

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

Dr Hugh Millar, Past President, Victorian Division, Australian Veterinary Association.

The CHAIR: Welcome, Dr Millar.

Hugh MILLAR: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: I will read this short statement. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

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

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

Hugh MILLAR: Certainly. My name is Hugh Millar, and I am here on behalf of the Australian Veterinary Association, in particular the Victorian division of the national association.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. I might invite you to make an opening statement of around 5 or so minutes. Then the committee members will introduce themselves and we will start asking you questions.

Hugh MILLAR: Excellent. Thank you very much. A sincere thankyou for the opportunity to present to this select committee, a very important committee inquiring into the recreational native bird hunting arrangements in Victoria. So, yes, I am appearing on behalf of the Australian Veterinary Association and the Victorian Division of that association. I will call it the AVA. It is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. It has a strong national focus, but it is structured into state and territory divisions and special interest groups for the different sort of species of animals and so on. Our policies are national; they may have sort of regional nuance, but they are national policies, and they are developed following very significant consultation across the veterinary profession.

Our members are veterinarians who come from all fields across the profession. Actually the veterinary profession is extraordinarily broad in the different pursuits that veterinarians enjoy, from clinical practitioners working with a whole range of companion animals, farm animals, horses and wildlife to government veterinarians. In a second I will introduce myself a little bit more; that is my background. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, animal welfare, public health and quarantine systems. And then we have members working in industry, pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises, and veterinarians working in and for racing authorities, standardbred, thoroughbred and greyhounds. Members work across research and teaching, so we are a very broad church in that sense.

Just quickly, I am the immediate Past President of the AVA. I must apologise for our senior advocacy officer Dr Kristen Steele. She put most of the work into preparing our submission, and sadly for her – she is really disappointed – she is on a family holiday, being school holidays, so could not make it. I submit her apologies. So, yes, for most of my career I worked for government, and I think this is just important in a few aspects. I was the chief veterinary officer here in Victoria for close to a dozen years – a job I loved – and so I am accustomed to government policy development and, you know, that sort of general space and the balance and the challenges that invariably go into developing policies when there is ‘on this hand’ and ‘on that hand’, which is pretty much all the time. I recently stepped aside as president, but I am here today given Dr Steele's absence.

You will have read our relatively simple, I think, submission to the committee, and I thank you for that. Our national policy on this matter is in essence quite simple. We do oppose the hunting of waterfowl using shotguns, and we strongly believe that the animal welfare impacts from recreational hunting of ducks are broad and unacceptable and, in practical terms, just cannot be entirely avoided.

To just expand on our position a wee bit – in terms of the unacceptable animal welfare impacts, there are no recent studies, sadly, but certainly from past studies here and in other countries with similar hunting activities it is clear that a significant proportion or number of birds are wounded during the hunting activities but not retrieved. Wing, bill and leg fractures are common in those surviving birds, and certainly they can suffer from those disabling effects and eventually often do die and/or are taken by predators. This may not happen immediately, so it is that period of pain and suffering that we are particularly conscious of.

I think it is fair to say that there is no other animal-related pursuit that I can think of where this is sanctioned. Indeed our strong legislation in the state would normally deem a lot of this activity unacceptable or introduce the cruelty aspect of the legislation, the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. But there are specific exemptions, and that is probably the only reason why the issue of cruelty never arises. It is also at odds, I believe, with our legislation to protect and manage our native wildlife. But I am certainly not here today to represent wildlife management. That is well outside my sphere of experience, so I am not willing to be drawn too far on that score.

We also think that there are social and economic risks for Victorian society from the fact that practices like this do risk our reputation and our clear commitment in every other respect to sound animal welfare practices as a society. Again, I will not be drawn too far, but we do appreciate that there are environmental impacts as well. Interfering with the nesting of other species during that season of hunting activity is an example, but again, I am not appearing before you to pretend to be an expert in the ecological, biodiversity or environmental aspects of this activity.

I do think it is incongruent with our whole approach to animal welfare, and I for one have been closely involved as a stakeholder in a process to develop contemporary new legislation in Victoria for animal care and protection. That process, which has engaged all stakeholders really well, I believe, is moving us towards a more contemporary set of legislation, and I think that activities such as duck hunting are just inconsistent with the whole direction of our society and what we believe is appropriate for animal welfare.

It is our strong recommendation to the committee that the recreational hunting of waterfowl using shotguns – and I stress that – should be prohibited.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will ask committee members to introduce themselves.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Evan Mulholland, Northern Metropolitan Region.

Bev McARTHUR: Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region.

Jeff BOURMAN: Jeff Bourman, Eastern Victoria Region.

Sheena WATT: Hello. Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan Region.

Georgie PURCELL: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copey, Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: I am Ryan Batchelor, from the Southern Metropolitan Region, Chair of the inquiry, and I will start these questions. How long has the veterinary association had its policy position with respect to duck hunting?

Hugh MILLAR: This is one of our policies that has been recently reviewed in the last 12 months. For a long time we had a position which was probably regarded a wee bit as fence sitting, and because we respond to our members and to the profession, over time there has been a real push for the AVA to actually get off the fence. So we went through a specific period of engagement with our members, and that resulted in our policy being sharpened up and in fact moving from on the one hand and on the other hand and so on to just saying, 'We oppose it.' We cannot see the compelling reasons or the counterbalancing offsets that would justify the activity in a contemporary sense and moving forward. It is not the only animal welfare-related policy where we have sharpened up our view as well.

The CHAIR: How long would you say that consideration that you have recently given to this topic took within your organisation?

Hugh MILLAR: Like a lot of organisations, no policy is changed or developed quickly. We have a national policy advisory committee, so there is a process. Given that we are very much also a distributed organisation regionally, and we all know across Australia what happens – the situation in Victoria can be very different from the Northern Territory and so on. So to get a national policy does require quite a lot of consideration and a lot of engagement. It would have taken – I do not know exactly with this policy; I am not on that policy advisory committee, but I imagine it would have taken 12 months of engagement.

The CHAIR: One of the things you mentioned was the relationship between the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* and native bird hunting. Do you have a view as to whether the new animal welfare laws should apply to the practice of duck hunting should it continue in Victoria?

Hugh MILLAR: My view and the association's view is yes, they should.

The CHAIR: Why do you think that is?

Hugh MILLAR: It is not the only exemption in the current *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. There is a whole range of regulated, so-called, activities that receive special exemption by virtue of being a regulated activity, even though they are not regulated for the purposes of animal welfare protection. It is incongruous and I can see in the past that it was acceptable. I mean, the meat industry – basically what happens in abattoirs is exempt. Now, in this day and age every industry, every activity should be able to stand up and meet the same requirements as any other or society's expectations generally. I think exemptions because of licences issued, which are issued usually for another purpose, should not apply. I am not sure that anything has been settled, but it was one key element of our submission to the current process to look at contemporary new legislation that those exemptions are unnecessary and do create tensions that really need not be there.

The CHAIR: As I understand it, your position is because the regulatory arrangement does not have cruelty prevention as one of its components, therefore the cruelty prevention aspects of animal welfare law should apply.

Hugh MILLAR: Yes, in essence. That is not to say that the relevant authorities are not conscious of animal welfare and that there have not been shifts and improvements and codes of practice and ethical hunting principles and so on. That is terrific. But in a regulatory sense the purpose of the regulated activity is not primarily one around animal welfare. Also, I mean, if it is acceptable, it is acceptable. It ought not to be acceptable here or not acceptable here but off you go over here. In this day and age, it is not sensible.

The CHAIR: Yes, okay. Just one last question from me: we heard in earlier hearings from some ecologists that bird population lost due to hunting was – the phrase they used was 'compensatory'. Essentially I took that to mean they die anyway. Can you describe for us, given your profession, how different death and injury by shotgun is to other forms of death for native birds?

Hugh MILLAR: Well, death by natural causes in the wild, for a better term, we all know would involve a whole range of situations – different lengths of time of pain, of suffering. That is the natural course of events. In society in 2023 and beyond I just do not think that because there is natural death in a population there is any reason to actively enhance and further that. But clearly in the natural environment animals do not die with the benefit of analgesia and intervention. And we do accept that there is a level of intervention involved in duck hunting, but just by the nature of the bird, the firearm and so on, that cannot be completely managed.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Dr Millar. Are you a government vet, Dr Millar?

Hugh MILLAR: Not anymore.

Bev McARTHUR: No – always in your past life?

Hugh MILLAR: In a past life, up until 10 years ago.

Bev McARTHUR: Never worked in the private sector?

Hugh MILLAR: I did, early in my career.

Bev McARTHUR: For how long?

Hugh MILLAR: For about three years.

Bev McARTHUR: Good. You have got 6000 members in Australia. How many in Victoria?

Hugh MILLAR: It is about 1500. To be honest, I am not sure. Kristen would have told you in a flash.

Bev McARTHUR: Maybe we will take that on notice.

Hugh MILLAR: I am more than happy to get back to you with that.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. Are they all qualified veterinarians?

Hugh MILLAR: Yes, qualified and registered.

Bev McARTHUR: Registered veterinarians. How many would be private sector veterinarians as opposed to government veterinarians?

Hugh MILLAR: The vast majority would be in the private sector, because that is where the vast majority work.

Bev McARTHUR: What surveys or polling did you do of the membership before you came to this decision to oppose duck hunting?

Hugh MILLAR: The way the system works is in this case we had a policy. So the members are informed that the policy is up for review, and it is probably not unlike – well, it is not quite like this process, but nonetheless the members are invited to make their opinions, positions, known.

Bev McARTHUR: So is that review process completed?

Hugh MILLAR: Yes. So a policy, as I say, is developed through that process, and then it gets to a draft –

Bev McARTHUR: How many people participated?

The CHAIR: Let the witness finish the answer, please.

Hugh MILLAR: There is a draft, and then the draft is put out there for members to review as well. I have no idea – I can get back to you – how many responded.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. Are you opposed to all forms of shooting of animals?

Hugh MILLAR: No, we are not. You know, we have a broader policy on hunting in general, and it is reasonably clear that hunting for purely recreational purposes is not supported by the AVA. But there are all forms and situations for hunting, and provided it is done in the context of the appropriate standards and so on, we recognise that that can be and is a more acceptable pursuit. Of course often in those situations this balancing thing – which is always the case, particularly with animal welfare issues – really is important. I mean, in my past career one of the trickiest things was – because I actually was also executive director for biosecurity, which took all the invasive plants and animal control in; it was not just animal health – you know, things like the management of wild dogs and foxes, particularly wild dogs. I mean, no-one likes the idea of traps and baits and things, but there was this very strong offset that, left to their devices, wild dogs created awful, awful situations.

Bev McARTHUR: Especially with native animals.

Hugh MILLAR: With native animals, but in particular with farm animals.

Bev McARTHUR: Let alone the agricultural area.

Hugh MILLAR: Yes. On the one hand, it is not ideal that they are trapped and poisoned; on the other hand, there are clear offsets – there are compelling offsets. Our view with recreational hunting is that there is not that compelling offset.

Bev McARTHUR: So you are happy with them being shot for pest purposes to protect crops and airports, for instance?

Hugh MILLAR: Yes – well, we are happy within the appropriate frameworks and so on. Yes, that is acceptable.

Bev McARTHUR: There would be less regulation of that, really, wouldn't there, than duck shooting?

Hugh MILLAR: There are actually standards and operating procedures and so on associated with those.

Bev McARTHUR: Are you opposed to fishing? Surely that is cruel as well.

Hugh MILLAR: Fishing is an interesting one. Fish as an animal are sentient and so on. It is only in recent times that they have really come under debate about whether they should be considered animals for animal welfare purposes. Fishing is probably still a little bit of a work in progress in a whole lot of respects from an animal welfare perspective, but we would certainly advocate humane fishing.

Bev McARTHUR: What do you say about the shooting of brumbies in the High Country?

Hugh MILLAR: The association's position is that provided that is done through appropriately controlled and managed situations with appropriately expert shooters and so on, that is an acceptable thing.

Bev McARTHUR: All the evidence says it is clearly not.

Hugh MILLAR: Clearly not?

Bev McARTHUR: Clearly not done under proper situations. Horses are left to die over long periods of time; foals are left to starve.

Hugh MILLAR: That is unacceptable.

Bev McARTHUR: Unacceptable – good. You talked about the broad environmental impact of duck hunting. Can you explain that?

The CHAIR: That is time, Mrs McArthur. Let us just finish this question.

Hugh MILLAR: I think I also qualified that by saying that I did not profess to be here to have any expertise in that regard.

Bev McARTHUR: Maybe you could take that on notice and the author could get back to us.

Hugh MILLAR: I could, but I think there would be far better organisations and others –

Bev McARTHUR: The author of the submission could perhaps get back to us with that detail.

Hugh MILLAR: Yes, sure.

The CHAIR: Mr Bourman.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Dr Millar. We got around to death of the animals before and about how cruel being shot was and things like that. My view is that nature is incredibly more cruel in its own way. Do you think a bird is more or less worried whether it has been shot by a shotgun or torn apart whilst it is alive by a raptor? I have seen one torn apart while it is alive.

Hugh MILLAR: I just do not think I can answer that question.

Jeff BOURMAN: That is kind of my point. Is the AVA openly opposed to the horseracing and greyhound industries?

Hugh MILLAR: No.

Jeff BOURMAN: Why not? It has been touted as cruel as well.

Hugh MILLAR: Touted as cruel – but touting does not mean ‘is’.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you. You made a comment about ‘more acceptable pursuits’ earlier on to Mrs McArthur. I think it was regarding something more acceptable than recreational hunting of ducks. That sounds to me more like an ideological position than a veterinary or scientific position. Can you expand on what ‘a more acceptable pursuit’ means?

Hugh MILLAR: Well, I think, for instance, if animals are hunted or shot for invasive species management, that is a more balanced situation and there is a more compelling reason to potentially risk animal welfare.

Jeff BOURMAN: So by virtue of the fact that it is not native, it is okay to use a method that you do not like, as compared to a native animal?

Hugh MILLAR: No, it is not specifically to do with whether they are native animals or not. In the culling of abundant native animals, the same applies – it needs to be done properly and within appropriate standards by people who are proficient in it, and it is unacceptable if it is done outside of those parameters. But there is a clear – that is where you can see, there is a clear, compelling objective to the activity.

Jeff BOURMAN: Should recreational duck hunting be banned, there is going to be – there is already, but there will be much larger amounts of birds hunted under authority to control wildlife permits. Whether the people that do not like recreational duck hunting like it or not, that is a fact; it has happened in every other state that has banned recreational hunting. Are the AVA okay with hunters or shooters – they are more or less shooters at that stage – using a shotgun then, on native animals?

Hugh MILLAR: Presumably that is done under some sort of permit situation?

Jeff BOURMAN: You have to get a permit to actually shoot the animals, but after that it is not a lot different to recreationally hunting a bird.

Hugh MILLAR: Well, we come back to this issue of the compelling justification, if you like. To my mind that is a far more controlled situation, and ought to be, but there is a clear purpose for that other than personal enjoyment and recreation.

Jeff BOURMAN: May I ask, Dr Wirth, why you think it is more controlled –

Hugh MILLAR: Millar.

The CHAIR: It is Millar, sorry.

Jeff BOURMAN: Millar, sorry.

Hugh MILLAR: An important distinction.

Jeff BOURMAN: My apologies – yes, very. Why do you think it is more controlled with an authority to control wildlife permit than recreational hunting with protesters, GMA and all that? Because the control of wildlife permits are generally exercised on private land.

Hugh MILLAR: Yes, I guess I am thinking of the people involved. They are the farmers that run their business. If they are not, then they are sort of professionals –

Jeff BOURMAN: If I may interrupt, because we are short of time, it is actually the same people that normally go recreationally hunting; what we have is a lot of Victorian hunters going to New South Wales to shoot ducks on the rice. So I will actually I guess put it to you that there will be no change to the actual ducks, except for the paperwork behind it all.

Hugh MILLAR: Look, if that form of duck shooting involved the same level or the same issues, notwithstanding that it is offset against a clear purpose, then that would not be acceptable.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you. You mentioned social and economic risks earlier in your contribution. What studies have the AVA done to come to this conclusion, that there are actually risks?

Hugh MILLAR: Well, it is a general term, and I think that we are talking more about the risks to Victoria in terms of a progressive society with contemporary animal welfare standards. So that broad term, economic and social risk, is in that context. I know there has been recently an economic study of the economic contribution of the activity. Ours was more a reference to Victoria as a whole, as a place and a society, that in most respects has a very high reputation for a range of things, including its approach to animal welfare.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you. I will make that a question. You mentioned progressive. Every other of the top 25 progressive countries in the world, that are widely accepted to be progressive, have a form of bird and waterfowl hunting and are still considered widely progressive. Why do you think the hunting of birds under a controlled environment, which is exactly what we have got now, is not progressive?

Hugh MILLAR: For a start, we do not believe that it is sufficiently or capable of being fully controlled, and I would imagine that the veterinary associations in those countries have a similar view. I would not know.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you. Ms Watt.

Jeff BOURMAN: Just before that, my apologies for calling you the wrong name.

Hugh MILLAR: That is okay. It is not the first time in my career.

The CHAIR: Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Dr Millar, thank you very much for being here and for the submission on behalf of the association. I have a question that has not yet been asked, and I hope you can help me out. It is about the use of dogs. I understand that a range of hunting dogs are used to assist in retrieval. Do you have any comments on the hunting dog welfare practices or breeding? Or is there anything that you can shine a light on with respect to hunting dogs and their part in native bird hunting?

Hugh MILLAR: Look, it is not really an element of our policy on waterfowl hunting. I mean, clearly we know dogs are used. Our concern is for the birds, and we do acknowledge that often the use of dogs will improve the retrieval of birds that have been injured. That is accepted. In terms of those dogs and their general management and systems of breeding them and so on, that is well outside the scope of this. I would only say that the standards that appropriately apply to all dog companion animal breeding, management and care should apply.

Sheena WATT: So you have no reports about improper practices or use of those dogs at all have come through?

Hugh MILLAR: No –

Sheena WATT: That is something I am keen to understand. Are hunters good owners of these dogs? Because they are commonly used. I just thought that as a veterinary association you might have some views on that, but that is all right. What are the most common breeds, do you know? Are you prepared to share that?

Hugh MILLAR: Of?

Sheena WATT: Of the hunting dogs?

Hugh MILLAR: Look, I think they tend to be the retriever type of dog.

Sheena WATT: Yes.

Hugh MILLAR: Again, I could get back to you, but there would be others far more knowledgeable.

Sheena WATT: I think there are two types of animals here that are most involved in native bird hunting arrangements – one is ducks and quails and the other is dogs – so I thought that perhaps it was worth exploring that. But that is all right. I will go to disturbance. You said in your submission that other species suffer from noise and movement disturbance and named particularly swans. Are there any other impacts of that disturbance

that we should be considering from an animal welfare perspective? Apart from the short-term movement, are there changes to –

Hugh MILLAR: I think they are more ecological than specifically welfare, but I would imagine that disruption to nesting activities can and would have welfare impacts. Again, we are not trying to put ourselves forward as the key keepers of knowledge on environmental and ecological impacts, but I am simply pointing out that there are these broader impacts on non-target species.

Sheena WATT: Yes. Okay. I thought I would now go to wounding. The draft wounding action plan says that a minimum standard of hunter skills is required to reduce wounding, yet these minimum standards do not exist. Some hunting groups question really if it is necessary to have these standards. Should there be a minimum skill requirement for hunters, and if so, do you have any view on what that might be?

Hugh MILLAR: Yes, I believe so. I guess the bit that concerns us most is that if birds are retrieved and they are injured. I see that in the code of practice it is very general, the ethical principles. The Victorian game authority code is very general: they should be humanely dispatched. That is easily said, but I think that is an area where there should be, if hunters have to go through some assessment and training in identification of different waterfowl species and so on, then things like the humane killing of birds. It is a bit of a gruesome topic, but wringing a bird's neck is not actually easy to do humanely. It is not actually something that is just easily done. In another activity or another role that I have at the moment, which is with the animal ethics committee at a big animal laboratory, it is teaching technicians to skilfully dislocate the neck of a bird. It does require some training. I am not saying it is a difficult thing to learn, but it needs to be learned. So I think there are things like that if you are going to find a way to further augment or offset some of these things. I do not know how practical it is, but that would be one thing that I would see should be added to the minimum competencies of someone licensed to shoot, to hunt.

Sheena WATT: Lovely. That is about it for my time today. Thank you very much, Dr Millar.

Hugh MILLAR: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Thank you for your presentation to all of us, Dr Millar. Say this inquiry and the government came to a decision other than to ban duck hunting, and say that was off the table, what would be your preferred model to tighten up the requirements and what would you recommend in the view of yourself and your association to better manage it?

Hugh MILLAR: I think the association's policy, as you can see, is kind of simple. If the situation was it was clear that the activity was here to stay, then I think we would maintain policies. I do not think we would veer from our position. But in terms of improvements to the other arrangements, then I think some of the things that I have just mentioned would become a necessary part of being permitted to hunt waterfowl with shotguns – that is, to understand the appropriate means of humane killing. But that is for birds that are recovered. Birds that are not recovered, I do not have –

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just on the shotgun point, I just wanted to get your thoughts. There was a recent study conducted by the government in South Australia, which you might have seen, that found that deer culled using shotguns instead of rifles improved the efficacy of welfare outcomes. What would you say to that?

Hugh MILLAR: I have not seen that. But just from first principles – and I cannot talk from the association on that one – given the size and the situation, I would imagine that a shotgun could be a more effective means of killing a deer. But you would also have to be a lot closer, I imagine. But you are getting outside my expertise here.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just expanding on Mr Bourman's question, can you elaborate on the statement about economic risk in relation to retaining hunting? I just want to clarify the evidence for that. I recognise you mentioned social – but economic risk?

Hugh MILLAR: Again, I will just make the distinction. I am aware that there was work done on that – I just want to make sure we are distinct from that. There was an economic study of the economic contribution. In

my long experience, in my past life, there is a difference between economists telling you what the economic contribution of an activity may be, to the economic impact of ceasing that activity. They are not the same thing. People still spend money. If they do not do this, they do that. It is not a simple matter of saying that is lost to the Victorian economy. We do recognise that study. As I think I said before, we are talking more generally about the risks to Victoria as a society from having policies incongruent with contemporary animal welfare.

We are seeing animal welfare creeping into trade more and more. This is an area that I have of course had a lot to do with. Our livestock industries depend massively on exports. Our farmers feed Australia on a Monday, and the rest of the week their efforts in raising livestock are to feed others. Increasingly in international trade, issues like animal welfare – and obviously climate – are creeping in, whether we like it or not. These are all things which countries are taking into account in trade. I am also very acutely aware that animal welfare is becoming an element in trade. Whether it should or should not, it is.

Evan MULHOLLAND: That is fair enough.

Hugh MILLAR: That is an example of a potential economic risk, but we are talking more generally when we say that.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes. I am not sure other countries should be deciding what we do in a democratic country with trade.

Hugh MILLAR: Well, that is trade.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I just want to get to my last question. You mentioned at a social level a reason that it would damage our reputation as a progressive state or progressive society. We just heard from the Electrical Trades Union, who are about as progressive as you can get on lots of issues – I suspect far to the left of the AVA. They disagree that it is progressive to ban duck hunting. Is your statement around progressivism just on the vibe? Do you think there is a greater reason to ban duck hunting than progressivism or the vibe?

Hugh MILLAR: I do not think that we are relying on a vibe at all. We are very clear and, in that sense, simple in that we believe that there are unacceptable animal welfare aspects to the activity, with insufficient compelling offsets. We do not believe the practice should continue, progressive or otherwise, in the context of the fact that as a society we are progressing with our attitudes to the use, management and care of animals.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thanks for joining us today. Just a few questions, and I think you have been reasonably clear in your evidence so far, so feel free to answer these shortly should you wish. In the AVA's view, would you say that should duck shooting continue, wounding is an inevitable consequence of that activity?

Hugh MILLAR: That is at the core of our policy.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Does the AVA have a view on the impact on endangered species and whether impact on endangered species as part of duck shooting is an inevitable part of the season?

Hugh MILLAR: That is really not the focus of our policy. We do accept and appreciate that the permissible species that can be shot are clear and that there is a requirement for waterfowl identification training and so on. No doubt there are non-target impacts, but again that is getting into the realm of ecology and biodiversity that we might have a view on but are not professing to have any expertise on. We are not really relating it to other threatened species, but we accept that the ecosystem is a tangled web – you disrupt one bit and you will disrupt other bits. That is true, but that is not at the core of our policy.

Katherine COPSEY: Yes, and that goes to physical disruption of other species other than game ducks during the season as well. So despite the fact that there is quite clear guidance given around humane dispatch of game species, we have continued to hear pro-shooting witnesses to this hearing defend the practice of windmilling. Given that, despite significant resources going into trying to educate the shooting population, do you think that cruelty is an inevitable part of dispatch practices?

Hugh MILLAR: We do. Again, that is at the core of us saying that we just cannot see that it can be managed to become acceptable.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you.

Hugh MILLAR: That and the birds that are not retrieved, which is inevitable as well, are the fairly sharp aspects of what concerns us most.

Katherine COPSEY: Yes. Now just turning also to some of the views of your membership, this committee has been hearing about the so-called positive mental health aspects of shooting ducks throughout various witnesses' evidence. I just wonder if you could give some insight into the mental health impacts that you might have heard from your membership. I understand many of the people who undertake rescue activities, particularly veterinary intervention during duck shooting, are practising vets who are doing that on a volunteer basis. I know that that is not part of your submission, but do you have any insight into the mental health stress impacts and the resource impacts that those volunteer activities have on vets who undertake those exercises?

Hugh MILLAR: We do, if not specifically for that element of that broad problem. There is an issue in the profession, and it is growing, of mental wellness or mental ill health. Vets are called upon to do many, many things other than just their core business, if you like – paying clients – and they have willingly done and continue to willingly do these things. Wildlife rescue – receiving wildlife that need treatment and care with no owner – has long been a part of veterinary practice. It is increasingly, in a sense, taking a toll. Some elements of wildlife rescue are just inevitable misadventures of wildlife, but when it is part of a deliberate activity, that is a harder thing again. So I would have no doubt that at least one element of the consultation and the feedback that we have had as an association from our members is the issue that you have just identified and that it is avoidable.

Katherine COPSEY: Yes. As opposed to many of the difficult tasks that your members would be called on to do as part of their day-to-day work, there is the additional aspect that this is done for recreation.

Hugh MILLAR: Indeed.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I do not have further questions.

The CHAIR: Ms Purcell.

Georgie PURCELL: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Dr Millar, for coming along today and speaking to us. Could you please explain from a veterinary perspective the effects that shotguns and cluster pellets have on the bodies of ducks and the injuries that can come with them?

Hugh MILLAR: Well, only in a general sense. I mean, there is clearly no doubt that the impact of a shotgun pellet spray from a physiological point of view is highly significant. If it kills the birds outright, then that is fine. But again, by the nature of a shotgun spray, if that is the right word, birds will get a sublethal impact, and that is the clear concern. We are not concerned about the fact that a bird could be killed with a shotgun cleanly and outright. If that was always the case, then that would be fine, but it is not. And it is very hard to say, 'Well, we can manage that problem away.' So it is significant that it is not just a wound that would simply heal from just a single projectile.

Georgie PURCELL: Yes, thank you. I wanted to talk more broadly about wounding. I understand that Dr Bronwyn Orr is not here today, but she is your current president, who also used to be recently on the board of the Game Management Authority. Has there been a unique perspective that she has been able to bring to the AVA, from having that experience on the GMA board, on this issue?

Hugh MILLAR: Look, I would imagine so. I am not on the policy advisory committee, so I have not been party to the variety of views and submissions. But there would be no doubt that Bronwyn's would have been significant, given her position within the Association – she would have been heard. So I have no idea what her submissions would have been for this process, but our policy was developed with the benefit of her contribution, whatever that was.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you. It sort of leads on from what Ms Copsey was talking about on the challenges that the veterinary industry is facing at the moment. As I am sure you are aware, there are

unprecedented shortages of both vets and vet nurses, particularly in regional areas, due to a range of factors like compounding stress, compassion fatigue and rates of pay. Would you say that it is a good use of veterinary resources to be deployed in either a paid or volunteer capacity to wetlands during the recreational duck-shooting season instead of being able to service your communities?

Hugh MILLAR: No, I would not. It might be a necessary activity under current arrangements, but it is not useful, and it is definitely, as I indicated before, adding to this very real and growing problem within the profession of the pressures on and the mental wellness of veterinarians. You are quite right. Particularly in rural areas there is a crisis developing with the availability of veterinarians for the whole range of things that they necessarily do, much less things that they need to do that could be avoided, such as what we are talking about.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you. Do you believe that there is any way at all that wounding or suffering can be stopped or avoided during a recreational duck-shooting season?

Hugh MILLAR: I would think, in all practical terms, no.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you. The committee has heard from a number of witnesses who are not qualified veterinarians that spoke about the ethical killing and wounding of ducks. One witness even told us that ducks can live happily post wounding on wetlands for years. In your view, would you consider this a possibility, or should the committee take the view of the veterinary association in a stronger way than duck shooters when it comes to wounding advice?

Hugh MILLAR: Look, I think it is the fact of wounding and non-retrieval. Wounding and non-retrieval is very much at the heart of our concerns. And if I have got your question right, that is the element that is very difficult, from our point of view, to manage away, under all the circumstances. Certainly ducks survive. I mean, a study – I cannot quote it, except that I remember seeing it – found that there is a surprising percentage of ducks found with lead shot who have clearly been wounded and survived. But survival after what? That in itself does not justify the practice.

Georgie PURCELL: Thanks so much, Dr Millar.

The CHAIR: Dr Millar, thank you very much for your evidence today. We appreciate the time you have taken. You will shortly receive a proof transcript of your evidence and the discussion for review before we publish it on the website. With that, the hearing will adjourn till 1 o'clock.

Hugh MILLAR: Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.