

BirdLife Australia statement to the Game Management Authority stakeholder forum

**November 19th
2019**

BirdLife Australia

BirdLife Australia is an independent science-based bird conservation organisation. Our vision is that native birds are protected, valued and enjoyed by all Australians. We support research, conduct monitoring and run citizen science programs to inform and guide conservation of birds and their habitat.

We are the nation's primary repository of information on bird ecology and conservation, periodically reporting on the status and trends in Australia's bird taxa. Our programs and strategy are guided by advice from a Research and Conservation Committee of leading ecologists and ornithologists.

Following many years of consideration, BirdLife Australia has adopted the position that recreational waterfowl hunting should not be allowed in Australia and its Territories.

Long term trends in the ecology and conservation of wetlands and waterbirds

Wetlands are key habitat for waterbirds including ducks. A 2012 review found that two thirds of Victoria's wetlands have been lost since settlement, and the State's remaining wetlands continue to be threatened by development, lack of water, pollution, poor land management, and climate change. The ecological condition of wetlands varies as a result of these pressures, both past and present. ¹

Victoria's changing climate adds greatly to the pressure on the ecological condition of Victoria's wetlands and waterbird habitats, affecting things like water availability and breeding conditions.

¹ Environment Defenders Office 2012, Protecting Victoria's Wetlands, Environment Defenders Office (Victoria), December, Carlton.



Annual surveys show long term declines since 1983 in waterbird indices including abundance, breeding and breeding species richness across eastern Australia. Most game species abundances were well below long term average.² No game species has shown any signs of recovery from these declines. National waterbird indices being developed by BirdLife Australia and available in 2020 are supporting the trends evidenced in Porter *et al* 2018, indicating long term and sustained declines in waterbirds.

Maintaining and improving monitoring of wetland extent and condition and waterbird numbers and ecology is crucial to conservation efforts. BirdLife Australia calls for a sustained commitment to systematic monitoring for the effects of wetland management on waterfowl across Victoria including at all game reserves.

A precautionary approach is the key

The extinction process begins with a species' decline, perhaps gradually, and perhaps only towards the edge of its geographic range. Often, incipient extinction processes are driven by several threatening processes occurring in concert or over time. Recognising the early warning signs is crucial to effective and efficient species conservation as the further the decline of a species is allowed to progress, the more difficult and expensive is its conservation.

With clear signs of long-term decline and with multiple pressures on waterbirds, including hunting of game species, BirdLife Australia holds that the precautionary principle inherent in international, national and State conservation agreements and legislation must be adhered to.

2020 season outlook

The outlook for hotter than average conditions over summer, lower than average runoff and the outlook for lower than average rainfall over most of the country, taken with water storage levels below this time last year, suggests strongly that waterbirds will be under extreme pressure at the time of the proposed 2020 duck season.³

Severe drought conditions are occurring across eastern Australia and taken with the existing pressures on waterbirds and their habitats, BirdLife Australia believes that

² Porter JL, Kingsford RT and Brandis K 2018, Aerial Survey of Wetland Birds in Eastern Australia - October 2018 Annual Summary Report, UNSW, Sydney.

³ Bureau of Meteorology: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks> accessed 19 November 2019



the warning signs are clear and the addition of the artificial pressure of recreational shooting of game species should not be countenanced for the 2019 season.

In saying this we note the current Senate inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis⁴ which underlines the need for all responsible authorities and stakeholders to take a more active and precautionary approach recognising the early declines of species and ecosystems to avoid the costs and the ecological impoverishment of extinction.

BirdLife Australia's position

BirdLife Australia holds that the 2020 duck season in Victoria should not occur. This will be consistent with our nation's commitment to taking a precautionary approach to nature conservation. It will afford respite to waterbirds attempting to take refuge in Victoria from appalling drought conditions (climate change) in other States and territories. It will also provide breathing space during which trend data and outlook data can be examined coolly to develop forward-looking policy on duck hunting in the context of long-term wetland and waterbird declines, and of Victoria's changing climate.

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https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Faunalextinction