

Inquiry into Auditor General Report No.202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)

Mr David Mould

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YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

During each recreational duck shooting season for the last ten years Geelong Duck Rescue volunteers have attended the RAMSAR listed wetlands in the Connewarre State Game Reserve system in Geelong. Our team has witnessed horrible acts of cruelty towards so-called 'game' species and non-game species alike.

We are of the firm opinion, as a group with membership of 85 and several hundred additional supporters, that the practice of allowing duck shooting in RAMSAR wetlands is absolutely inconsistent with Victoria's obligations under the RAMSAR Convention. Furthermore we cannot see any possible way of reconciling the recreational shooting of waterbirds with those duties to RAMSAR and believe that the practice must be prohibited within all RAMSAR sites.

Our volunteers have witnessed international migratory birds being frightened off the wetland by duck shooters and their shotgun blasts. A shotgun emits a loud and terrifying noise that travels through the air causing birds of all species to take off in fright and seek refuge elsewhere.

It is the opinion of all our members and supporters that if the RAMSAR wetlands cannot actually provide the refuge for these birds, as was their purpose when established, then the Government has failed in one of the fundamental duties of the Convention.

Rare visitors from overseas, especially different species of sandpipers in recent years, have been sighted at Lake Connewarre and have also been sighted fleeing from the noise and activities of duck shooters.

Our members would like to present their evidence of such disruption to the committee.

Duck shooters have been known to shoot indiscriminantly, killing or wounding protected species in large numbers at RAMSAR listed wetlands. It is clear that the RAMSAR designation offers no protection from duck shooters recreation. Though many duck shooters are conscientious about the regulations, there are those within their numbers that we have witnessed who hold no such scruples and have even been heard to remark their unofficial motto is, "If it flies, it dies!" Authorities have proven incapable and frankly unwilling to police this activity and prevent or prosecute such behaviour on any wetland, let alone A RAMSAR wetland. Our members would also like to offer evidence to the committee of such failures in regulatory bodies as further evidence that recreational shooting is inconsistent with our RAMSAR obligations. Even in such cases where authorities might like to act they are restricted by lack of resources, an environment that

makes evidence gathering virtually impossible and a regulatory framework that is designed to protect duck shooters from scrutiny rather than constrain their excesses.

The constant littering of empty shotgun shells has been an ongoing problem for decades, with thousands of shotgun shells entering the waterways of the major shooting wetlands each year. These plastic and metal detritus do not biodegrade, they crumble into smaller pieces. The plastic components enter the food system for fish and waterbirds of all species causing enormous damage, some of which we don't get to see as the birds are internationally migratory. This means that toxins potentially poisoning birds who then die overseas are in fact being ingested in Victoria's RAMSAR wetlands. Another clear failing of our duties.

Although lead shot has been banned in most instances of recreational duck shooting due to its negative environmental effects and the toxicity that was being detected in bird life, there is still a great deal of lead being introduced to the RAMSAR environments each year through the following causes:

1. Some firearms have an exemption to the prohibition and are permitted to continue using lead shot,
2. Some shooters each year are caught using lead shot despite the prohibition, leading to the conclusion that many more are using lead shot without being caught by authorities,
3. Shooting of quail, rabbits and foxes often occurs within the boundaries of the RAMSAR wetlands as well as duck shooting and the use of lead shot is not prohibited for these species, and
4. Each shot gun cartridge littered into the wetlands actually contains a fragment of lead in the firing pin. As these cartridges decay the lead is released in to the waterway and can be ingested by wildlife.

Whilst volunteers do their best to clean up after the shooters, there is only ever a fraction of their litter recovered. No enforcement of the anti-litter laws is attempted by authorities.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

The prohibition of recreational animal shooting at all RAMSAR sites, particularly of duck shooting, must come into immediate effect if the Victorian Government is to stand a chance of meeting our obligations under the RAMSAR Convention.

We would also advocate for greater funding to be made available to the preservations and understanding of RAMSAR wetlands for the vital role they play in world ecology.

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Signature:
David Mould