

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

Organisation: Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc
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**Submission re the Game and Feral Animal Hunting Legislation Amendment
("Conservation" Hunting) Bill 2025**

By Regional landowners/farmers/businesses.



Too often, the hunting/shooting lobby is squashing the rights of regional businesses, landowners, residents and the general public- most of whom would like to appreciate their natural environment in peace.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting inc, is a not-for-profit incorporated association representing concerned regional landowners, residents, farmers and businesses in issues to do with "recreational" hunting of native birds. Since incorporating in 2018, we have attracted over 6600 direct supporters. Via an alliance of more than 90 First Nations, business, union, and environmental groups, together we represent hundreds of thousands of voters¹.

It appears the Minns government has not been informed of all the issues which will negatively impact NSW should this bill be progressed.

We are alarmed to see the Minns government considering a move pushed by the minority hunting fraternity which would have devastating social/economic and environmental outcomes. Following are just some of the issues we urge you to consider before making any amendments to legislation – let alone granting unprecedented preferential "rights" to a minority hunting group.

1. Conflict of interest

We note the proposed hunting agency consists of 8 members, only 7 of whom can vote including 4 nominated by hunting groups. It's not rocket science to predict the outcome of this. How could this ever be "independent"? Why should the public – 99 percent of whom do not hunt – be forced to fund the management and promotion of hunting?

This type of arrangement continues to cause significant problems in Victoria. The result is regional communities are ignored, threatened species are killed, our environments are polluted and our regional economies are starved of the nature-based tourism dollars flowing elsewhere (where "recreational" hunting is banned).

There is no taxpayer-funded "devil's advocate" to consider arguments contrary to the interests of hunters. The voices of regional (and non-hunting) voters are ignored, despite the fact that less than one per cent of our population are licensed hunters.

To illustrate our point, over half of Victoria's public land is available for hunting, yet state government agencies refuse to consider well-supported requests from regional communities to close a mere handful of wetlands, even where it is known that threatened species are present.

¹ <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/2022-alliance>

We are especially concerned about the NSW proposal to consider the impact on hunters in every land use policy consideration. Why give special rights to hunters? What about the impact on non-hunters? What about the rights of environmental groups, or birdwatchers?

2. Impact on regional communities

It seems there has been little if any consultation with regional communities whose lives and safety will be impacted by the promotion of hunting across the state. In Victoria, many regional residents are afraid to speak out against shooters, for fear of retribution. However confidential online surveys report widespread distress to families, businesses, farm animals and pets².

The NSW legislation will create a “right to hunt” but what about the “right to peaceful enjoyment” for the far greater number of NSW residents who pay rates or rent for the privilege of living in regional areas?

The NSW proposal to conduct safety assessments for hunting regions provides little reassurance, given the Victorian experience with pro-hunting government bureaucrats.

3. Impact on regional tourism

It seems there has been little if any consultation with regional tourism operators. Numerous professional studies³ show tourism is adversely impacted by hunting occurring in proximity. Would *you* take your family bushwalking or birdwatching knowing there were blokes in army fatigues in the bush nearby with firearms?

A UComms poll of 1031 regional and metro residents in Victoria in 2021 regarding native bird shooting, showed:

- The majority of holiday makers from metro areas would be put off holidaying in an area where there was shooting
- Over 60% of both city and country respondents said they would feel unsafe undertaking other recreational activities where shooting takes place

There have been numerous safety incidents involving hunters’ firearms in public places. Many are not publicized. One which has been public, is the long-running court case involving the death of two elderly campers following an altercation with a deer hunter (Greg Lynn). This hunter almost escaped detection because Victoria has no system for notifying the authorities of planned hunting trips. He was picked up by CCTV camera when he had to divert his route due to an unexpected roadblock.

4. Economic catastrophe

Why would the NSW government upset your current positive nature-based tourism trend? Tourism Research Australia visitor surveys show NSW (and QLD) are ahead of the pack when it comes to nature-based tourism revenue. The highest revenue generator is visits to national/state parks.

Hunters’ “economic benefit” studies to date (at taxpayers’ expense) have been conducted by the same consultant each time. Their methodology was debunked by the Australia Institute in its presentation to Victoria’s 2023 parliamentary inquiry into recreational native bird hunting.

² <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/rural-voices>

³ 71% of respondents would avoid an area where hunting was occurring – [The Australia Institute](#),

Key failings include: all data is based on guesstimates from hunters about their expenditure. No supporting evidence is provided. The expenditures include many items that would be purchased whether hunting or not (e.g. food, alcohol, dogs, vehicles, vehicle maintenance etc.). Only the more enthusiastic hunters take part in the survey, which provides a further bias. Importantly, hunters would divert their discretionary income to other pursuits if they did not go hunting, so it would not be lost to the economy. RMCG itself (in its first hunting survey report, 2013) acknowledged that their work is not a cost-benefit analysis and so should not be used as the sole justification for any activity.

The survey does not include non-hunters and takes no account of the many costs to the community that arise from hunting. We submit the costs far outweigh any alleged “benefits”. These costs include:

- Lost tourism (in Victoria, ecotourism businesses have to close during the three months native bird shooting season. Victoria’s national/state parks do not derive anywhere near the nature-based tourism income that QLD/NSW currently do. In QLD, “recreational” hunting is banned in public areas. Up until now, native bird hunting has been banned in NSW and deer shooters must advise authorities in advance of where they will be and when, thus providing some level of comfort to the public.)
- Cost of compliance monitoring and law enforcement.
- Cost of signage and maps to inform the public of where folks with firearms will be in the bush.
- Cost of “research” (aka hunting promotion)
- Inability for nearby residents to work from home, or for shift workers to sleep.
- Cost of trespass and biosecurity issues for landowners/farmers.
- Cost of loss of biodiversity/adverse impact to threatened species.

Global Trends

What the hunting fraternity doesn’t share with Australian parliamentarians, is the irrefutable evidence that hunting is losing appeal, while wildlife watching is gaining in popularity and bringing in eye-watering sums of money.

The decline in hunting and rise in birdwatching is a global phenomenon. The US Fish and Wildlife Surveys (USFWS) show a marked decrease in hunting and an increase in wildlife watching between **2011** and **2016**. Most of these wildlife watchers were birdwatchers. We encourage you to look at the latest USFWS data, because the trend has continued exponentially on the same trajectory.

Simply put, expanding hunting will kill tourism.

Wildlife Recreation Trends	2011	2016	Change in 5 years
# who fished (million)	33	36	+3
\$ spent by fishers (\$USD billion)	42	46	+4
# who hunted (million)	14	11.5	-2.5
\$ spent by hunters (\$USD billion)	34	26	-8
# who watched wildlife (million)	72	86	+14
\$ spent by wildlife watchers (\$USD billion)	55	76	+21

Above: table showing the popularity and spending of hunting has declined, while that of wildlife watching has substantially increased.

6. Polluting the environment

Neither lead nor plastic breaks down in the environment⁴. It would be negligent for the NSW government to knowingly allow it to be pumped into the environment.

In NSW both the duck shooters on rice fields and the pest hunters elsewhere are legally allowed to use lead ammunition. This has long been acknowledged as a toxin for wildlife that ingest it through fragments in the water and in the ground, and in humans and scavenger animals that feed on shot animals or produce grown in the area.

Freedom of Information has revealed Victoria's GMA Board is aware of the plastic pollution left by shotguns, estimated to be more than two million plastic fragments left behind in every duck season.

7. Fire risk

If hunters do not use lead ammunition, they will likely use steel or copper, both known to cause fires⁵. With fire seasons already predicted to become more frequent and intense due to climate change, does NSW really need this additional threat in its forests?

8. Regulation of hunters

We can categorically prove it is physically impossible to regulate the activities of hunters spread across the state. In Victoria there is strong evidence of hunter transgressions that are not and cannot be effectively policed. These include (but are not limited to): illegally cutting down trees, destroying Indigenous sites and scar trees, camping in prohibited areas, leaving toilet waste and other litter around campsites, shooting protected species, trespass, and shooting at signs and other infrastructure.

It is particularly ingenuous to suggest that a pro-hunting body led by a majority of hunter nominees, will take a strong stance against such transgressions.

9. Specific examples of unacceptable behaviour at management level

While the NSW government may have received assurances from the Allan Labor government in Victoria, that there are no problems with the GMA or the hunting industry it supports, here are just three examples that have been uncovered (there is little transparency):

- 2016: former Greens leader Greg Barber reported to parliament on his FOI request; the GMA had urged police to "go easy" on hunters. (Ref: Victorian Hansard, Legislative Council, 25 Oct 2016, p.5545)
- 2017: GMA misled the former Minister (Jaala Pulford) who reported that the duck season opening was "a very orderly weekend". (Ref: Victorian Hansard, Legislative Council, 21 March 2017, p.1476). In fact it was a scandalous, illegal massacre of waterbirds, as later acknowledged by the GMA (*in its media release dated 22/3/2017 – now removed from its*

⁴ <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/plastic-pollution-from-shotguns>

⁵ <https://www.abc4.com/news/bullets-can-cause-wildfires-heres-how-target-shooting-turns-dangerous-in-the-wild/>, <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/43918>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S037971122200100X>

website, in another example of its lack of transparency).

- Following from that 2017 opening weekend debacle, Pegasus Economics conducted an independent review of the GMA's compliance functions. Its report was highly critical, finding the regulator was "too comfortable" with those it regulates and at risk of capture by those interests. It recommended the GMA be split, remaining as an advocacy/education body, with regulatory functions returned to a larger department. *[With an election looming, former premier Andrews ignored that recommendation and instead boosted the GMA's budget.]*
- The taxpayer contribution to the GMA has been quietly growing ever since it was established in 2014. Last year the government revealed that taxpayers had been funding three-quarters of GMA's budget. However there is no transparency about the pro-hunting contributions from other government agencies. GMA now taps into university funding for "hunting research" – denying more urgent research projects of much-needed funds. We note with concern that the NSW hunting body will also pursue hunting research – presumably funded by taxpayers.

10. Guns, guns and more guns?

"Hunting" is accepted by the government as a "genuine reason" to own a firearm – in fact multiple category A&B firearms. But no-one checks if they're actually used for hunting. What a wonderful loophole for the firearms industry to flout.

Not long ago a couple of us sat our firearms safety course. The fact it consisted of a session in which everyone was provided answers to the test so no-one could fail, was concerning. The fact we had never touched a firearm in our lives, didn't know how to pick up one end from the other, including at the end of this one-hour theory session was even more concerning, but the real clincher was what we were told at the end.

We were told, the "quickest way to obtain our firearm" was to say on the firearm license application, that we wanted the firearm to hunt pest animals on crown land, even though we are primary producers with a real genuine reason other than hunting.

We note that in Victoria, the number of firearm licenses has increased exponentially, above the percentage of population growth. This is very likely what the gun lobby is wanting to replicate in other states and this bill is one way they will try to do it in NSW for now.

What's next, the "right to bear arms"? This is what the gun groups have been actively striving for ever since John Howard's bold stance to control them after the Port Arthur massacre.

Conclusion

The incorrect use of the word "conservation" in conjunction with hunting, is an insult to the thousands of regional landowners, residents and environment groups working year-round (at their own expense) to protect and nurture the natural environment. Killing native wildlife including threatened species, and pumping tonnes of toxic lead and plastic pollution into the environment is not, and never will be "conservation" despite the ongoing attempts by the gun lobby to dress up their minority and highly destructive pastime.

Taxpayers do not need to fund a new "Hunting Minister", nor a promotional hunting body. Hunters should be expected to fund their own promotional activities like any other recreation. Notwithstanding, other more popular recreations (wildlife watching, birdwatching) and known to be far more of a financial boost to the economy, as well as safe family pastimes which respect the environment, would be hampered by the minority destructive pastime of hunting.

We are shocked the Minns government would even consider supporting this blatant hunting/gun promotion, let alone make taxpayers fund it.

We would be very happy to provide any further testimony if required.

Yours Sincerely,

Karen Mander – Campaign Manager

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Relevant links:

[Victorian family's near miss](#)

[Truck driver had to quit his job](#)

More information can be viewed on our website, regionalvictoriansOTDS.com