

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON VICTORIA'S RECREATIONAL NATIVE BIRD HUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Melbourne – Friday 26 May 2023

MEMBERS

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Jeff Bourman

Katherine Copsey

Bev McArthur

Evan Mulholland

Georgie Purcell

Sheena Watt

WITNESSES

Mr Rod Campbell, Research Director, and

Ms Elizabeth Morison, Researcher (*via videoconference*), the Australia Institute.

The CHAIR: Mr Campbell, Ms Morison, thank you very much for joining us here today.

I will just let you know that all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided in the *Constitution Act 1975* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearings. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and any organisation that you are appearing on behalf of.

Rod CAMPBELL: My name is Rod Campbell. I am the Research Director at the Australia Institute.

Elizabeth MORISON: My name is Elizabeth Morison, and I am a Researcher at the Australia Institute.

The CHAIR: I will invite you shortly to make an opening comment, and then we will take it in turns to ask a series of questions in blocks, alternating between members of the committee. Ms Morison, you are going to make an opening statement.

Elizabeth MORISON: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to speak. I am calling from Ngunnawal–Ngambri country and acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and the Wurundjeri people on whose land this hearing is taking place. The Australia Institute is one of many civil society groups calling for an end to native bird shooting, contributing expert economic analysis.

A decade ago, in 2012, we released a report describing the lack of an economic case for duck hunting in Victoria. The report explained that duck hunting has minimal economic impact and that ending the practice would likely have a positive economic effect. Eleven years later, the point still stands; in fact it has become stronger. In 2012 half of 1 per cent of Victorians were licensed duck hunters, but in 2022 that number had dropped to 0.34 per cent, and only 0.17 per cent actually went hunting. On the other hand, polling by the RSPCA in Victoria in 2022 found that two in three Victorians oppose duck hunting – four times as many as those who support it. Hunters themselves also say that they would substitute native bird shooting with other activities like pest species hunting, fishing or camping.

The Australia Institute supports a ban on sports shooting of ducks and quails in Victoria based on economic analysis showing that ending the practice would have a minimal impact on Victoria's economy. This economic analysis is assisted by research commissioned by the Game Management Authority and written by RM Consulting Group. Based on calculations from RM Consulting Group, duck and quail hunting results in economic activity of between \$4 million and \$11 million each year. Even at the top of the range – \$11 million – duck and quail hunting represents just 0.002 per cent of Victoria's gross state product of \$501 billion. And even at 0.002 per cent – or 0.0008 per cent if we are referring to the \$4 million end of RM Consulting Group's range – the Australia Institute expects this to be an overstatement of the economics. The report is likely to have overestimated how much duck and quail hunters spent by using a survey of self-selecting participants and by using an input–output economic model that the Australian Bureau of Statistics describes as biased.

The Australia Institute is also concerned about the integrity of the Game Management Authority as an independent and impartial regulator. The commissioned research from RM Consulting Group emphasises economic footprint and gross economic contribution, which are unorthodox figures that inflate the economic reality of sport, duck and quail hunting and make this research more appropriate to advocacy for hunting than to inform policy.

The Game Management Authority website also boasts that Victoria has some of the best game hunting opportunities in Australia and generous open seasons and bag limits. In 2017 a review of the Game Management Authority found that it was failing to adequately fulfil its statutory obligations and recommended that the regulator functions be moved to a different body. This recommendation was not implemented, and the Australia Institute suggests that six years later this recommendation is still highly relevant. Between the low economic impact of sport shooting for ducks and quails and concerns that the regulator is not fit for purpose, the Australia Institute strongly supports that the committee follow the examples set by Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia and end duck and quail shooting in Victoria. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. What I thought I would do is ask members of the committee to introduce themselves in order, and then we will start the questioning. My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Chair of the committee and a Member for Southern Metropolitan Region. I might ask Evan to introduce himself, and then we will go down the table.

Evan MULHOLLAND: G'day. I am Evan Mulholland, Member for Northern Metropolitan Region.

Jeff BOURMAN: I am Jeff Bourman, Member for Eastern Victoria Region.

Bev McARTHUR: I am Bev McArthur, Member for Western Victoria Region.

Melina BATH: I am Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria Region.

Michael GALEA: I am Michael Galea, Deputy Chair and Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sheena WATT: Hello. I am Sheena Watt, Member for Northern Metropolitan Region.

Georgie PURCELL: I am Georgie Purcell, Member for Northern Victoria.

Katherine COPSEY: I am Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. I am going to start. Obviously one of the terms of reference that we have got is about economic impact. We have just heard from RMCG about their report on economic contribution, and they were very clear with us about the importance of making sure that we do not confuse the two. It seems to me that critical to the assessment of impact is this question of substitutability of economic activity that hunters might undertake between duck hunting and alternative forms of outdoor recreation but also what sort of substitutability there might be between non-hunting-related forms of economic activity and hunting-related economic activity in particular locations. I just want to get your evidence on the question of substitutability based on the work that you have both done here and in other contexts.

Rod CAMPBELL: In terms of the polling that we have done in 2012 in Victoria and some other polling we have done more recently in South Australia, it is close to 100 per cent, or it is certainly in the 90s, of hunter respondents who say that – sorry, our surveys in particular are in relation to bird hunting – in the absence of bird hunting they would hunt pest species, go fishing, go camping or go four-wheel driving et cetera, substituting that activity with activities that are very, very similar, with similar spending profiles in similar locations.

The RMCG work that you were talking about before has similar numbers, with percentages in the 90s, of respondents saying that in the absence of any kind of hunting they would go fishing, go boating et cetera. You know, polling aside, I think it just makes real-world sense that if you are a person interested in the outdoors and one kind of outdoor activity is not available you would be very likely to substitute that with another kind of outdoor activity.

The CHAIR: On the substitutability question, one of the things that we confront is obviously that the season for native bird hunting is at defined times throughout the year. Did any of your research ask the question about what people who participate in that activity during the season do in the off-season?

Rod CAMPBELL: No, our surveys have not looked at that timing element.

The CHAIR: They have not looked at the timing element, because that would give us an indication, I suspect, of whether there was participation in non-hunting activities during that time that people were unable to hunt.

Rod CAMPBELL: No, but I guess while bird hunting has particular seasons, almost all of those substitute activities do not have a particular season, and there is no particular season for most kinds of fishing or any kind of boating or camping et cetera. I guess they are weather dependent. But, yes, I would argue there is a less time-sensitive element in almost all of those substitute activities than there would be for bird hunting.

The CHAIR: Do you have any comment or evidence about the substitutability of activities between hunting and non-hunting-related activities – alternative forms of outdoor recreation and alternative forms of tourism? Is there anything in the work that you have done that would give any evidence to the committee about that sort of substitutability between different types of people who would –

Rod CAMPBELL: For the general public as opposed to –

The CHAIR: For the general public, yes. Yes, as opposed to the hunter community. For the general rest of the community is there any evidence you have got about what they might do in the absence of having parts of the state occupied by hunting at particular times of the year?

Rod CAMPBELL: Yes. So our surveys asked people who were not hunters if they were more or less likely to go to areas for a general tourism visit if they knew that there was hunting occurring there. I think it is not very surprising that the numbers are pretty high. Liz might have the numbers in front of her, but I am pretty sure it was I think about 76 per cent of people saying they would be less likely to visit an area that has a hunting season going on at it.

The CHAIR: And those other types of activities – did the survey ask what types of activities they were, and do you know from other data sources what the economic value of those types of activities is?

Rod CAMPBELL: I think we only asked about general tourism, not any detail about what the activities are. So I mean, it would be a bit of a guess, but as I think was commented before, you know, hunting is often seen as a kind of tourism, so you would imagine spending profiles would be similar, although perhaps more likely to be, you know, staying in paid accommodation and perhaps less likely to be camping and self-catering. So, you know, perhaps you would expect some amount of expenditure to be lost as a result there, but I think it is important to note it almost certainly would be substituted by those non-hunting tourists. They would probably substitute that visit to an area with hunting with a visit to a different area most likely within the same state, so I think the overall statewide economic impact of what we are saying there would similarly be minimal, but it could be material in terms of where the hunting is occurring.

The CHAIR: Okay. My time has expired. Melina.

Melina BATH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation today. I am interested that your submission and your website speak about you being ‘an independent public policy think tank based in Canberra’. I looked up your website. I am interested to understand who donates to you and how do we understand who donates to you.

Rod CAMPBELL: So we are philanthropically funded and donations from the public. You can go to our website and donate. I encourage you to do so.

Melina BATH: Yes, I saw that. But how do we see who donates to you? Is that visible to the public?

Rod CAMPBELL: Not all of our donors. If you when this hearing finishes go to our website and sign up as a regular donor, we will not be publishing your name.

Melina BATH: That was not really my question. How can you state your organisation is independent when you are funded by the RSPCA with a stated position of anti duck hunting? And you have just said today that you are anti duck hunting, so there is not a level of independence.

Rod CAMPBELL: We are not funded by the RSPCA. We were commissioned to write a report 10 years ago by the RSPCA, and as far as I know, that is the only money we have ever received from them.

Melina BATH: But you are heavily quoting, now today in your discussion, that report.

Rod CAMPBELL: Yes, but our positions are based on our published economic research. We are a registered research organisation. We are overseen by a research committee that is approved by the federal Department of Education. We stand by our research as independent, published, and our positions are based on our published research.

Melina BATH: Thank you. And this published research is from 2012 with 503 survey respondents, and 3 per cent of them, as stated, were hunters. So you have spoken to 15 alleged hunters in this report. Doing the maths on that – and I think you quote it in your document as well – there are around 6,000,700 people who are of voting age or adult age in Victoria, that ends up being 0.002 per cent of the population that you are making these generalisations about, 15 people in your survey out of a population of 6 million.

Rod CAMPBELL: Is that a question?

Melina BATH: My question to you is: how can Victorians have confidence when you are making a report and generalisations when your dataset is statistically insignificant?

Rod CAMPBELL: Well, as I said to Mr Batchelor, while the statistical power of talking to – let us say you are right – 15 hunters about hunting might be limited, the logic of it is what is useful here. If you are not allowed to hunt ducks, you are likely to hunt another species or undertake another outdoor activity that is in a lot of ways similar to duck hunting. I do not think the psychology or logic of that is controversial.

Melina BATH: So we just grilled – nicely, as we do – the previous people who investigated very thoroughly. They refused to answer a number of questions, not because they did not happen to be keen on this inquiry but because they knew it was outside the terms and scope of their survey. Yet you are drawing from statistics to logic to say, 'If it's not this, it's got to be this.' On your figure 4, 'Proportion of Victorians who would avoid holidaying in duck hunting areas', of your small percentage of 500 people surveyed, you have got a graph and at the end of it you say:

The results make clear that while duck hunters may inject some funds into some regional economies they also deter other tourists from visiting those regions and, in turn, offset any benefit that their expenditure this may have brought.

You do not in your question say what the duck hunting areas are, you do not give a parameter and you make gross generalisations in that discussion. How can we believe you when the rigour is not there in this level of survey?

Rod CAMPBELL: Is that a question?

The CHAIR: Your time is up, Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: I am happy for the gentleman to take it on notice, and he can respond in writing. I have got some other questions in on notice too.

The CHAIR: Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thank you for your presentation today and for the submission. There were a couple of scenarios presented in the previous witnesses' evidence around, you know, ranges of substitutability. I am very interested in your findings around substitutability, and I wonder if you can comment on how your research differs from that of the previous witness and also the chance that there could be a positive economic impact from cessation of duck shooting in Victoria.

Rod CAMPBELL: Okay. I will take that bit by bit. I guess, in terms of how our views differ from the economists before us, we heard repeatedly that this was an economic contribution study. I have been a professional economist for – I do not know – 15 years. I do not know what an economic contribution study is. I know what an economic impact study is. I know what a cost-benefit analysis is. 'Economic contribution' is not a term that you will find in any economics textbook in any university syllabus. 'Contribution' implies a gift or something. Economists talk about spending, about changes in output and about demand and supply and prices. We do not talk about contributions. You know, perhaps it is a shortcoming of economics, but rationality and demand and supply of goods and services is generally what economics is about.

What I take the RMCG report to really be about is taking bits and pieces of expenditure, including on vehicles and fuel and alcohol and groceries, and somehow trying to make various bits of various bits of expenditure relate to hunting as an activity or as a community that is not very well defined. And, you know, as an economist and someone who certainly works in political economy, why would you do that? As we have heard repeatedly, this study is not useful for policymaking. It provides no understanding of the marginal impacts of any particular policy change. Why would you produce a document that is of no use for policy development? You would only produce it for advocacy.

And so I look at the RMCG report from 2020, the one that was referred to from 2019, a similar report they wrote – the 2019 report was commissioned by the federal health department when it was under Bridget McKenzie, who is a very well known and a very big hunting advocate – along with their 2017 and 2013 reports, and all of these reports are largely used for hunting advocacy rather than policy development. So I think that is sort of my difference in approach between what they have done and what we are trying to do. We are trying to look at what the difference would be in economic output, net economic benefit, of a particular change in policy.

And that brings us I think to your next point, where you were talking about the potential economic benefit of a change in policy, like banning native bird hunting. I think, as discussed before, you would really be looking at what the costs and benefits are of doing something like that. Duck hunting benefits very, very few Victorians, and it imposes costs on many, so it should not be a big surprise that ending something that imposes costs on many but benefits few would likely bring about a positive economic impact.

And I think one of the witnesses in the last part of the hearing said in relation to a duck hunting ban that there would possibly be a positive economic impact. I think what she is referring to there is again in relation to substitutability. If the activities that somebody is engaging in – if they are initially engaging in bird hunting that is then banned and they take up a different activity, under the RMCG approach if that new activity has more elements of it that are produced in Victoria, then you would see an increase in economic activity. So if a duck hunter stopped going out to wetland areas and camping and shooting ducks and replaced all of that spending with going to the pub and eating steak and drinking locally brewed beer, then you would expect to see an increase in economic activity because there had been a decline in use of imported fuel, imported vehicles, imported firearms, imported ammunition and an increase in locally produced services.

The CHAIR: Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair, and thank you both for your attendance today. I note that your submission has a strong emphasis on Victorians' social attitudes to the issue of duck hunting. As I am sure you are aware, there is one jurisdiction that has already abolished the practice of duck hunting, and that is New South Wales, although it was some time ago. I am curious to know if you have done or are aware of any research that measures the social attitudes to the issue of native bird hunting in New South Wales – whether their standpoint has resolved as stronger against duck hunting or whether there has been growing pressure to reinstate the practice in that state?

Rod CAMPBELL: I do not know.

Elizabeth MORISON: Yes, we have not done any follow-up research in New South Wales.

Michael GALEA: No worries. Taking you back to the point as well of the difference between an economic contribution study and an economic impact study, do you feel that an economic impact study would be valuable, especially to the work of the committee or to the broader debate on this issue, or do you believe that the evidence already speaks for itself?

Rod CAMPBELL: Look, probably not. I think the evidence largely speaks for itself. If we start with a broader point: I am an economist. For better or worse, that is what I been trained to do; it is how I have been trained to think. But I think we do not live in an economy, we live in a society and in a democracy. So it should really be about the democracy deciding 'what kind of community do you want to live in?' and then asking economists what the most efficient way is to bring about the outcomes that we want as a democracy. I think it is really dangerous: I think there are a lot of examples of where this has happened in the last 30 or 40 years, where economists have been asked, 'How do we maximise the economy?' – whatever that exactly means – and policy

has been driven by what might drive economic growth or economic output. I think there have been a lot of big picture problems that have been the result of that kind of thinking.

In terms of a question like native bird hunting, where you are talking about ethics and animal welfare and sustainability, I think this is the kind of question that you need to ask scientists, ecologists, animal welfare experts and the community for their general views about that kind of thing, come to a policy position and then ask the economists, 'What might the impact of this be?'. The impact of it is very small: possibly negative or possibly positive, as we have been hearing this morning – everyone is on the same page there. So is a study worthwhile? The impact is going to be incredibly small and very hard to measure with any kind of confidence, without bickering over whether or not the survey or the methodology is any good. I think the decision should really be made on ecological and community attitude grounds.

Michael GALEA: Sure. And I note from your submission that whilst you have referenced the RMCG analysis, the crux of your submission is about Victorian attitudes to this issue. Is that a fair assessment, to say that?

Rod CAMPBELL: I think Victoria is a democracy, and that is how these decisions should be made. As an economist, I guess I am here to say a decision on banning native bird hunting seems to be either slightly economically beneficial or at least is having minimal economic impact.

Michael GALEA: Sure. If I can ask just briefly, again picking up from a point that Ms Bath made in terms of the respondents to your surveys, to the 503 respondents, can you provide any sort of indication on the geographic spread of those responses?

Bev McARTHUR: Especially the three shooters – 15.

Rod CAMPBELL: Can I take that on notice? As it was a 10-year-old study, I will dig out the back-end results of that.

Michael GALEA: Sure. I appreciate that. Thank you. That is all for my questions, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. As an economist, how can you justify criticising the previous very thorough economic submissions that we have heard, when we are meant to make judgements on your work that was done 10 years ago?

Rod CAMPBELL: How can one economist justify criticising another economist? That is the nature of being an economist.

Bev McARTHUR: I am sure you are familiar with the textbook *How to Lie with Statistics*. Is that something you are basing your work on?

Rod CAMPBELL: I have never read that one.

Bev McARTHUR: What a shame, because you seem to be a good proponent of it.

Sheena WATT: We know what is on Bev's shelf.

Bev McARTHUR: You seem to want to ban duck hunting.

Rod CAMPBELL: Was the crux of your question 'What is my criticism of the previous economists' surveys?' They were administered to a particularly active, engaged part of the hunting population. The hunting advocacy groups promoted those surveys. In our submission we highlight a post from the Australian Deer Association that emphasises to their members that this study and this survey will provide useful dollar-value figures that will help with hunting advocacy, and when a survey is being promoted like that to a particular part of the sample population, it gives every incentive to provide exaggerated results –

Bev McARTHUR: So being commissioned by DJPR – is it not a viable organisation to be asking for research from an organisation like theirs?

Rod CAMPBELL: If I can finish my point, when respondents are being told the political implications of their answers, I think that is deeply problematic for a survey, especially when it is not followed up with any attempt to collect receipts or get any actual hard data, as opposed to claims and statements. Yes, they have compared some results to other studies, perhaps, but the answer was 'no' there. No receipts were collected. They did not accompany anyone on a trip and make their own estimates of those expenditures.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay, we get the discrediting.

Rod CAMPBELL: Well, you asked me a question, and now you do not want –

Bev McARTHUR: And you have answered it. Thank you very much.

Rod CAMPBELL: No, you asked me what my criticisms of their survey were, and now you are not hanging around to get the answer.

Bev McARTHUR: You have given it. Thank you very much.

Rod CAMPBELL: My point is given weight by these results that these economists ducked out of. Their results imply that \$269 was spent for every duck shot in Victoria last year. For quails, it comes out at \$177. That has got to be \$80 a mouthful, doesn't it? Their response, that that is not the way they look at these things, I just do not think is good enough. I think as an economist you sense-check your results, and when your results say a very small number of people spent \$351 million, you are meant to go out and sense-check that, especially when you have not checked the receipts. You have not got any hard data. So you ask, 'What is my criticism of their survey?' That is it. It was given to a motivated and biased sample. They described themselves that it was self-selecting. They have given a survey that was developed by hunting advocates to well-informed, well-motivated hunters, and then they have not checked their results against real-world data. How can I criticise them? That is exactly why.

Bev McARTHUR: Good. Given that the RSPCA has also been criticised for being a regulator and an activist body in the 2016 Comrie report, aren't you compromising your independence by accepting funds from the RSPCA to undertake your report?

Rod CAMPBELL: No. We have got a long and proud record of doing commissioned research for organisations and then criticising them where we think they need criticism. We have done commissioned research for Uber in relation to the great potential they have had for extending public transport and transport options, and we have been incredibly critical of Uber in relation to their employment practices. We have been incredibly critical of aspects of the mining industry. We have been commissioned by mining companies to review their economic assessments. So I think we have got a proud record of doing commissioned research that certainly provides interesting results and value for the people or the organisations that have commissioned it but demonstrating that we are capable of being independent in relation to exactly those same organisations.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. Thank you very much. Last question.

The CHAIR: No. Ms Purcell.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you very much. Thanks, Ms Morison, and thanks, Mr Campbell, for your evidence today and your great submission to the inquiry. I just want to put on the record that I do believe you, and I am sure that many others in this room do as well. Could you just go into a little bit more detail. You have given some criticisms of the RMCG report from the previous witnesses. Can you tell us about the two studies that I referenced in my questions – and their differences?

Rod CAMPBELL: I mean, we are really picking up on the same topic. I think here is a fantastic example of where economic modellers have not bothered to check their results against either their own results or the real world. The RMCG 2019 study for the federal department of health came up with a very similar population despite their claims that, 'Oh, it was of a different group.' I mean, if you go to the headings of the relevant tables, they are saying almost exactly the same thing. It is saying the economic contribution of hunting in Victoria – I do not have the exact number in front of me – was about \$650 million. The very next year they produce another report for another government department saying economic – maybe it is better if we talk about spending. In 2019 they say hunter spending in Victoria was 630 – do you have the exact number there? It

does not matter; it was in the six hundreds – \$600 million. A year later spending in Victoria was \$350 million, with no reference to the study they made just the year before. We spent quite a bit of time – when I say we, I mean you. You spent quite a bit of time talking to them about their comparison of their 2020 report with their 2013 report.

Bev McARTHUR: It has got to be better than their 2012 report.

Rod CAMPBELL: They did not even refer to their 2019 report in their 2020 report, and why didn't they refer to it? Because they had completely different results. If they had referred to their 2019 report in their 2020 report, they would have had to explain: where the hell did that \$250 million go? Did it slip down the back of the couch? Of course not. Their results were so different because their surveys are so unreliable, and their results were there. In 2019 – and I am sure regional Victorian members will be concerned about this – the RMCG results said that there were 5200 jobs supported by hunting in Victoria. In 2020 suddenly that was down to 3500. These are approximate numbers. Where did those 2500 jobs go? Did RMCG go to the ABS data and check? Were there thousands of jobs lost? Did they ask any businesses, 'Did you let tens of people go because of some radical change in hunter expenditure?' Of course they did not. They did not talk about it in their written reports, they did not talk about it today, because their results are too flimsy to talk about, too flimsy to refer to and certainly too flimsy to make any kind of policy decisions based on.

Georgie PURCELL: Thank you very much for that. We have established that you believe that those reports are unreliable. Do you believe that continuing duck shooting in Victoria, despite such a small number of participants and noting the fact that it does deter other Victorians from visiting the areas where it happens, is having a detrimental effect on Victoria's economy?

Rod CAMPBELL: Again, if we are talking statewide economy –

Georgie PURCELL: Regional economies.

Rod CAMPBELL: Detrimental; very small – it is just so small. The output of Victoria's economy is over \$500 billion a year, so let us not pretend that any change that this committee is looking to recommend will be of any particular interest to Treasury. It will not. But on a cost-benefit analysis perspective, there are a large amount of ducks being shot that the community is not really being compensated for. There are some significant regulatory expenses that in my understanding are not entirely covered by licence fees. You know, again, whether or not this is the realm of economics is open to debate, but economists are interested in what people are willing to pay for, and people care about animal welfare, and people are willing to pay for it. People buy free-range eggs all the time. They buy free-range pork all the time, and they do that because they care about animal welfare, and they are willing to pay for it.

Bev McARTHUR: Where is your evidence?

The CHAIR: Order!

Rod CAMPBELL: Where is my evidence that people buy free-range pork? It is down at the supermarket.

The CHAIR: Order! Can we just wrap up the answer to this question, because it is Ms Watt's time allocation.

Rod CAMPBELL: Just to wrap up, there are significant costs being imposed on many Victorians, as described, while there are benefits accruing to relatively few, and so on that basis, ending duck hunting and native bird hunting in Victoria would be economically beneficial.

Georgie PURCELL: Great. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Thank you so very much. Thanks for being here today, and sorry, Elizabeth, that we have not had a chance to hear from you more in our questions. I note that there was some polling done in 2022 by the RSPCA in your submission, which goes to community attitudes to duck hunting. I wonder, then, are there any further studies around community attitudes that are longitudinal or that you can highlight for the committee around community attitudes to duck hunting?

Rod CAMPBELL: Not that I am aware of. We might take that on notice. There might be other witnesses that would have that. Ms Morison, Liz, might have some other ideas relating to that, but we might take it on notice otherwise.

Elizabeth MORISON: Yes, I can do some digging and find out if it exists. We have not done it at the Australia Institute.

Sheena WATT: Okay. Certainly, thank you; I would appreciate that. Your *Out for a Duck: An Analysis of the Economics of Duck Hunting in Victoria* is actually – well, it is 10 years old.

Rod CAMPBELL: Eleven.

Sheena WATT: Eleven, rather. And given that during these last 10 years, we have heard from our first witnesses today, there has been a significant degradation in environmental conditions of wetlands and associated breeding areas due to climate change and significant events, are there any more recent studies that the Australia Institute has done into duck shooting and the economic impact that you can highlight for the committee, or is that in fact one of the most recent?

Rod CAMPBELL: No, that is our most recent study. And our submission –

Sheena WATT: And the submission, of course.

Rod CAMPBELL: to this committee. Just as a side note, I think it is really important to note again with economic studies like the RM studies that use what are called input–output models or multiplier models, they take no account of environmental costs. That is one of their key shortcomings. And so if that is the kind of evidence you are hearing – that environmental changes are having an impact on duck populations and duck seasons – none of that change will be incorporated into these economic models. It is ignored entirely.

Sheena WATT: I am just more thinking to changes in terms of attitudes and participation in outdoor recreation – you know, investments that may have been made to outdoor recreation spaces that may then reflect that sort of substitutability.

Rod CAMPBELL: Are you sort of saying that, perhaps, if there has been a degradation in environmental conditions, people are placing an even higher value on what remains or on further conservation?

Sheena WATT: Yes, as in people. Similar to how people are rushing to get to the Great Barrier Reef because they hear about how the conditions are degrading and so are wanting to participate in seeing that before it becomes, you know –

Rod CAMPBELL: I see the logic of your question, but I have not done any research.

Sheena WATT: Any research into that. I am happy to move on to another question. I am thinking I have still got time. I note in the conclusion of the submission that you support an exemption for Victorian traditional owners and referenced the Victorian traditional owner game management strategy. I certainly have read and am very familiar with that work. I wonder: are there any other conditions for which you would support an exemption on the basis of economic benefit, considering that it is really only, I suspect, Aboriginal people that have a cultural connection that brings to –

Rod CAMPBELL: I think this comes back to my earlier point that the community needs to come up with what the community wants and then ask economists about the best way to get there. I guess we were just highlighting in our submission that that seems like the kind of exemption that might apply here, but it is really outside our expertise to comment on those.

Sheena WATT: You made mention of a particular exemption that you support, in the submission, and I was going to that point about offering up exemptions to your position. Of course there are a number of organisations, I noted from the previous witnesses, that had supported the surveys, such as shooting and hunting bodies. I can relist them, but if you were here, you may have heard me speak to them.

Rod CAMPBELL: I was here, yes.

Sheena WATT: And I saw in your submission that one of the organisations had promoted it:

... the Australian Deer Association promoted the RMCG 2020 survey, stating that it would be “an important tool in helping advocate for more support and opportunities for hunters” ...

Was there any advocacy of the survey that you saw from those particular to the duck-hunting industry?

Rod CAMPBELL: Sorry, are there any other examples of the survey being promoted?

Sheena WATT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Just briefly, if we can, because we are out of time.

Sheena WATT: Promoted by any bodies?

Rod CAMPBELL: Not that I found. That one came –

Sheena WATT: Not that you found.

Rod CAMPBELL: When you google the survey that post comes up as one of the highest results. That is why we found that one.

Sheena WATT: One of the highest ones – not to say that that was the only one, though?

Rod CAMPBELL: Okay – no.

Sheena WATT: Lovely. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Cool. Thank you for presenting to the committee today. You have obviously submitted a report that says you support the banning of duck hunting. Does that also extend to pig hunting?

Rod CAMPBELL: We have not researched that.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Or deer hunting? Do you support deer hunting?

Rod CAMPBELL: We have not done any research on it, so we do not have a particular position.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Okay. It is just your survey basically equated that 60 per cent of people would go on to pig or deer hunting or some other form of hunting, so I just wanted to clarify that.

Rod CAMPBELL: I am not aware of any current policy proposal in Victoria to ban those practices. Is there?

Evan MULHOLLAND: No. I was just asking for an opinion. Was the survey you did back in 2012 an online panel survey?

Rod CAMPBELL: I think so. I have already undertaken to take on notice a couple of questions about, or a question about, the back end of that poll.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I would be interested in – just take it on notice, as I know we are short on time – if it was a panel survey and whether participants were selected or invited. Just going back to your submission, in the headline of your submission you quote the 0.17 per cent yearly figure of Victorians against the population as if that is all the support for duck shooting amongst the public, but you also compare it to the 88 per cent figure from a poll that are concerned with bird suffering. That is not really a like-for-like comparison, is it?

Rod CAMPBELL: I mean, I think the point that a very large number of Victorians oppose duck shooting and are concerned about the welfare of ducks and a very small number of Victorians actually shoot ducks – I do not think that point is really disputed.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I understand, but it just was two different figures from two separate scenarios. I will go on to another question, as I know we are short on time. You have acknowledged today there would be

some economic impact from the banning of duck hunting. Your own submission says that 70 per cent of Victorians would not be willing to pay a cent to end duck hunting and 83 per cent would not pay more than 20 cents a week. Do you acknowledge that there appears not to be a whole lot of passion to end this recreational activity once you add an economic cost?

Rod CAMPBELL: On the contrary, I think that result – as somebody who has looked at willingness-to-pay studies quite a lot, I was really surprised at how strong that is. Usually when you ask people to pay, yes, support for all kinds of conservation propositions evaporates pretty strongly. Again, I do not have the exact numbers in front of me. The idea that 20 per cent of Victorians are willing to pay for a specific conservation outcome at the quantities suggested I thought was a really strong result. Again, as we were discussing with Ms Watt, 10 years on with a lot more concern around the Murray–Darling Basin and wetlands, I would be a little bit surprised if those numbers had not gone up, but I certainly have not done the research. I thought that was a really strong result.

Evan MULHOLLAND: And just lastly –

Rod CAMPBELL: Sorry to interrupt again, but with that result and then when that is considered against the population, I think that gives a really strong indication of the extent to which people are willing – it puts a dollar value. Again, is a dollar value the right way to do this? It puts a very large dollar value on the economic value of animal welfare in relation to ducks, one that certainly outweighs any kind of net benefit from duck shooting. That was the result of that study.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I would disagree. Seventy per cent seems a large number, but I will just go on to a quick question on your use of the number of –

Rod CAMPBELL: I mean –

The CHAIR: Can we just let Mr Mulholland ask his question, please.

Rod CAMPBELL: Sorry.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It is just on your use of the number of people who engage in duck hunting and its relevance as to whether it should be legal or not – as an argument. According to your own figures, 7 per cent of Victorians have duck hunted; by comparison, 3 per cent of Victorians go to the opera every year. Is that an argument that we should be making to ban the opera? I am just trying to understand why your use of relative figures of a small number of Victorians should be used as an argument to ban something. Why not actually make the point on the merits rather than this economic argument?

Rod CAMPBELL: Sorry, could you just rephrase your question?

The CHAIR: I do not know if it was a question or a point you were trying to make, Evan, but we have just run out of time. So unless there is any particular thing you want to respond to –

Evan MULHOLLAND: No, I just wanted to ask about the reasoning behind engaging in the argument of the small amount of Victorians being why we should ban it.

Rod CAMPBELL: Because it imposes a cost on a large number of Victorians.

The CHAIR: Okay. Mr Bourman.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you. What cost does it impose?

Rod CAMPBELL: So we have just been discussing –

Jeff BOURMAN: Economic cost, I am assuming.

Rod CAMPBELL: Sorry?

Jeff BOURMAN: Economic cost.

Rod CAMPBELL: There are a bunch of costs initially. I mean, it costs a lot of money to run the regulator. There is –

Jeff BOURMAN: How much?

Rod CAMPBELL: I will take that on notice. So there is running the regulator. There are significant environmental costs relating to lead pollution in –

Jeff BOURMAN: We use steel shot now.

Rod CAMPBELL: Yes, but that is still the cost of –

Georgie Purcell interjected.

The CHAIR: Order!

Rod CAMPBELL: I mean, putting amounts of steel into waterways probably is not best environmental practice either.

Jeff BOURMAN: Have you got a study to refer to on that?

Rod CAMPBELL: It is beyond my expertise, but as a –

Jeff BOURMAN: That is what I mean.

Rod CAMPBELL: Sorry, do you have a particular question?

Jeff BOURMAN: That is my point. It is beyond your expertise, so I do not know why you made the comment.

Rod CAMPBELL: There are environmental costs relating to wetlands. I mean, you have heard evidence this morning that there are environmental costs in relation to shooting large numbers of ducks –

Jeff BOURMAN: No, actually there was an environmental cost with the –

Rod CAMPBELL: Are you going to let me finish my answer to your question?

Jeff BOURMAN: When you get something right.

The CHAIR: We can have questions and an opportunity to answer, please. Mr Bourman, did you want to state a question?

Jeff BOURMAN: I will let you finish.

Rod CAMPBELL: Great.

Jeff BOURMAN: I will keep my mouth shut for a short time.

Rod CAMPBELL: There are significant management and environmental costs. There is a cost in terms of the public resource. I mean, there are hundreds of thousands of ducks that get shot that are owned by the public, and the public receives no return from them, whereas –

Jeff BOURMAN: Actually, may I interrupt on that point?

The CHAIR: When the witness has finished his answer, then I will invite you to ask another question.

Rod CAMPBELL: When miners dig up a lump of gold they pay the state for it. When forestry operations chop down a tree they pay the state for it. When a duck shooter shoots a duck they do not pay for it, so that is a cost to the community. Then returning to the largest cost that Mr Mulholland was just – largest but most perhaps difficult to measure, and is it even an economic issue. But Victorians care about the welfare of their ducks. That is the overwhelming result of everybody's survey and of every discussion you have on the street. People care about that, and some of them – 20 to 30 per cent of them – are willing to pay for that. Huge

numbers of Victorians are willing to pay for all kinds of aspects of animal welfare. That is the relevance of my discussion about free-range eggs and hormone-free pork and things like that. Victorians care about animal welfare, they are willing to pay for it and therefore it has an economic dimension. So that is why I am saying that significant economic costs are imposed on the community. Whether or not you think dollar values is the best way to be talking about animal welfare, that is a valid discussion, but certainly within economics –

Jeff BOURMAN: We are going on a bit now.

Rod CAMPBELL: Within economics that is what I am talking about in terms of costs.

The CHAIR: Maybe Mr Bourman can –

Jeff BOURMAN: I have got limited time. So all your arguments could be applied to fishing, correct? There is no economic return to Victorians when someone pulls a 4-kilo snapper out of the bay.

Rod CAMPBELL: I am not sure the extent to which fishing licences and so on cover various aspects of the regulation of fishing, but in general –

Jeff BOURMAN: We will just take it as ‘not sure’. I am happy with that. I am sorry to cut it off; we are really on limited time. Your submission refers to the GMA report 44 times, economics six times. You also said the GMA commissioned the report – this report here. Is that your contention?

Rod CAMPBELL: The report that is on the GMA website that GMA refer to all the time?

Jeff BOURMAN: The RM consulting one, the 2013 – yes. It is your contention that they commissioned that report?

Rod CAMPBELL: I mean, I heard you ask them about that, and they say they were commissioned by the department that oversees GMA, so –

Jeff BOURMAN: Your thing here says:

... GMA's commissioned research by RMCG ...

It was done by the department, and I have it on extremely good authority that it was actually commissioned by the minister herself at the time, who is now the Attorney-General. All the criticisms in this report – would you make the same criticisms of the Attorney-General? Because that is basically what you are doing. Your whole contention that GMA have done that report is wrong.

The CHAIR: Mr Bourman, it is probably not within the competence of the witness to answer a question about who commissioned a report, and we can probably –

Jeff BOURMAN: If I may, Chair, they made the statement, not me.

The CHAIR: If you want to respond to that particular question, and then we have got to conclude.

Jeff BOURMAN: We are really running short, sorry.

Rod CAMPBELL: So RMCG say they were commissioned by the department. This is a report that is used by GMA, it is on its website and they use it in hunting promotion. If it is wrong to say that they commissioned it, then it is wrong, but it is certainly a report that is promoted and used by GMA all the time.

Jeff BOURMAN: Absolutely, I accept that, but if you cannot even get that right, how can we take your submission seriously? You can comment or not, as you see fit.

The CHAIR: All right. We have concluded our time. Mr Campbell and Ms Morrison, thank you so much for your contribution to this inquiry. You will receive a copy of the transcript for your review – which I am sure will be very entertaining – in about a week, before it is published on the website. We are going to take a break for lunch now and resume at 1:30.

Witnesses withdrew.

