

Assessment of the GMA's Compliance and Enforcement Function

2017 Pegasus Report – Three-year progress update

The Game Management Authority (GMA) is continuing to grow and build on its capacity and capability to regulate game hunting in Victoria. Our aim is to ensure the GMA is an effective regulator that delivers a modern approach to regulating game hunting now and into the future. Moving forward means taking on the lessons of the past, focussing our priorities and working with our partners and our stakeholders in new and productive ways.

The opening weekend of the 2017 duck season at Koorangie State Game Reserve near Kerang was characterised by unacceptable behaviour by a large group of hunters. Some hunters started shooting well before the regulated opening time. Over 1,000 ducks were shot and not retrieved. Approximately 260 protected birds were also illegally shot and not retrieved.

In response to the incident, the GMA Board engaged Pegasus Economics to conduct an independent assessment of the GMA's compliance and enforcement function. This included assessing our operating model, our capacity and capability to effectively support and monitor compliance and enforce the law.

Pegasus Economics provided 27 recommendations to assist the GMA to achieve its legislative objective to promote sustainability and responsibility in game hunting in Victoria. In September 2017, the board accepted 26 of the 27 recommendations in the Pegasus Report. The recommendation that the GMA's regulatory function be located with a larger more broadly-based regulator was not accepted. The Board considers that the GMA's purpose as an independent regulator is a strength of the governance structure for game hunting in Victoria and the main reason for the GMA's existence.

Much has changed in the three years since the Koorangie incident. New regulations were introduced for the 2018 duck season, including later opening times, an increased pass rate for waterfowl identification tests, a requirement to immediately dispatch wounded ducks, and to collect and harvest at least the breast meat of all downed ducks. The numbers of uncollected ducks and protected species that have been shot have reduced significantly since 2017.

In November 2018, the government provided the GMA with an additional \$6 million over four years to help strengthen the GMA's regulatory capacity and capability. This included recruiting more staff and an organisational restructure to better focus the GMA's priorities and regulatory effort. As at 1 July 2020, the GMA has 36 staff and a recurrent budget of approximately \$7.5million. This is a substantial increase from the 18 staff and \$4.8 million budget at the time of the Koorangie incident in 2017.

The GMA is moving forward with its vision. A new compliance and enforcement policy has been developed, which outlines the GMA's evidence-based and intelligence-led approach. A new hunter education strategy has also been developed, designed to ensure that hunters are well informed and equipped with the information that they need to comply with the law.

Further, the GMA is providing robust advice to government on policy and regulation matters. This advice is informed by research and science-based evidence.

Nineteen of the 26 Pegasus Report recommendations are now fully implemented and will be removed from future quarterly progress reporting. Of the remaining seven recommendations, five are reliant on other government agencies, as they sit outside of the GMA's legislative responsibility. The GMA has held discussions with these agencies and progressed the actions as far as it can. The GMA will work closely with the respective government departments towards implementing these remaining recommendations. Two actions remain in progress and we are working to complete these as soon as possible.

Significant future challenges exist for the GMA, beyond the Pegasus Economic recommendations. The regulation of game hunting in Victoria is not simple. It occurs within a complex and fragmented regulatory and institutional framework. Effective regulation is dependent upon partnerships and close collaboration with several other regulators including Victoria Police and numerous public and private land managers. The GMA is also developing a stakeholder engagement strategy which will support ongoing consultation and engagement with hunting, conservation and animal welfare stakeholders.

Recent improvements in levels of hunter responsibility and compliance must continue with the active support of hunters and their representative associations. We will continue to enhance our enforcement functions. We are also building and improving our licencing, research, communication and education activities. We will be driven by evidence-based decision making using the best available science. We are paying close attention to the impact of a changing climate on the sustainability of game species and we are listening to the views and perspectives of hunter, traditional owner, environmental and animal welfare groups.

All of this is critical to ensuring that the GMA can achieve its vision – that game hunting in Victoria meets community expectations as a sustainable and well-regulated activity, based on science and conducted in a responsible manner.

Brian Hine
Chairperson
Game Management Authority

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