



Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Hearing Date: 16 June 2023

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: RSPCA Victoria

Received Date: 4 July 2023

1. MELINA BATH Page no. 19

Question asked to Mhairi Roberts:

What about fishing? Fishing is seen as a sport. Are you opposed to fishing? Can you clarify that you are opposed to all forms of hunting, and can you go through the things that I have asked?

Mhairi Roberts: In terms of fish I would probably have to take on notice our exact policy, but I would be happy to bring that back to the committee.

Response:

RSPCA Policy E08 Fish and aquatic invertebrates

RSPCA Australia advocates the use of fishing methods and equipment that minimise pain and suffering and avoid injury for both target and non-target animals.

Fish caught for food or other consumptive purposes must be killed humanely as soon as possible after capture.

2. MICHAEL GALEA Page no. 21

Question asked to Mhairi Roberts:

In your submission you have referenced comparisons with other states – WA, New South Wales and Queensland – that progressively over the last three decades have outlawed the practice of native bird hunting. I would be interested in, especially in light of this survey as well – are you aware of social attitudes in those states particularly since bird hunting was abolished there? Have social attitudes hardened against the practice, or has there been a pushback to bring back native bird hunting in those states that you are –

Mhairi Roberts: I am not aware of any data, but we could take that on notice and look into that.

Response:

In 2018 McCrindle ran a survey on behalf of RSPCA Australia. This survey asked:

How do you feel about the following animal welfare issues? *The hunting or shooting of ducks and other birds for recreation or sport*

66% of respondents were either concerned or very concerned (31% very concerned, 35% concerned, 25% unconcerned, 9% don't know) and this is broken down by state/territory below:

State/territory	Very concerned	Concerned	Unconcerned	Don't know
NSW	32%	36%	23%	9%
VIC	34%	33%	23%	10%
QLD	30%	36%	23%	11%
TAS	30%	31%	27%	12%
NT	27%	28%	39%	5%
SA	30%	35%	27%	9%
WA	27%	38%	31%	4%
ACT	31%	33%	30%	7%

This data shows that the majority of Australians are concerned about duck and bird hunting, including in states where it is already banned.

3. THE CHAIR Page no. 28

Questions asked to Dr Liz Walker:

Two things I would not mind following up if you can. One, you have given us the Kantar research; there is research referred to in section 6.1 on Victorians' attitudes towards locations and the season. Is it possible to provide that to the committee? Second, you mentioned in the last answer some feedback that was not incorporated into the wounding action plan. Are you able to provide that to the committee as well?

Response:

The research undertaken by the RedBridge Group referenced in RSPCA Victoria's submission is attached.

The key feedback that RSPCA Victoria provided to the Game Management Authority (GMA) on the Wounding Reduction Action Plan that was not included in the final draft is:

- A mandatory game license test should not be conducted as a once off and should be required more regularly.
- Proficiency testing for prospective hunters should not be undertaken as a once off and should be undertaken more regularly. Proficiency testing should also be required for existing hunters and not just prospective hunters in order to achieve the aims of the plan.
- The Wounding Reduction Working group should be a GMA Board Subcommittee to give GMA Directors a clear line of sight on work and progress on the plans.

We have provided the document with RSPCA Victoria feedback on an earlier draft that was sent to the GMA. The terms of reference (ToR) for the Wounding Reduction Working Group requires confidentiality of reports and papers provided to the Working Group so we ask that this document is not made publicly available so that the requirements in the ToR are not breached.

4. BEV MCARTHUR Page no. 29

Question asked to Mhairi Roberts:

Section 5.2 that you refer to, 'Stubble quail abundance in decline', can you maybe take this on notice: there seems to be a throwaway comment that no-one fact-checked. You make two statements here that:

... there is evidence to strongly suggest the population is in decline ...

when GMA's 2022 abundance estimates show increases in the population. You also state that quail hunting should be banned due to additional pressures from hunting during the breeding season, when all established science states that Victorian stubble quail breed in spring and early summer, not in autumn and winter when hunting occurs. So what information can you supply to the committee to verify these claims you have made?

Response:

Since RSPCA Victoria provided a submission to the Committee, the following resource has become available which may be of interest to the Committee:

Scroggie, M.P. and Ramsey, D.S.L. (2023) Stubble Quail abundance in Victoria: Improved survey methods and updated population estimates, available at: https://www.gma.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/953348/Stubble-Quail-abundance-in-Victoria_2023_FINAL.pdf

It is worth noting that this study is the first abundance study undertaken in Victoria where there have not been concerns with the adequacy of the methodology. As we highlighted in our submission, there have been significant challenges in estimating the number of stubble quail in Victoria, because of this lack of data, which is why RSPCA Victoria presented harvest data as a proxy for species abundance.

The authors of the 2023 abundance study noted that the population estimate was obtained at the end of a prolonged period of above average rainfall conditions in Victoria, meaning that abundance reported may be abnormally high. The authors recommend that surveys under drier conditions be undertaken. This illustrates, that unlike for ducks where there are decades of data that show trends in abundance over time, the lack of data for quail over time is problematic to allow for informed decisions to be made.

In terms of quail breeding, no recent studies have been undertaken which further highlights the lack of understanding of the pressure hunting may have on these native species. One historical study that looked at the breeding of stubble quail was:

Frith, H.J. and Carpenter, S.M. (1980) Breeding of Stubble Quail, *Coturnix pectoralis*, in South-Eastern Australia *Australian Wildlife Research* 7(1) 117 – 137

This study outlined the following:

“At Werribee breeding was encountered in February and March and, in two of the four years in which samples were taken, in March juvenile birds were in the population.

Apparently, in at least half of the years at Werribee there is significant breeding in March; this results in young birds of weak flying power being in the population in April. Because of the strong effects of rainfall on prolonging the breeding season, it is probable that in some years significant breeding would occur in April and, indeed, hunters have reported eggs in birds shot in southern Victoria in that month.”