



Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Hearing Date: 26 May 2023

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Dr Holly Sitters

Received Date: 7/6/2023

1. Jeff Bourman p. 62

Question asked:

If a fire were to go through, say, one with high fuel, what sort of damage would that do – depending on the time of year of course – to the ducks and their cycle? You would expect it during summer, but it would have a marked effect on the environment, I would assume. That is where you come in?

Response:

Fire can have both positive and negative effects on wetlands (e.g. Osborne et al. 2013), but there is negligible published literature about the effects of fire on ducks specifically (see Kruse and Bowen 1996).

The effects of fire on wetlands depend on the wetland's characteristics, including its climatic and hydrological context, as well as interactions with other disturbances such as grazing (Kotze 2013, Nocentini et al. 2021). As is the case in forest and woodland, regeneration of wetland vegetation after fire in cold temperate wetlands is a function of fire intensity, fire size, plant species characteristics and site conditions (Zhao et al. 2013).

For example, annual prescribed fires in Maryland, USA, were found to decrease the accumulation of litter, increase the biomass and stem densities of some wetland plants considered less suitable habitat for wildlife, and have little effect on other wetland plants previously thought to benefit from fire (Flores et al. 2011).

The ecological impacts of fire in wetlands are often unpredictable because they depend on how fire interacts with hydrology (Nocentini et al. 2021). Nonetheless, it is clear that “more intense fire regimes tend to have more dramatic consequences” (Gianoli et al. 2023).

2. Jeff Bourman, p. 63

Question asked:

Connewarre is actually a really good example, because I personally believe that it is still in the state it is in because it has been used as a state game reserve for hunting. Shortly it is not going to be, just because of the encroachment of suburbia. I think we all know what is going to happen once hunting stops and once someone is going to get a planning permit – they are going to pave paradise and put up a parking lot. I actually see in some cases hunting keeping habitat that would otherwise be used for development. Connewarre is a beautiful place, but you can stand in there and shoot and they are a long way away, but you can see people's houses. I do not want to say 'I put it to you'; it sounds like we are at a trial, but I am raising the possibility that hunting may well work to retain habitat. You can comment on that or not if you wish?

Response:

Crucially, Lake Connewarre is part of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar wetland (<https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/wetlands/ramsardetails.pl?refcode=18#>), noted for its internationally significant habitat for migratory waders, Black Swans, ducks, ibis and cormorants.

A developer proposing to take an action that is likely to have a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland must refer the action to the Federal Environment Minister for evaluation under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Further, hunters are among many individuals, groups and organisations that value wetlands. Groups undertaking wetland conservation, research or management in Victoria include: Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action; Arthur Rylah Institute; Parks Victoria; the Blue Carbon Lab's Victorian Coastal Wetland Restoration Program; Environmental Justice Australia; Catchment Management Authorities; Aboriginal Corporations; Land for Wildlife; Trust for Nature; Conservation Volunteers Australia; Environment Victoria; the Wetlands and Wildlife Creations Group; the Wetland Revival Trust.

The Wetlands Environmental Taskforce (wet.org.au/projects/connewarre) states that the “Connewarre Wetland Centre now fulfils a variety of uses for the entire community: wetland conservation; community outdoor education; youth and school group visits; tourist and visitor centre; hunter education; meeting rooms; dog trials, training and retrieving demonstration days; walking tracts; wildlife research; project partner field days; nest box workshops and research; community events; birdwatching”.

Lake Connewarre’s status as Ramsar site of international importance, along with the diverse stakeholders in the community who value wetlands, mean that it is far from reliant on hunters for protection.

References

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