters how to pass the test – they are teaching hunters how to identify waterfowl. And as you said, you get one wrong and you fail. So it is as simple as that.

Bev McARTHUR: So what is the fail rate?

Daryl SNOWDON: I believe it is in the 80 per cent region.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, there you go. So there is only 20 per cent that are passing the test.

Daryl SNOWDON: They are the ones that come in off the street cold. Once they go through training it basically flips over – 80 to 90 per cent pass after training.

Bev McARTHUR: So this is quite a vigorous approach to making sure people that go duck hunting know what they are doing.

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly. So our program is over two weeks –

Bev McARTHUR: Two weeks!

Daryl SNOWDON: Yes. You spend 3 hours in the classroom and then you have a week – you get home, you get modules to take home and practise identifying birds – and then you come back, do some revision and sit the actual test. So it is quite a process.

Bev McARTHUR: Politicians do not even have that sort of training. Perhaps we need it.

Daryl SNOWDON: Some of them have done that training.

Jeff BOURMAN: I must admit, I did mine; it was not easy.

Bev McARTHUR: I just want to go to the economics of all of this. As you have said, Barry, if you ban duck shooting, the economists might tell us, 'Well, the people that spend their money are going to spend it in Fitzroy on a soy latte or something,' but that is not going to help Buloke or Horsham or wherever else they are shooting. So how is this going to affect rural communities?

David LAIRD: As we said before, hunters are still going to spend that money, but they will spend it in other areas. The analogy Barry used before: the pie shop in Kerang is not going to get that money, so someone else will. The big picture is the money will still get spent but it will be spent in different areas. For those regional areas that benefit at the moment from duck hunters coming in during the season, they will certainly be missing out.

Bev McARTHUR: So there is a real downside for country Victoria.

Daryl SNOWDON: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thanks for being here today, gentlemen. What proportion of your membership would you say hold just a game duck hunting licence?

Barry HOWLETT: What proportion of our membership hold a duck hunting –

Katherine COPSEY: Hold just a duck hunting licence and not a broader game licence?

David LAIRD: We would not be able to even speculate on that. We know from previous surveys that approximately 80 per cent of our members do hunt, but the actual numbers of who hold just a duck licence – we do not do that sort of research.

Daryl SNOWDON: And there would not be that many that hold just a duck licence. Hunters being hunters, they hold duck licences. With a duck licence comes a quail licence, and it is most likely they will have a deer licence as well.

Katherine COPSEY: So most of your members, if they do undertake duck hunting, would also undertake hunting of a different nature as well.

David LAIRD: That is a fair statement, yes.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. From your experience around wounding, in regard to the proficiency test that was being discussed just previously: do you think that that assists, when people are able to correctly identify species, in reducing the number of prohibited species that are shot?

Barry HOWLETT: To be clear, so you are saying the waterfowl identification –

Katherine COPSEY: Yes.

Daryl SNOWDON: If you look at the data and look at the protected species that were collected pre the test and what is collected now, I think there has been a huge change. I read the Coalition Against Duck Shooting's

submission yesterday, and I think Laurie himself states that there has been a drastic improvement over that time period as well. Since the introduction of the WIT, there has been a huge change in hunter behaviour; no doubt about that.

Katherine COPSEY: The changes to that test that you have spoken about – you think that those are sensible changes and it should continue to be a rigorous test?

Daryl SNOWDON: I think the changes to the test are sensible in the fact that it has become harder to pass. Yes, the benchmark has been raised. The way the test is administered is quite strange still – you have to positively identify the birds that you do not shoot, yet you do not have to possibly identify the game ducks. To me it is a bit reverse, so I do have some issues with that WIT and how it sits now. There is a focus on identifying protected species when to me it is not really important. If you know it is a protected species, you are not going to shoot it. You need to positively identify the things you are going to actually shoot and kill. I still do have some concerns with the WIT, but certainly I do not have any issues with raising the bar of the WIT, no.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I appreciate that you said you do not regularly collect this data, but do you think that the proportion of your membership that engages in duck shooting has declined over time, over the decade, for example?

David LAIRD: Duck hunting – but look, we would not be able to speculate on that because we have not got the figures. We did not have them prior to that; we have not got them now.

Katherine COPSEY: And you do not have an anecdotal view?

Barry HOWLETT : Well, if you looked at our members as an average of the hunting and shooting community, the number of duck hunters has reduced. The number of shooters has increased, but whether they are the same people or not – it would be speculation.

David LAIRD: Total speculation.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I wanted to touch on the existing methodology for determining waterbird populations on the eastern coast of Australia. I want to ask if you accept that there has been a long-term decline in waterbird populations.

David LAIRD: Yes.

Daryl SNOWDON: We are not the experts, and the experts came before the committee. If the experts say there is a long-term decline, I am not going to argue with the science.

Katherine COPSEY: Relevant to people going out and undertaking shooting activities, particularly where we have wetlands that are close to residential areas now, does your organisation undertake activities around gun ownership and gun safety and education in relation to those?

David LAIRD: Yes. We do a lot of education in gun safety. We run a practical firearms training program for new shooters, and that is part of the pathway for people to get their shooters licence. We have been running that for about the last five years. We started it initially as a firearm safety course to teach people how to competently use firearms. Victoria Police then came on board and recognised it as an approved safety course for the purposes of getting a shooters licence. We have subsequently become a registered training organisation, and that course is a nationally recognised course. We also do a lot of training. We run courses for various corporate entities teaching them how to safely use firearms. We are involved in a partnership with the Game Management Authority running hunter education courses with them. We have obviously got the shotgun education program that we have been running for quite a few years, and we have run some pilot programs with GMA on duck and quail hunting and also deer hunting for newly licensed game licence holders.

Katherine COPSEY: Do you believe that gun regulation in Victoria is too strict? Would you like to see it relaxed?

David LAIRD: That has really got nothing to do with the hunting regulations. We do not have a particular view on that. We want reasonable regulations and reasonable laws that make sure that the community is safe and that do not unnecessarily impact on recreational shooters and hunters.

Barry HOWLETT: I think it generally strikes a reasonable balance. I think the community would agree with that. You look at certainly changes that were made before the last Parliament – there were changes made to the safe storage of firearms to actually beef up the requirements for safe storage of firearms, and that was driven by and done in deep consultation with all of the major shooting organisations.

Katherine COPSEY: And just to dispatch methods, do each of you go out and shoot ducks during duck-shooting season?

David LAIRD: That is correct.

Barry HOWLETT: Yes.

Katherine COPSEY: So the dispatch methods that have been discussed this morning and the commonality of windmilling still persisting – have you witnessed that personally out on the wetlands?

Barry HOWLETT: Yes.

Katherine COPSEY: And how did you respond when you saw that activity being undertaken?

Daryl SNOWDON: It is not illegal. There is some sort of theory here that it is illegal. There is a guide to humane dispatch – it is a guide. I do not see where in the dispatch of ducks there is a legal requirement that says what method you have to use. That method has been used for hundreds of years. Since the shooting of birds has existed, that method of dispatch has been used.

Katherine COPSEY: And you do not have a problem with windmilling continuing to be used?

Daryl SNOWDON: I have a problem with it, because people are not educated to do it properly.

The CHAIR: That is time. Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Thank you.

Melina BATH: Can you say what you said before, sorry. The bell went off and I did not hear. Can you just repeat your last comment? Thanks.

Daryl SNOWDON: The problem is people are not educated on how to do it correctly. Done correctly, it is a perfectly legitimate method of dispatch.

The CHAIR: What is?

Daryl SNOWDON: Windmilling. It has been used since shooting has existed.

The CHAIR: Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Thank you. I am going to go to a different set of questions. Firstly, thank you very much for being here and for your submission. I wanted to ask more about your membership and your understanding of what they do in an average season. How many times in a season would your members head out to hunt? Do you have any statistics or anything around that?

Barry HOWLETT: We do not have data specifically on our membership, but I know the Game Management Authority takes data annually on hunter effort, which we would take to be a general reflection. I have not got that to hand.

Sheena WATT: So nothing specific to your membership?

Barry HOWLETT: Nothing specific to our membership.

Daryl SNOWDON: No. We do survey our members, but that would be covered under the surveys done by the GMA.

Sheena WATT: Okay. To your understanding, do hunters normally go to the same reserve every year or is it more of a 'travel around and see different places'? Talk to me about hunter patterns of practice.

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly our regional hunters have their traditional areas that they will hunt. There will be generations of families that hunt at exactly the same location. I know Gippsland and western Victoria are prime examples. They hunt in the same place, and they have their kids – it is multigenerational; some of them have hunted there for 100 years. Melbourne hunters obviously do not have wetlands in their backyard; they are a lot more nomadic. They will move around a lot more than our regional hunters.

Sheena WATT: All right. Good.

Daryl SNOWDON: But then again, they still have their favourite spots; if they are successful once, they will go back to where they had that success.

Sheena WATT: Yes. I am just trying to understand more about the practices of hunters. What about your members travelling interstate? Is that something you have asked about? Do you have any knowledge of members travelling interstate to participate in hunting activities?

Barry HOWLETT: I have knowledge of one of our members who travels interstate.

Daryl SNOWDON: Our members certainly travel. They travel to the Northern Territory. They are involved in native bird control programs in New South Wales – 'on the rice', as it is commonly referred to. Certainly this year a number of our members travelled over to South Australia for the recreational hunting season in South Australia. There were great opportunities in South Australia – with the water that has come down the Murray, there was quite an abundance of ducks in South Australia. And it was quite a liberal season compared to Victoria – a lot longer with higher bag limits.

Sheena WATT: Sorry, could you repeat that last part?

Daryl SNOWDON: There was an abundance of ducks in South Australia this year and a longer season at a higher bag limit, so a number of our members did travel over to South Australia to hunt this year.

Sheena WATT: Okay.

Daryl SNOWDON: And will continue to – the season is still on in South Australia.

Sheena WATT: Is that just this year or is that something that has happened in the past?

Daryl SNOWDON: They do it every year. There are not huge amounts of Victorians that travel to South Australia, but there is a number that do.

Sheena WATT: Okay.

Barry HOWLETT: Anecdotally, that would be determined by opportunity.

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly.

Sheena WATT: Okay. That is helpful. I wanted to go to the electorates that you surveyed – I know others have asked about this – on pages 27 to 29. Are these electorates skewed by location to particular hunting grounds, or is it more around –

Barry HOWLETT: They are chosen primarily, most of them, for being marginal or for fitting a profile where there is a high population of game licences – so where there is a decent number of duck hunters living – so that we could get a snapshot of how they would react.

Sheena WATT: Yes. Do you think that these electorates provide an accurate mapping of Victorian communities and their attitudes as reflected in this survey?

Barry HOWLETT: I do not think they provide a mapping, to the extent that that is at all possible, of the entire population of Victoria. I think they provide snapshots. An electorate like Bass provides a snapshot of

people in that outer-suburb urban fringe and their attitudes; I think that provides a very decent snapshot of that. I am quite familiar with that because it neighbours where I live.

Sheena WATT: What about the sample size? Can you talk to me about the sample size for each of those polls?

Barry HOWLETT: I cannot talk – I am happy to take that on notice.

Sheena WATT: Yes, if you could.

Barry HOWLETT: That was determined by Eric and not by us, but I am happy to take that on notice and provide that.

Sheena WATT: Yes, just to get an understanding of that one. On page 25 – I will just give you a moment to go to that one – you spoke about the recommendation that this committee should restrict protesting in Victoria for the benefit of hunters. Is the restriction of the right to protest truly an appropriate response? How do you reasonably restrict? Can you just talk to me a little bit about that suggestion, please?

David LAIRD: That is not what we are suggesting at all, as I outlined before. What we are asking for is a restriction on the ability of protesters to impact on the lawful activities of hunters. As I said, if protestors want to stand on the edge of the wetlands or they want to come into town and stand on the steps of Parliament, more power to them. They are entitled to their view, they are entitled to express that and they are entitled to protest. But we do not believe that they have a right to protest where they are actually hindering hunters going about their activities. Perhaps the Melbourne Cup might be a good example, a bit of an analogy, as a lot of people feel very strongly about that. There are protests about the Melbourne Cup. That is fine, but they are not allowed on the track. If they did, they would be arrested and they would be dragged off. So they can stand outside and they can express their views, but they cannot actually hinder those activities. And we see it should be exactly the same for hunters in a wetland going about their lawful activities; they should not be hindered by protesters.

Georgie PURCELL: Rescuers.

Sheena WATT: Okay, lovely. I am sure there may be others that will want to go to that one. I have just got a short period of time left. Do you have any specific restrictions on protesters that you would like to recommend? About the location of protests, is there anything else to that that you would want to suggest for us to consider?

David LAIRD: Certainly just keeping them out of those wetlands when hunting is actually occurring –

Sheena WATT: Or rescuers, as my colleague next to me said.

David LAIRD: so that they cannot get in there and they cannot be waving their flags around. We want to reduce wounding, and we have got protesters going and disturbing birds and chasing them away. We are trying to encourage hunters to change behaviours and use decoys to bring animals into that effective distance, and we have got protesters who are potentially impacting on that. So yes, as I say, outside the wetlands I am more than happy for them protest there and express their views but not get in the way of hunters going about their lawful activities.

Sheena WATT: So it is more about location. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Ms Purcell.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you, Chair. And thank you for appearing today. I just want to go back to dispatching. Earlier you made a criticism of the RSPCA that they would have never dispatched ducks and that their comments were wrong. That evidence that they prepared for us today was from the veterinary experts. Do you have a background in animal welfare or any form of science?

Daryl SNOWDON: No, I do not. But I have long and expansive experience in hunting and dispatching wounded ducks and wounded birds, yes.

Georgie PURCELL: Are you suggesting that your understanding of it is more qualified than a vet?

Daryl SNOWDON: No, I am not suggesting that. I sat on the committee with Animals Australia and RSPCA and the RSPCA vets to develop that wounding guide, so we worked collaboratively on that guide.

Georgie PURCELL: We have spoken a bit about windmilling today. I obviously have a decent understanding of duck shooting due to my position on it, but can you explain to other committee members what windmilling actually is?

Daryl SNOWDON: It is a type of cervical dislocation where you are holding onto the head of the bird and rotating it around in order to dislocate the neck from the head.

Georgie PURCELL: And how long does it take a duck to die from windmilling?

Daryl SNOWDON: Done correctly, it is fairly instant.

Georgie PURCELL: Okay. Earlier on you were saying that it is not illegal. Do you believe it should be?

Daryl SNOWDON: No, I do not. It is not in the guide for a reason. I am not saying I agree with it as an approved method. It did not make it into the guide. But to say it is not effective – it is effective. Done by the right people in the right hands, it is an effective method.

Georgie PURCELL: Sorry, just to understand, you believe that windmilling should not be made illegal? Is that what you just said?

Daryl SNOWDON: I do not believe it should be made illegal, no.

Georgie PURCELL: Okay. Do you accept that a number of shooters are not windmilling correctly and are causing suffering to birds?

Daryl SNOWDON: Certainly. That is why it is not in the guide.

Georgie PURCELL: So based on that, why don't you think it should be illegal?

Daryl SNOWDON: Why shouldn't it be illegal? Done correctly, there is no problem with it. All those methods – cervical dislocation, all the methods in there – have their limitations, and done incorrectly they will have the same results: they are not effective.

Georgie PURCELL: Okay. Earlier on you said that wetland closure thresholds were not being met. What evidence do you have that they are not being met?

Daryl SNOWDON: I have sat on closure committees in the past in my previous role, and also in this role I am involved in the closure process. There are wetlands added to the list for discussion in those forums. The thresholds are not met, so there are a number of –

Georgie PURCELL: Specifically for this year I think you said they were not met.

Daryl SNOWDON: Yes. There were for this year, yes.

Georgie PURCELL: And you were involved in those processes of knowing how many birds were counted – you were given that evidence?

Daryl SNOWDON: Well, I was not involved in the process of counting them, but I got the data. The data was provided.

Georgie PURCELL: The data was provided to you by the GMA?

Daryl SNOWDON: Yes, that is correct.

Georgie PURCELL: Okay. On your website you boast many years of mateship with the NRA. Could you tell us a little bit about the way that you work with them?

Barry HOWLETT: On the SSAA Victoria website?

David LAIRD: That is not the case.

Daryl SNOWDON: I do not think we do. That is not the case.

Jeff BOURMAN: Chair, I do not see the relevancy.

David LAIRD: I am happy to answer if –

Georgie PURCELL: I just thought there might be findings from them that are relevant. So Victoria is different to the national –

David LAIRD: There is an umbrella organisation. SSAA Victoria is a separate organisation. We have no affinity with the NRA. We have nothing on our website about the NRA.

The CHAIR: Let us move on.

Georgie PURCELL: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Your submission relies heavily on comments and papers from scientists from the last century. On page 24 it cites a report from 2000 that was based on research conducted decades earlier. Do you accept that the environmental situation for game ducks has significantly changed this century compared to last?

David LAIRD: Yes.

Jeff Bourman interjected.

The CHAIR: Order!

Georgie PURCELL: Yes, thank you, Chair. The change requiring shooters to retrieve wounded ducks before firing again is only relatively recent, after the massacre at Koorangie in 2017. Did you support this change, and had you advocated for it prior to that?

David LAIRD: We have certainly supported hunters utilising whatever they shoot, and that has been the position of the association forever. Our expectation is that any hunter who shoots a bird will retrieve it and will utilise it.

Georgie PURCELL: Do you think that hunters are following those new rules, given that they are relatively recent?

David LAIRD: Absolutely. I mean, you look at the compliance rates, and the compliance rates of hunters are extremely high.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you. In your submission you suggest that shooting must continue because it is important for the mental and physical health of shooters. We regularly hear the opposite to that – that people who live in regional areas, particularly near water bodies, are greatly distressed by the activity. It also limits their ability to be physically active in their area and can have mental health implications by being surrounded by guns and suffering. What is your response to the people that are affected by duck shooting in regional areas in terms of their mental and physical health?

Barry HOWLETT: People are entitled to their views, and there is a wide range of views on this. A lot of those wetlands, pretty well all of the public wetlands, have been available for hunting since the 1950s at least, but certainly people are entitled to their own views and local conditions dictate local management.

Georgie PURCELL: Why are shooters more important, though, than regional Victorians who are affected by this?

Barry HOWLETT: Nobody has claimed that they are.

Georgie PURCELL: So do you accept then that if duck shooting was not to continue, we could have a balance – that shooters could still do something else outdoors that benefits their mental and physical health?

Barry HOWLETT: Duck hunters could not, no.

Georgie PURCELL: Duck hunters could not do something else?

Barry HOWLETT: Duck hunters could not duck hunt if duck hunting was banned, no.

Georgie PURCELL: Correct.

Barry HOWLETT: There is not a balance.

Georgie PURCELL: That was not the question.

A member: What was the question?

David LAIRD: Could they do something else?

Barry HOWLETT: The shooters could do something else, absolutely, yes.

The CHAIR: That is time. One question, if I can: when the committee went down to Connewarre, one of the things that struck me was how close developments come to the game reserve. Do you think there are circumstances where people are living or businesses are operating too close to a game reserve? It struck me that it was like –

Daryl SNOWDON: The game reserve boundary is not expanding out to the houses; the houses are expanding into the game reserve. It is like putting a house next to the airport and complaining about aeroplanes.

The CHAIR: But do you think it is an issue?

David LAIRD: It is certainly something that has to be looked at, and I note as long as things are safe then you have not got a problem.

The CHAIR: All right. I appreciate that.

Melina BATH: Any environmental implications for the wetland by housing encroaching on it?

Daryl SNOWDON: Oh, there are massive – water outfall et cetera, pollution down the waterways, yes.

David LAIRD: I think massive problems.

Barry HOWLETT: I think David opened by saying change is the one constant. As conditions change, certainly approaches change.

Daryl SNOWDON: I would look at it a little bit, especially at Geelong and Connewarre, as the opposite. It is an example of how those things can coincide together. It has worked together for years; it is not new.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. That brings us to the conclusion of the time we have got available today. Thank you very much for coming along and for your participation in the hearings. You will receive a copy of the transcript of today's proceedings to review in about a week before we publish it on the website. The committee is now taking a break until 1:30.

Witnesses withdrew.