

# 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

**WITNESSES**

Ms Glenys Oogjes, Chief Executive Officer,

Ms Louise Bonomi, Director of Development, and

Ms Jo Wilkinson, Consultant, Animals Australia.

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

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and 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 that you are appearing on behalf of.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Certainly. My name is Glenys Oogjes. I am the CEO of Animals Australia.

**Louise BONOMI:** Louise Bonomi, Director of Development, Animals Australia.

**Jo WILKINSON:** Jo Wilkinson. I am a consultant to Animals Australia. I helped to prepare their submission.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We will invite you to make an opening statement – I believe you have got something else you want to show us as part of that allotment of time – and then we will introduce ourselves as members of the committee and start asking you some questions. So over to you.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Thank you. Lou is going to start, and then I will say something after.

**Louise BONOMI:** Thanks, Ryan. Thank you to the committee for having Animals Australia present here today. Our vision at Animals Australia is a world where kindness, compassion and respect extend to all living beings. This vision is one that is supported by our members, who represent a broad cross-section of our community in Victoria and across the country, including many regional Victorians, and this brings a diverse range of animal protection and political views. But when it comes to recreational shooting of wildlife, there is very clear alignment.

We have seen a staggering 54,203 emails sent to local MPs and Victorian ministers since July 2019 in support of an end to duck shooting in our state. Over the years we have seen widespread and routine non-compliance out on the wetlands and regulatory failings from the GMA. We have routinely documented and reported breaches, including illegal shooting of threatened and non-game species, shooters exceeding bag limits, shooting outside official times and particularly shooters routinely failing to kill birds quickly or effectively. As the committee will have seen through submissions and evidence given so far, this non-compliance has continued through this 2023 season.

But our biggest and remaining ongoing concern is the fact that recreational shooting causes unavoidable suffering to hundreds of thousands of native birds each year. This mistreatment of native wildlife is not aligned with community values, nor is it accepted in other states and territories. This is why we, along with the majority of Victorians, want recreational duck shooting to end.

And we will now throw to the video, please, Kieran.

**Video shown.**

**Glenys OOGJES:** So, Chair, from the video just shown it is clear that wounding occurs and causes great fear and suffering to the birds. It is notable that way back in 1958 this Parliament, under Premier Henry Bolte, a

shooter himself, prohibited the trapshooting of birds on welfare grounds. This Parliament and the community it served recognised then the obvious suffering some 65 years ago. Shooting birds with an arc of metal pellets inherently causes wounding. It is known that the wounding rate is high and cannot be reduced to an acceptable level. Given this is an unnecessary recreational pursuit targeting sentient animals, the acceptable level of wounding is really zero. Modelling of the wounding rate is imprecise, we agree, but we believe most of the estimates are gross underestimates. The number wounded is likely at least double the 30 per cent figure often quoted and acknowledged by GMA. We say that because most estimates only consider birds observed downed and wounded; they ignore the uncountable flying wounded. But they can be calculated from X-ray data surveys of that portion who fly on but miraculously survive. Even the current POCTA, the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, says, relevantly, a person who wounds or terrifies an animal commits an act of cruelty. Only the outdated code and regulations serve to exempt duck and quail shooting from prosecution. We implore this committee to rectify this unacceptable gap in protection for our native birds. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will ask committee members to introduce themselves. We will start with Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria.

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

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Jeff Bourman, Eastern Victoria Region.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Evan Mulholland, Northern Metropolitan.

**The CHAIR:** I am Ryan Batchelor, Southern Metropolitan, Chair of the committee. I am going to start.

How many non-game or threatened species do you think you have seen killed or wounded in Victoria during a hunting season?

**Glenys OOGJES:** I think I will throw that one to Lou; Lou has been out more than me. But I think that it is also a really difficult one because each year the ones that are displayed, the ones that are found, are only of course going to be from a minority – a snapshot, if you like – of what is happening out there when independent rescuers are out there at some wetlands on some days. Whereas there are thousands – hundreds, thousands – of places that shooters can be over however long the season is, up to three months. I do not know if you have anything to add, Lou, but it is really difficult.

**Louise BONOMI:** Do you mean from this season just gone or overall?

**The CHAIR:** Yes. I have been asking a series of questions to groups as they come in to identify what they think the acceptable level of that is, but I suspect I know the answer from your perspectives. I am interested in your observations of how much of that is occurring. That is the judgement we have to make.

**Louise BONOMI:** Yes. Okay. Certainly, and we have included this in our submission of course, from the opening week, from Wednesday to the Sunday, of this season there were – I am just counting up here in front of me, which we can refer to on notice – about five threatened species, just from that opening week. The majority of those were from the opening morning, and that was just from the location where some of the volunteers and the Wildlife Vic triage unit was stationed. It would be a guess to extrapolate that out to every single wetland, but of those found –

**The CHAIR:** And in rough percentage terms, what percentage of coverage does your organisation or do similar organisations have of the available reserves for hunting?

**Glenys OOGJES:** It is tiny.

**Jo WILKINSON:** Point zero, zero.

**Glenys OOGJES:** It is a very tiny percentage of both time while hunting is occurring as well as the places that we can be at. I have to say that is replicated by the regulators. Even on the opening weekend or opening days, even though they bring in the police and wildlife officers and others as well as GMA staff, they can still only cover a very small portion of places.

**The CHAIR:** I want to go now to what happens to the evidence of hunter non-compliance or hunter infractions that you gather in the course of your activities. What do you do? You have got vision. You have got observation. What happens then? And what happens after that?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Okay. Our submission goes to this. Indeed at – and I am just looking at which attachment –

**Jo WILKINSON:** The first one.

**Glenys OOGJES:** At attachment A there is an 80-page document that goes through our complaints from 2016 to 2022. We have focused on those, and then we have put in more this last season, 2023. We have focused on those because that is the period where we have focused on ensuring that we gather the information that rescuers provide to us, Animals Australia. Our legal team then puts it together, provides the video vision and any information – witness statements, for example – in a brief to the GMA. We do that regularly, each season, and we then liaise with GMA.

I have to say to you, as a generalisation but in summary, that we have not found that there have been adequate sanctions, if you like. Investigations often have been botched in the past. There is one example you will see, if you go to attachment A, of backwards and forwards with GMA where there was a report of an issue, a breach, and we followed up several times only to find that the witness account and the footage had been lost. We provided it again, and it was still some nine months or so before they first attempted to talk to the witness. That is one example of real frustration. Across the board what we found is that there is not a willingness to fully investigate or to take it further through. Therefore what we have is a situation where the regulator is not providing a situation where hunters could think for a moment that they are going to be sanctioned for any breaches. It is just a very frustrating system. We continue to do it because we think it is worthwhile bringing it to the fore.

**The CHAIR:** We heard evidence on Monday that peer pressure is perhaps the best and most effective way to improve hunting standards. Do you have any observations on the actions by hunters that you have observed on reserves or on wetlands as to the kind of peer enforcement that takes place?

**Louise BONOMI:** Just quickly – sorry, Glenys, I will just jump in there. Apart from us personally seeing fewer hunters, which is anecdotal of course, the types of behaviours continue regardless of the season. Whether they happen in the volumes that they used to or not is one thing. Certainly post COVID, in that gap from 2019 to now, in terms of volumes on the wetlands, what we just saw there were things like discouraged behaviours like windmilling. It is still happening.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have any evidence of hunters telling other hunters not to do certain things which you would view as an infraction?

**Glenys OOGJES:** I am not out there enough. I think that Jo is very keen to give you an anecdote.

**Jo WILKINSON:** I think it is relevant. You would be well aware of the two particular scandals, Box Flat in 2013 and Koorangie Marshes in 2017. There were a number of shooters present, and certainly at Koorangie Marshes the authorities were also present. I think it is telling that nobody volunteered information as to who the culprits were, and after extensive investigations no-one was held accountable. That is a little while ago, but that is one example. Another telling statistic, I think, is that in the 2019 hunter survey report from RMCG, tucked away on page 91, is an amazing statistic that only 29 per cent of game hunters belong to gun clubs. More than 70 per cent of game hunters do not even buy a membership, which is about \$100, give or take. That is how interested they are in learning about best practice and being educated by the leaders.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, ladies, for attending. We just heard from the ETU before, and Troy declared he was a member of the Labor Party. Are any of you members of a political party?

**Glenys OOGJES:** No.

**Jo WILKINSON:** No.

**Glenys OOGJES:** I am not sure that that is relevant.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It is important to declare all our allegiances. Are you a member of a political party?

**Glenys OOGJES:** No.

**Bev McARTHUR:** No. No?

**Louise BONOMI:** No.

**Bev McARTHUR:** No. No?

**Jo WILKINSON:** No.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Good. Do any of your volunteers or supporters go out and do conservation work in wetland areas?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Lou can speak to that. We are not actually a conservation organisation – I am saying that up-front. Our key role is to raise issues of animal protection. Having said that – Lou.

**Louise BONOMI:** Yes, highly likely. We are actually very proud to have supported several community projects in Victoria, across Australia. We are a national organisation, but in Victoria specifically, yes, absolutely. Post fires is when we put a lot of funding into revegetation work, obviously because of the widespread destruction of wildlife habitat. That funding came through from supporters and members of ours crying out for help who were needing help to revegetate areas that had been burned by the bushfires. We do that, and we are very happy to do that to support that work in terms of funding because it provides lasting and ongoing protection for the inhabitants of that habitat.

**Bev McARTHUR:** What about in the wetland areas where duck shooting does occur? Do you do any work there?

**Louise BONOMI:** We support a major wetland revegetation project out on the Surf Coast of Victoria, but no, duck shooting does not –

**Bev McARTHUR:** Which one is that?

**Louise BONOMI:** That is Seatrees Foundation down on the Surf Coast. They are not allowed to shoot down there, which is why we support it. And as I said, that lasting, ongoing protection is important, because we are not happy to hand out money for work that is done so that those people can come back and kill the inhabitants of those wetlands. That is not why we operate as an organisation. Our donors would be very unhappy if we did that.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, we are looking for volunteers that do work on wetlands that provide nesting boxes for all number of species of bird life, not just the seven, for instance, in Connemara that are able to be shot. But let us go to one of your assessments that duck shooting will increase the duck numbers. Where it has been banned – for instance, in New South Wales – the numbers have declined, so how do you argue that banning duck shooting actually increases the number of ducks around?

**Jo WILKINSON:** I think the answer to that is fairly straightforward. It is likely the numbers may have declined further if they were still shooting them. I mean, that is a pretty simple one. But could I just come back –

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, the evidence we have received from Professor Kingsford is that the main reason for loss of bird life along the east coast is due to habitat loss and encroaching urbanisation. What do you say to that?

**Glenys OOGJES:** That is absolutely a real concern. It will be contributing to the trend, the seemingly quite dire trend, to reduce the numbers of birds over many years. There is climate change. There are a lot of reasons, and habitat loss is a primary one. All of those are very good reasons not to continue to recreationally shoot these native birds. I fail to see the point you are trying to make.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, these birds are going to be shot because of course they are allowed to be shot where they are affecting agricultural enterprises and airports, for example. So what you say to that?

**Jo WILKINSON:** I am happy to say that a lot has been made about the rice crop protection in New South Wales. People do not necessarily look at the stats. But if you look at the last eight years of stats, which are publicly available, the average cull in the New South Wales rice crop program is 5 per cent of our recreational cull for that same eight-year period – 5 per cent. Ours is for recreation; theirs is for economic purposes.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You referenced the presence of an orange-bellied parrot at Lake Connemara as a reason to close that wetland network. What comment do you have on the fact that the Arthur Rylah Institute advised us that those released and wild birds have been in that location for at least the last five years and that in their scientific assessments each year they did not feel a need to close that wetland to hunting?

**Jo WILKINSON:** I can answer that one. The Arthur Rylah Institute, as you probably know, funded by DEECA, released an updated report on disturbance to waterbirds, and if you look at the criteria there, the criterion for orange-bellied parrots is one. If they see one, they have to look at management action. That is how rare the parrot is. But that is exactly following the recommendations of the 2022 update of that ARI report.

**Glenys OOGJES:** I think that is a reflection more on the ineffectiveness or unwillingness of GMA to close wetlands when they should be closed.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You are involved in the welfare practices, I understand, in farming, racing, entertainment and animal testing. What do you say about the cruelty to the brumbies in the High Country being shot?

**Jo WILKINSON:** That is irrelevant.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It is not a relevant if you are an animal welfare organisation, surely.

**Glenys OOGJES:** We see that as a very wicked problem, I have to say to you, because there is animal suffering on both sides of that debate. But it is totally irrelevant to talking about recreational shooting of ducks and quail, which we are here to talk about today.

**Bev McARTHUR:** So do you approve the shooting of wild pigs and wild deer?

**Glenys OOGJES:** As I said, again, I think it is irrelevant. But in short answer, where there are animals in areas where they are causing damage of some sort, if they have to be managed – if the population has to be managed – and if it has to be a lethal management, which it does not always, then it should be in the most humane way possible.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You made an allegation that in 2022 at Kerang swans' nests were destroyed by shooters. Have you got any evidence?

**Louise BONOMI:** Yes, that was submitted last year.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Can you provide it to the committee?

**Louise BONOMI:** We can check who submitted that and provide it.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** That is time, Mrs McArthur. Ms Purcell.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thanks, Chair. Thank you very much for appearing today and for your long advocacy on this issue, and I sincerely hope we are reaching an end to this campaign. We know that Animals Australia has been working for over a decade on the issue of recreational duck shooting; taking into consideration what you have seen as an organisation over the years and the points that you raised about your experience with the GMA in both your submission and your evidence today, do you believe that duck shooting can ever truly be properly regulated in Victoria?

**Glenys OOGJES:** No, is the short answer. But the longer answer is that, as I have already indicated, we have real concerns about the willingness and the ability of GMA to regulate it. That was seen to be a real concern, for example, in the independent Pegasus report of the way the GMA was operating. I think the other element, though, is the difficulty of regulating, even with the best intentions. The tools are just not there, and the way that recreational duck shooting is conducted – that is, its inherent nature – is that using shotguns which provide an arc of pellets to shoot at flying, moving targets; that is always going to mean that animals are going to be wounded. But in addition to that, it is very difficult for a regulator to know exactly which gun and which person has fired a gun to effect that suffering – or if it is a threatened species, whatever the offence is, if you like – to be able to nail that person, that is to be able to prosecute that person, using, obviously, credible evidence. So that is a problem we have with providing information to GMA. But it is an inherent problem with trying to regulate something, and we have found that over and over again. It is just very difficult to have even the very basic laws that we have adhered to.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you. And I meant to ask at the beginning, for the purposes of the committee's information, was all of the footage that you showed in your opening statement from the 2023 season alone?

**Jo WILKINSON:** Yes, just this season gone, yes.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you very much.

**Jo WILKINSON:** Could I just add too, to Glenys's reply, just in terms of numbers, GMA keeps very tight lips about how many wetlands there are available for duck shooting, but unofficially we have been told it is 20,000 wetlands, plus streams and waterways. Now if you just look at the numbers, you could have an entire army trying to supervise that, and they could not be everywhere. In fact the Regulatory Impact Statement 2012 that underpins the current rules said that most hunting will occur out of sight.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you. I was going to ask if you think it is possible to achieve humane or ethical duck shooting in Victoria, but I am presuming from your previous answer, the answer is no. I am hoping you could describe to the committee just some of the instances of cruelty that you have seen since you became involved as an organisation in the campaign and some of the injuries that we see native waterbirds endure.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Yes, you will have seen some in the video of course; that is just such a small portion of it. But just to go to the wounding issues; I know that the secretariat would have provided you with this very simple Venn diagram. What I want to say is that, what we understand is that around 300 – what was it, 300 –

**Jo WILKINSON:** 300,000.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Some 300,000-plus birds are killed in a normal season, up to 500,000, if you like. But what I would like to say to you is that wounding has been acknowledged by GMA as some 30 per cent – that comes from a lot of different studies, but they acknowledge it to be 30 per cent. And that is in addition to the birds that have been bagged. So if we are looking at this Venn diagram, the 'retrieved (bagged)', that is those that have been shot – some of them might have been killed outright of course, but many of them also would have been wounded. You see there that they are down, they are wounded and then they are taken by a shooter, and you will see the cruelty involved in not killing them properly and quickly. So the suffering and fear that they feel is part of that bagged figure. In addition to that, you have the 30 per cent figure on top of that just acknowledged – we think it is more than that, but another 30 per cent on top of that. So that is the red, the downed and not retrieved, okay, but they are wounded. They probably die over time. They are predated or die of their wounds.

There is another whole segment that is a larger figure again, which are flying wounded. That is, shooters are shooting at them, and they appear to fly on. You might sometimes see them flinch when they are hit by a pellet, but they are not mortally wounded. They keep going; they may go out of the wetland to another wetland. Those

are very hard to estimate, but they are there, and we know they are there because of the X-ray surveys that are done. GMA/ARI did one recently, but some of you will know that Norman did a whole lot down at Serendip through the 50s, 60s, 70s. They were finding multiple pellets in birds back then, up to 20 per cent of birds having pellets in them, some with multiple pellets. In the most recent GMA/ARI, looking at just the young birds that were hatched the year before, 7.5 per cent of them had pellets in them – and they are the ones that have survived, okay? It is a survey of ones that have survived. Many of the flying wounded would have died, so the 30 per cent is a total underestimate. We would say that at least for every bird bagged there is going to be another one that will be harmed in some way and will die or recover to be found later with pellets inside them.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you. And just quickly, could you just tell us the shift that you have seen in public opinion since Animals Australia joined this campaign?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Yes. Well, we have been involved for decades. I think that in the early days – the 80s, 90s, 2000s even – not very many people knew what was going on, and as Jo has said, most of it goes on behind the scenes. The Coalition against Duck Shooting and others have been able to bring it to media attention and political attention. So what we have seen is an increase in understanding of the Victorian community and a growing opposition, and I think you will know from the RSPCA and other surveys that it is very high. Most – the majority of people in Victoria – do not support this cruel recreational sport.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Watt.

**Sheena WATT:** Thank you all for being here. I might jump on Georgie's question and ask about community sentiment. I see in number 10 of your submission you talked about the withdrawal of the social licence. Your comments then about changing community sentiment over years, are they based off the same RSPCA survey or is that something that you yourselves have done? I am just keen to understand the source data for that.

**Glenys OOGJES:** We have not done surveys ourselves as such, have we? But I think, Lou, you could speak about our supporters and our knowledge of that.

**Louise BONOMI:** Yes. So we reference the data that comes and is refreshed through the RS Vic. Anecdotally, in Victoria one of the most active issues that we see through our supporter base – and it almost even trumps actions on live export – is duck shooting in Victoria. So anecdotally in terms of volume we have not seen numbers that high in terms of people individually taking action to speak out against a practice as they do with duck shooting. Really it is just indicative of this evolution of our values in society – this shift in and this acknowledgement that reinforces really solid animal welfare science over the years and luckily for animals an evolving community sentiment that agrees with that and does not accept even individual levels of animal suffering. It is important to recognise.

**Glenys OOGJES:** If I could add, too, we are in these couple of years where the current government is reviewing the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. There is already of course a plan for a new animal welfare Act – it will be called that rather than the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. It will recognise sentience. We have all known for decades that animals are sentient, but this will explicitly talk about the fact that they are sentient and therefore require equal consideration and should be not treated cruelly. So I do think that this current government has accepted that.

It has been incredible. During the consultations for what will become a bill later in the year, the consultations up to now have been huge, as have the number of submissions that have been provided. It is a clear indication that the Victorian community is interested in this issue and concerned about animal welfare, more so than they would have been in years past when they were not as aware of the hidden cruelty in many practices.

**Sheena WATT:** So with the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, which you mentioned being changed, is it the position of Animals Australia with respect to native birds and native bird hunting that that should be included?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Now and in the new Act, but of course the permission to shoot birds is under the *Wildlife Act* at the present time. But we do believe that the new Act should provide a fair and singular approach across the government on all of these practices. So obviously recreational duck shooting does not accord with current social values.

**Sheena WATT:** We have heard some critics of the 2023 seasonal arrangements saying that they ignore the scientific advice and the evidence. What is your view on the science that led to that decision and on other factors that fed into the decision on the seasonal arrangements?

**Jo WILKINSON:** I think –

**Glenys OOGJES:** Yes, go for it.

**Jo WILKINSON:** I think it is often claimed that the science said there should have been a full-length season. That is really a misunderstanding of what a scientific model is. My background is in science. You would know that Kingsford and Klaassen were asked by GMA to build a model to help to guide them with season settings, and they were given a choice of whether they would modify the bag limit or modify the season length. Because it is easier to build a model if you do not have too many moving parts, so not too many variables, for convenience it was decided to leave the season length alone and to just modify the bag. So in that model season length was not a variable. It was not even in there. It was just assumed we would have a full-length season, which no doubt GMA thought would be popular with shooters, and so they tampered with the bag. Just to illustrate how unrelated to reality that is, they looked at 30 years of data going back the last 30 years and what the bag limits were and so on, and in half of those 30 years the season length was changed. So they have built a model saying, 'We're going to have a fixed season length' and using data over a 30-year period, but 15 of those 30 years had short seasons, and four of them actually had cancelled seasons. So it is just wrong to say the science said we should have had a full-length season.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Could I add to that? I think that you have a handout which looks at the trend in the estimated number of birds by the eastern Australian waterbird survey, indicating that –

**Sheena WATT:** Are you saying that is in your submission, sorry, or is that an additional handout?

**Jo WILKINSON:** It is meant to be.

**Sheena WATT:** Oh, yes, the handout. Sorry. Thank you.

**Glenys OOGJES:** So I think that is the science we should be looking at. The population of waterbirds by that now 40-year-long survey trends absolutely down. It will be of great concern if it continues in that downward trajectory, as we are going to be seriously looking at having the extinction of these populations. We have on top of that climate change of course. It is adding recreational shooting to the trend of the birds that we are losing and, as Bev McArthur said, already these birds are being so affected by lack of habitat.

**Sheena WATT:** That is lovely. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Mulholland.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Thanks so much for presenting today. If I was to give you a hypothetical scenario where duck hunting was not banned but you could suggest recommendations to tighten the regulations up and the practice and try to eliminate some of the concerns that you have, what would you suggest?

**Jo WILKINSON:** While you are thinking about that, could I just quote from this GMA PowerPoint presentation by Dr Jordan Hampton and Simon Toop that was released under FOI. I will just quote this:

Duck hunting by shotgun unavoidably causes wounding of waterfowl –  
that is from the GMA; they know you cannot stop the wounding –

due to insufficient pellet strikes that penetrate to vital organs or fail to immobilise the bird so it can be recovered and dispatched.

Now, that is from the GMA. Admittedly we needed to use FOI or someone had to use FOI to get that. So it is a bit hard to ask us to recommend a way to keep the practice going when you cannot stop the wounding. Sorry, Glenys.

**Glenys OOGJES:** No, that is all right, and I think I said in my opening statement that the only acceptable wounding rate is zero. I understand you are wanting a hypothetical, but it is the inherent physiology, if you like, of firing hundreds of metal pellets into the air to flying animals – and you cannot do that; it cannot be humane.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes. You mentioned the shotgun part. There was a recent study conducted by the government in South Australia on culled deer that found that using shotguns instead of rifles actually improved the efficacy of welfare outcomes. Would you agree with that?

**Glenys OOGJES:** I have not seen that study, so it would be really hard to comment. But again, clearly it is very difficult to kill animals in the wild, so I would be really sceptical. Happy to read that study, but I cannot comment on it otherwise.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** No worries. Does Animals Australia support industrial duck farming for the purposes of food on a plate?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Our concern about all sorts of farming and all sorts of practices, including the issue we are talking about today, is to reduce the suffering of those animals. Often in industrial farming you are talking about confinement and you are talking about a barren environment that is an under-enriched environment. So you have significant problems with most of those systems, and you often have disease because you have such crowded animals. We are concerned. Some of what we do do – and you will have seen this in our public actions – is to provide the community with information about those systems so that they then can make their own informed choices about what they wish to buy.

**Louise BONOMI:** There are similarities there when we are talking about ducks that end up on people's plates. When we are talking about providing information transparency, the thing that we see with industrial factory farming of ducks and recreational duck shooting is that it happens out of sight largely, which is a problem a lot of the time because people cannot make informed decisions on either. That is exactly what we have done in both instances. Whether it be factory farming or whether it be wildlife shot that ends up on the plate, our role is to bring that information to people and say, 'Look, we're not going to tell you what to do. We're not going to tell you what to eat or who not to eat. We're going to give information that you can then make an informed decision whether this is aligned with your values or not.' That is what we are doing, whether it be wildlife who are shot and eaten or factory-farmed ducks.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Just following up the conversation before, and I say this as somewhat of a rubbish golfer but a semiregular one: when ducks gather in large numbers on golf courses, I understand that they are quietly poisoned. Do you support that?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Sorry, they are poisoned, did you say?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Oh, absolutely not. That is quite a terrible thing to do. Population management of animals that compete, if you like, is always a difficult thing to do humanely, but that is exactly what we are striving to do.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** How would you control them, though?

**Glenys OOGJES:** Non-lethal methods.

**Louise BONOMI:** So you are talking, obviously, about the ATCW system, the authority to control wildlife system in Victoria.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes.

**Louise BONOMI:** We highlight the range of wildlife who are killed under the permit system in Victoria. If you look at volumes of animals who are killed under that permit system, macropods aside, it is far, far fewer than those who were shot recreationally in Victoria when we are talking about native ducks. The department does often, if you have a look at the ATCW system, encourage non-lethal mitigation strategies to be employed. A lot of golf clubs do. We have seen quite a few – and this is across Australia, not just the state – local governments and private companies encouraging a non-lethal mitigation strategy because of the blowback that they get from the local community.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** What other mitigation strategies?

**Louise BONOMI:** Non-lethal mitigation strategies?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes.

**Louise BONOMI:** We were a couple of years ago now looking at a golf course in regional Victoria looking at sound: scare guns and scare tactics to scare –

**Bev McARTHUR:** I have tried that in my garden.

**Louise BONOMI:** I am sure you do, Bev.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It has not worked.

**Louise BONOMI:** I am sure you do. But thank you for trying instead of killing. There are a whole range. I am not a land manager or a commercial business who has tried to do this, but they certainly exist. They are being taken up more and more.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Okay. Just getting back to another conversation earlier, it was stated there are 20,000 wetlands in Victoria. How is that figure calculated? Does that not include every farm dam in Victoria, or creek?

**Jo WILKINSON:** I was the one that supplied the figure. It was a figure that has been mentioned off the record by someone who works at the GMA. It also appeared on the RSPCA's overhead slides to this committee, so I think there is a bit of backing for it and I think it is a conservative figure, and it does not include streams and waterways as far as I know.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** So you do not know how it is calculated; it was an on-background figure that has just been replicated?

**Jo WILKINSON:** It is said to be wetlands where ducks can be shot that would need supervision, I suppose. Probably the point really is: why is it a secret? For heaven's sake, why is it a secret? Isn't it critical to the compliance monitoring?

**The CHAIR:** All right, we have got a chance to ask the department questions about that on Monday. Mr Bourman.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation. On page 7 of your submission you talk about how the sustainability window is mentioned in the ministerial preface and your concerns (1) that you have not seen the sustainability window research, and then (2) your obligatory disclaimer that you were rejected anyway. I did some digging, and my understanding is that mathematical ecologist Dr Thomas Prowse has been engaged to do work – I half agree with you – about having a properly modelled window below which no recreational harvest should occur. You also note that BirdLife Australia has called for this work. Wouldn't a well-modelled sustainability window address all of your peripheral concerns around sustainability? At page 7 of your thing there.

**Glenys OOGJES:** Yes, but I think – I would have to just preface that, and Jo might be able to assist, by saying that our key concern is the welfare and safety of birds. Sustainability is of course of concern from a broader conservation perspective, but our key issue, and we keep talking about it today, is the welfare of birds. Jo, I am not sure whether you want to add to that, but sustainability is of course a requirement of the flora and fauna Act as well.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Absolutely, and I am not arguing your key driver being the animal welfare, but there was also a concern about sustainability, and it is my understanding that there is a body of research being done on that. If we can get that research – if it comes out as expected, I suppose is the easiest thing, because no-one has seen it yet – and addresses your concerns about sustainability, is that going to keep you satisfied on that front? It is a bit hard because it is a bit of an up-in-the-air thing because –

**Jo WILKINSON:** Very much up in the air.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Has anyone seen it? Not me, not you.

**Jo WILKINSON:** No, that is one of the points on page 7 – nobody has seen it yet. I do know that BirdLife Australia has been asking for something like that for years. I think they have given up even putting in an annual submission now. I think if the GMA were serious about sustainability, the time to act on that would have been years ago. I think something that we need to focus on is that the taxpayers of Victoria are really funding this big time, including the wetlands recovery down at Heart Morass. It is not mentioned by Field and Game, but taxpayers pay a lot of money towards that –

**Jeff BOURMAN:** If I may interrupt – excuse me, no, actually. You said the Heart Morass is being funded by the taxpayer – the wetland recovery?

**Jo WILKINSON:** Yes. West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is a taxpayer-funded agency; it provides a lot of support. VicRoads offset funding comes from taxpayers, money from the SHAP program – you know, it is quite a bit.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I am sure you have got this all documented somewhere that you can send to the committee?

**Jo WILKINSON:** Yes, I am happy to do that. So there is a fair bit of – I am not surprised that you are surprised about it. It does not get mentioned by Field and Game, but taxpayers pay a lot of money to prop up and support what happens down at Heart Morass, as good as it might be.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Grants have been applied for, I do understand that, but grants are available to all sorts of people for all sorts of things.

**Jo WILKINSON:** Yes, well, that is right, but taxpayers are funding. The point I was trying to get to –

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Yes, my apologies.

**Jo WILKINSON:** in terms of this window is: I think if anything was going to be done about that, it should have been done years ago. Taxpayers are getting tired of constant hand in the pocket to support duck hunting, as they see the abundance going down the gurgler.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** On that note, the two professors that produced the EAWS, as I now know it is called, say that there is a decline in waterbird numbers. They say it is mostly due to habitat and that hunting – I think if I remember correctly; it is not a quote – is a tiny impact and, frankly, the other things are of a bigger concern. We get down to the authority to control wildlife stuff. If we ban recreational duck hunting, there will be an increase in ducks shot as pest. So is this even relevant to what we are talking about? The two professors have a completely different view to you guys. They are saying that whilst there is a problem, shooting is not it.

**Jo WILKINSON:** If I could answer that one, I think there are two parts to your question. The second part was ATCW, the first part was what the professors are saying.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** We will get to that.

**Jo WILKINSON:** In 2017 Kingsford published a paper in which they analysed a number of things, influences on wild game ducks, and they found – you are quite right – the major influences were a loss of habitat, and also they talked about rainfall. Well, you would say climate change on that one. They found a weak negative relationship with hunting. There are two things I would say about that: one is you have got to actually read the paper and look at the data. They looked at a 32-year period. More than half of that period was in the last century. Their data went up to 2014. More than half of that period was last century when I think we would agree ducks were resilient; they were heavily shot, but they were able to cope. This century things are changing because of, as you know, loss of habitat, climate change et cetera. The situation this century is quite different. So when you look at a long period of time, 32 years, where most of it – slightly more than half – is in the last century, that is going to weight the outcome. That is point one.

If I could just say point two. They did not have harvest figures in that study. That is really important. They did not have the harvest figures, so they used proxies. What did they use? They used the New South Wales rice cull – it was nothing to do with Victoria – and they used the number of licensed hunters, and as we know, a lot of them are not active. So it was a bit woolly.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Your science is better than their science – is that what I am hearing?

**Jo WILKINSON:** No, no. I am just saying it is in their paper.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Okay. Well, sorry, we have probably thrashed that one to death.

**Jo WILKINSON:** Yes, all right.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Do you have the data that you used to produce this handy anywhere?

**Glenys OOGJES:** That is an indication of the data.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Thanks. That is all I needed. I have got 20 seconds.

**Glenys OOGJES:** We know this figure. It is actually –

**Jo WILKINSON:** It is the GMA.

**Glenys OOGJES:** the GMA figures. And we know the 30 per cent, which is GMA.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Bourman, your next question.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** In your video you stated that windmilling was labelled inhumane by the Game Management Authority. Can you show me where?

**Glenys OOGJES:** In the guidelines they say –

**Jeff BOURMAN:** No, it does not. In the guidelines it says that it is not recommended because it is hard to do, but at no point does it say it is inhumane.

**Glenys OOGJES:** And those guidelines are titled the humane way to dispatch animals.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you. Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. Thank you very much for being here today and for the very comprehensive submission. I thought I would just use my time to go to a couple of the sections of your submission we have not touched on yet, noting the very clear evidence you have already given around the inherent cruelty of shooting ducks. I am interested if you could highlight for us Animals Australia's concerns around the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* and the implications for compliance with that Act that flow from the continuation of duck shooting.

**Glenys OOGJES:** I might refer – Jo, do you mind doing flora and fauna? It is really quite clear that the recreational duck shooting cannot comply with the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. Are you okay with that?

**Jo WILKINSON:** Yes, that is okay. Yes, this is section 2.5 of our submission. The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* has never, ever been mentioned by GMA in its annual considerations when it is deliberating whether we should have a duck season and how we should do it. There are two particular parts of that Act. One is that public authorities have to give proper consideration to the objectives of the Act, which include:

- (a) to guarantee that all taxa of Victoria's ... fauna –

in other words, animals –

- ... can persist and improve in the wild and retain their capacity to adapt to environmental change; and

- (b) to prevent taxa and communities of ... fauna from becoming threatened ...

Well, while the GMA has been in charge two of the eight game birds are now on the threatened list, so I think it is pretty clear that they have failed on that one.

There are various other bits. I will not take too long on this, but the other thing is that it also says we need to take a precautionary approach. Where you do not have all the facts and figures at your fingertips, a precautionary approach is needed, and I think that is what the ministers did this year. It probably was a shock to the shooters because GMA has never, ever thought about the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, or they have never printed it in their considerations, but I suspect the ministers responded to that.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. I am interested because you have members, as you say, who are active, out observing on the wetlands, and thank you for providing the very clear evidence that you have recorded. Just generally speaking, I would be interested in your observations around the task that is set for the GMA and whether it is possible, even with vastly increased resources, for them to observe hunter activity and make sure that it is compliant with regulations.

**Glenys OOGJES:** I do not know whether you want to answer that, Lou, but I think to some extent it goes back to some of the things we have been saying. That is, there are so many wetlands, at least half I understand are on private property, and even on opening weekends, when the GMA are assisted by other agencies, including the police, they still cannot get to very many wetlands. Then the other element of that is that even when they do or if they do, trying to ensure they have the right evidence and can therefore ping the right people, if you like, when there is some breach observed is really difficult because of the inherent nature of duck shooting. So I think it is impossible.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. You touched briefly before on the Pegasus review and the flaws that that uncovered and the recommendations. In your view, having observed this activity closer than most, I would say, have you seen the Pegasus review recommendations followed?

**Glenys OOGJES:** No, no. I understand that the GMA have attempted to put some of them in place. I think that, unfortunately, we have not seen a sizeable change in approach over the years. Certainly it probably did lead to GMA consulting with us more – meaning inviting us to address their board and a few things like that over the years in the interim – and yes, we welcome that; it should have always been happening. But we do not see any marked change in what is happening on the wetlands, and that is, after all, the measure we should all be looking at.

**Louise BONOMI:** We have spoken so much, and I am sure you would have heard this so often over the weeks of this inquiry, to Jeff's credit, looking at 'What can we do?' and 'How can we?' and from Evan as well, 'How can we fix this system that we know is broken?' But aside from tightening up regulatory failures, which we do not agree would even be possible, the public sentiment, as we have mentioned, against duck shooting, against the recreational shooting of wildlife, is what will kill this sport. You cannot turn around and say to people, 'Well, it's okay for us to harm this many animals because it is only this many.' Harming one animal – we have seen what happens in the media when there are exposés or when there is an isolated incident of animal cruelty. Rightly so, in the media it blows up because people are not okay with that anymore. We have evolved. Victorians have evolved. It is so clear this is such a political issue that continues, and it will continue to be a political issue until something is done about the inherent cruelty of shooting wildlife for fun. I think it is just really important that we note that.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. In my remaining time, we have had some evidence around the wellbeing benefits of shooting our native waterbirds for those that undertake the practice. I wonder if you could share, from your experience and what you know of your membership, the impacts that ongoing duck shooting have on the wellbeing of your members and those who participate in on-wetland activities.

**Louise BONOMI:** I mean, we have just got to take a look at the most recent survey that was done by Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting. That was really tough reading, to go through those responses and look at the depth. I have been around duck shooting for a long time; I live in regional Victoria. I had not even understood the depth of damage that this does to people, not just animals. That was really upsetting to read. I have not had that in front of me all at once. We do hear of course that our supporters who live in regional Victoria are very upset by it. They do not like the damage and the fear that it causes for their animals on their properties and for surrounding wildlife. They do not like to wake up and hear animals being shot where they live. I mean, it is pretty clear. I think supporters and Victorians generally have made that very clear.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Our time has come to an end. Thank you all so much for coming today and for the evidence you have given. You will receive a copy of the transcript for review in about a week, before it is published on the website. The committee will take a short break until we get our next witness.

**Witnesses withdrew.**