

Submission
No 171

**INQUIRY INTO GAME AND FERAL ANIMAL
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CONSERVATION
HUNTING) BILL 2025**

Organisation: Gordon Wildlife Alliance

Date Received: 2 August 2025

Game and Feral Animal Legislation Amendment (Conservation Hunting) Bill 2025

Introduction:

Gordon Wildlife Alliance is a group of dedicated volunteer wildlife rescuers, carers, habitat revegetation landcarers and conservation advocates, operating in Central Victoria, with outreach into other states. Several of our members are also active within domestic violence and victims of violence support groups. Therefore, the responses given below to the proposed amendment are written from the perspective of conservation, animal welfare, mental health and public safety, with a specific emphasis on the safety of vulnerable community groups, especially women and children.

We will address the terms of reference in order as below:

1) 1. Hunting is not a right.

Describing the taking of another life as a "right" opens up serious ethical questions and has dangerous implications for the safety of vulnerable parts of our community and the mental health of susceptible persons. How often have we heard serial killers and mass shooters claim they have a "right" to kill?

Any connection between "rights" and violence (the destruction of a life is by its very definition, an act of violence) has implications for the sense of entitlement displayed by perpetrators of violent attacks on the public, and in the domestic sphere. Nobody in a peaceful society should have a "right to kill". The law can play semantics, but in reality, this is what is being proposed - a right to kill.

How many victims of domestic violence have heard this "right" screamed at them? This amendment is dangerous in the extreme.

2) Conservation hunting:

This is more than greenwashing, it's gaslighting the public into accepting cruelty towards animals as an acceptable practice. It sets a precedent for covering up commercial slaughter and profiteering of killing not only non-native, but also native species. Using the term "conservation" alongside the killing of any animal, implies that all destruction of life, by any means, no matter how cruel, is acceptable, if it has an end goal of conserving habitat or a population. We have seen this argument used to justify shooting horses from helicopters, and in Victoria, to excuse culling of koalas! Using "conservation" as a reason for hunting merely devalues the concept of conservation, to the point where many conservationists desire to choose a different title for their field. Linking conservation with killing brings the whole field into disrepute.

Hunting has not been shown to preserve endangered species or protect vulnerable habitats at all. We have seen various official culling programs, as well as commercial slaughter and various types of "recreational hunting" across the country for years now, with no visible benefit to the environment in those areas. In fact, in areas where there has been significant "recreational hunting" of so-called "feral" non-native species such as deer and pigs, the population of those species appears to have increased, as has damage to the habitat of these areas. This is not surprising, given that it is not in the interests of the "hunters" to wipe out the populations of their target species. If they shoot all the "feral deer", what will they have left to seek trophy heads to mount on their walls? (For many years I was a member of the Austrian Cultural Society of Melbourne, who hosted a deer hunting club. A key tenet of their constitution was that the population of wild deer in the parklands where they hunted, must be preserved for future hunting. Therefore great care was taken to ensure only older stags were shot.) Dedicated recreational marksmen have no interest in "keeping numbers down" of non-native species. It would be self-defeating.

In terms of protecting vulnerable habitat areas, hunting is also more likely to cause damage than to protect the environment. Many ecologists as well as everyday users of public wilderness areas have noted the damage caused by heavy 4WD and motorbikes that refuse to stay on marked roads or trails, the rubbish strewn all over camping areas, including some that are marked as off-limits for camping, and the pollution of the waterways and trails, not only by hunting-related products, but beer bottles and cans, but human faeces, toilet paper and wipes. Our own

members have witnessed this disgusting damage first-hand, and the sound of gunfire leaves us in no doubt as to the culprits.

3) Public land is for everyone:

Public land is for everyone, be they residents of NSW or visitors from interstate or overseas, to escape from the violence, fear and distress that is the scourge of our modern society. During the pandemic lockdowns, people took to the forests and parks to find solace, to escape the confines of 4 walls, and find healing through connecting to Nature. After restrictions lifted, this re-connection to Nature continued, with the benefit to mental health of time spent "Walking on Country" widely recognized by health professionals. People have a RIGHT to continue to seek comfort and solace in Nature without the stress and PTSD triggers of hearing gunshots, witnessing animals and birds being injured and killed, or finding their favourite picnic spots or hiking trails suddenly off-limits because some violent person who believes destroying a life is "fun" gets granted priority of access.

Many of the people we know who regularly enjoy these areas, are vulnerable people who have suffered great violence in the past. Victims of war, of domestic violence, of child abuse, refugees who have experienced torture and many more. The wilderness is their healing place. We cannot allow it to be turned into their worst nightmare, to be relived every time they visit these areas. Imagine fleeing a war-torn land, full of the sounds of gunfire, believing yourself now safe in a free and democratic land, only to hear the gunfire once again when you take your family out into the bush for a much anticipated family hike! This is NOT what Australia is meant to be.

Opening up more areas to hunting will have a negative impact on tourism as well as the social cohesion of the local community. We have seen this first-hand in Victoria, where the "commercial kangaroo harvest" program has led to division within local government areas, violent confrontations between hunters and local residents, and general boycotts of tourist destinations. Accommodation and hospitality providers have been complaining for some time that the "roo killers" and the "duck shooters" have scared away their customers, while councillors have commented publicly that the reputation of their shires have been ruined. When complaints are made about "the place has been taken over by ferals", they are not talking about other species, they mean the human hunters! This situation cannot be denied - it has been quite widely publicised in the print media.

Finally, if the government really does wish to reduce populations of non-native free-roaming species, rather than just currying favour with the gun lobby, there are proven non-lethal alternatives available. Wild horse populations can easily be kept under control using immunocontraception methods, which have been used successfully for at least two decades in the USA, Canada, France and other parts of Europe. Arguments we have heard against these methods, such as "Too difficult to reach all the animals over such a large area", or excuses around "difficult terrain" simply do not hold up, when compared to the massive areas and extreme terrain overseas where the programs have been so successful. These are simply excuses given by government departments that PREFER lethal methods, and highly paid commercial hunters that want to maintain their income streams. There are similar proven methods to humanely reduce populations in other mammals such as deer.

4) Human Safety

It is hardly rocket science to understand that having firearms used in areas where members of the public may access is a recipe for disaster. Once again, we have witnessed this increasing risk in Victoria during the 2025 "duck season", where areas of permitted duck shooting were within 500 metres of shops, homes and even childcare centres (Geelong area). Putting up signage stating that hunters are active in the area is hardly going to keep anyone safe. Young people are notorious for ignoring warning signs of any description, and short of fencing off an entire area, there is no way to ensure members of the public do not go cross-country and miss seeing the signs put up on roadsides. How does the government plan to ensure no innocent hiker, camper or bike rider gets shot, simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time? We can't just rely on the shooters "being careful" of their targeting! Once again, the experience of duck shooting reminds us of how many terrible shots there are out there, that have somehow managed to gain a firearms licence without ever learning how to shoot with any accuracy. Sadly we have also had incidents in our local area of "recreational hunters" supposedly targeting "ferals" on crown land, shooting livestock on neighbouring farms, that were "too close to the fence, we thought that horse was a deer". If holders of firearms licences can't tell the difference between a horse and a deer, can they be sure they can tell a backpacker tourist from some other mammal?

Another aspect of safety that needs consideration is the enabling of a culture of gun violence. One only needs to look at the USA to see the consequences of encouraging a "right to hunt" or a "right to bear arms". Mass shootings and school shootings have become so commonplace that primary school kids are all taught "siege survival skills" along with their alphabet. Here in Australia we are in a public violence epidemic, with machete attacks becoming normalised in shopping centres, more armed robberies, and mass shootings becoming more common. Opening up more areas to hunting means increased firearms ownership, which leads to increased risk of something going wrong, somebody who may have been stable, having a change of life circumstances that lead them down a dark path. It only takes one "really bad day" for another Lindt Cafe Siege to occur. Then we have the incidents of youth getting hold of the weapons their parents use, with tragic circumstances. (Sadly this has affected me personally. One of my former students, then in year 9, shot dead his best friend, in some sort of innocent game, played with an old gun they found in a shed, left there by a parent from a hunting session. The kids had not been taught gun safety and neither realised the weapon was loaded. This tragedy broke the whole community, and the family of the shooter have never really recovered, nor has the father of the deceased, who had left the weapon loaded, in a place he thought was secure.) The simple fact is, the more gun ownership we have in this country, the greater the risk.

Another element of risk associated with increased hunting, which as a member of DV support groups, is close to my heart, is the enabling of an attitude of DISRESPECT for life, and an increasing belief in the power of aggression and violence as a means to controlling others. The links between "recreational hunting" and domestic violence, partner abuse and violence against women, are well documented. Many respected psychologists have commented publicly on this and the statistics back them up. My own GP has confided that she has seen an increase in both victims reporting abuse, and perpetrators admitting abuse, where the perpetrator has firearms in the home, "for hunting". Families are living in fear, not just because the father or brother has become more and more aggressive, paranoid, suspicious and controlling, but because "he has a gun!" Victim survivors are frightened to stand up for themselves, or even to try to leave, for fear that an armed aggressor will finally "lose it". Is this the Australia we want to be?

Our final issue about human safety may be one few would expect, but again, I can confirm from experience, this IS a serious risk. Terrorist cells use "Recreational Hunting trips" as a cover for Live Ammunition Tactical Training. Growing up in regional Victoria, in the time before the Port Arthur Massacre and subsequent "gun amnesty", local farmers used to host "hunting parties" of certain ethnic clubs. Locals were all warned to stay well away during these sessions, and it was known throughout the community that there was no actual hunting going on. Rather, they were playing "War Games" and strategic training, for the day when those skills may come in handy. When the Balkan wars broke out in the early 90's, many of those who once enjoyed these "hunting parties" flew over to volunteer, or even to fight as mercenaries. These days, fear of terrorism is so rife, that police are suspicious of anyone with a different accent or who speaks up for what they believe in, yet this government would consider encouraging more people to be out doing weapons training in public places, honing their skills for the next siege!

5) Weakening of existing safeguards

The current organisations supposedly responsible for ensuring public safety, as well as those tasked with preventing cruelty to animals or killing of endangered and non-target species, are barely sufficient, but under this proposed amendment, even these slight safety measures will vanish. Less control and oversight means greater chance of a "rogue agent" having a bad day, creating a very bad day for a lot of people. Reducing restrictions means reducing the checks and balances needed to protect human life. We have already seen far too many deaths and life-changing injuries due to inexperienced or unhinged people having access to firearms.

Changing over from the current advisory board, formed from a broad cross-section of stakeholder groups, to the proposed "Conservation Hunting Authority", which as it stands will most likely be comprised purely of stakeholders from the hunting lobby, poses a massive risk to species conservation as well as animal welfare. In simple terms, who will stand up to protect endangered species? Who will prevent cruelty to animals? We can't expect that the hunting lobby will be holding hunters to account about this. We have already seen the epic failure that is "self regulation" playing out in Victoria during Duck Season this year. Record numbers of non-target species killed, record numbers of endangered species deliberately shot, and a record number of animals maimed and left to die in agony, because the shooters realised that they had hit a non-target species, so refused to retrieve them while observers were filming, and rescuers were not permitted on the wetlands by the Game Management Authority.; This huge horror story was publicly documented for an international audience, damaging our national

as well as state reputation within the tourism sector. We have also seen from the Victorian context of the Commercial Kangaroo "Harvest" program, that even with oversight, incredible animal cruelty is normalised, and even permitted in the "code of conduct". The international community now knows that joeys are LEGALLY "euthanised" by being bashed against a wall or ute door, and they are appalled. The proposed amendment will lead to increased killing of protected species by inexperienced shooters who can't tell one animal from another, or from violent people whose blood-lust means they don't care who or what they shoot, so long as they make a kill. How can anyone call that "Conservation"? Australia already holds the world record for mammalian species extinction. That is not due to "the impact of feral animals" or non-human natural changes- that is due to colonial humans directly killing them. Non-native humans nearly hunted the Koala to extinction. Colonial humans DID hunt the poor Thylacine to its end. Our Koalas may be supposedly protected now, yet here in Victoria, we saw our own environment department shoot 1065 koalas (according to DEECA's own reported statistics) from helicopters, as part of a population cull that they attempted to undertake in secret, and once whistle-blowers revealed the actions, they then tried to cover up as "Euthanasia" following a "Devastating fire" that has since been thoroughly debunked by independent experts. This "Conservation Hunting" concept may claim to be only targeting non-native species, but when we already have native species being killed right across the east and south of this country, what faith can anyone have that some loophole will be created to allow hunting of ALL animals, of anything that moves? After all, if they will shoot Australia's most globally beloved marsupial from choppers, in a UNESCO World Heritage National Park, over Easter and Anzac Day, than NOBODY is safe. The good people of NSW and any international visitors can have no guarantees under this proposal, that there will not be more extinctions to add to the current deplorable record.

6) No state or territory in Australia should have a "Hunting and Fishing Minister". What does the appointment of such a role say about the culture of our nation? Polling shows that the vast majority of Australians oppose hunting! Why would taxpayers, already suffering under a cost of living crisis, be willing to fund such a minister? This is even more offensive given the environment minister currently fails in her responsibility to protect the environment! Under her watch, we have seen increased logging in koala and greater glider habitat, increased biodiversity loss to road trauma and clearing, and critically endangered species are being pushed over the edge. Adding a Minister for Hunting and Fishing is an affront to all the efforts of REAL conservationists who have been working so hard to protect species, while their projects have been de-funded, under-resourced, and in some cases, shut down altogether. It is an insult to the underfunded Rural Fire Service and other emergency services who have given so much to save lives and livelihoods in the face of increasing natural disasters. The state needs increased support for the roles that matter. NSW cannot afford a Minister just to cater to a tiny minority of people who enjoy killing for fun. This is a clear vote-killer that will most likely succeed in losing this government the next election.

7) Stop bounty hunting and trapping

The current bounty system in NSW and in Victoria has been responsible for so much grief to the community, so much cruelty to animals, and so much damage to the reputation of the country. Under this bounty system, we have seen people's pet Dingoes and even pet dogs STOLEN from their properties and killed. This bounty system has encouraged dangerous armed individuals to trespass on private property and threaten residents. Traps have caught people's pets, and even injured some humans who have either been caught unawares themselves, or been harmed while trying to free a trapped animal. The pain and suffering caused by leg-jaw traps is so horrific that they are banned in most civilized countries. Likewise in most civilized nations, bounties on killing any species are considered barbaric and relegated to a shameful past history. Using such practices brings our whole nation into disrepute. Furthermore, bounties have been shown to be ineffective in controlling non-native species such as foxes, while being very effective in nearly wiping out our beloved native marsupials. Let it be remembered that there was once a bounty on the Thylacine R.I.P.

Conclusion:

This proposed amendment should be rejected in its entirety, on the grounds of public safety, social cohesion, protecting vulnerable communities, maintaining a civil and moral society and promoting a peaceful and harmonious culture on the global stage. The words "hunting" and "conservation" do not belong in the same sentence. It is the ultimate oxymoron. We all know what needs to be done to conserve our environment and its precious inhabitants. Stop clearing, stop logging, stop burning. Stop killing anything that moves. Put the funds that would be wasted on appointing a new minister into regeneration projects and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Make our roads safer for all road users, including the wildlife whose home ranges those

roads cross. Address the Climate Crisis in a meaningful way. The answer is there for all to see and that answer is to reject this amendment. The world is watching.