



Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Hearing Date: 16 June 2023

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Field and Game Australia

Received Date: 17 July 2023

1. THE CHAIR Page no. 3

Question asked to Danny Ryan:

When we drill down into the non-compliance issues from last year, you said 62 per cent of the non-compliance issues were hunters. I think that if you drill down into the numbers of protected species, I think there were three, or somewhere around there. I will take that on notice and provide that further information back.

Response: To the best of our knowledge - In 2022 there was 1 hunter charged with exceeding a bag limit. There were no hunters charged with shooting a protected species.

In 2023 there was 1 hunter charged with shooting a protected species. While there were several protected or threatened species presented by protestors as shot – almost all had no shot in them, and had no conclusive evidence of having been shot. The quality of evidence produced around these birds strongly suggests that many were in fact recovered from disease outbreaks and other sources of natural attrition, and the protected species in particular were presented as a media stunt.

2. GEORGIE PURCELL Page no. 6

Question asked to Danny Ryan:

Wounding rates, percentage wise, differ – some people say 6 percent, some people say 40 percent.

Danny Ryan: The wounding rate is a massive issue, and I am sure that we will answer the question in somebody else's question as we move along, or I will take it on notice if you like.

Response: The calculation of wounding rates is particularly difficult, and even more so to calculate survival rates and recovery times. The assertion that ALL wounded birds die a long painful death is simply false. Most fatally wounded birds "rescued" die immediately, or in very short timeframe. At least some

portion of Non-fatally wounded birds recover. Calculating an exact rate of wounded birds that suffer from a welfare perspective is impractical at best, and as we have seen in this inquiry – is often deliberately overstated to be misleading and alarmist.

3. MICHAEL GALEA Page no. 7-8

Question asked to Danny Ryan:

You have provided in your submission a graph, I believe on page 21, showing possible outcomes for native game birds that have been shot during a hunting season, showing that the majority, according to this graph, are killed outright or are missed or whatever. There is no data attached to this. Perhaps this could be a question on notice, but could you please supply the committee with the data points that you constructed this graph from?

Response:

As stated in the previous response wounding rates are difficult to reflect accurately. From an objective resource management view there is a reason to assume and try to measure the level of birds that are essentially removed from the population but are not counted in a hunter's bag. Its a loss rate, that should be added to a "harvested" figure when considering effects on populations.

This number has been miss-appropriated by the anti-hunting ideologists, and they now try to represent this figure as a number of birds who suffer slow "inhumane" deaths. This representation is utterly false, and that's what our graph attempted to demonstrate.

Our included picture excluded specific data because it is not a graph as such, but a visual representation of the likely welfare outcomes of a bird that is shot at by a hunter, during a regulated season.

Most will not suffer at all (instantly killed, clean missed or very superficially struck) – some (perhaps most) birds struck but not instantly killed may suffer for only a very short time – equivalent to those birds that are recovered, and dispatched. There is no easy way to ascertain clear data on this topic, so we pieced a few studies together.

The red represents live wounded birds recovered by "rescuers" or by authorities, and birds that hunters will openly observe that were wounded and they were unable to recover them. These very small number of birds represent

an acknowledged poor animal welfare outcome.

Of note - There are very few of these reported each year, when compared to overall harvested numbers.

The yellow represents birds that might have a low level of welfare concern. Australian native ducks are exceptionally hardy, and those with only minor wounds have a good chance of survival (hence the birds detected in the GMA and other similar X-ray studies that are live healthy birds that are carrying shot from previous wounding. While these birds do have a welfare concern, and we are not saying its ok they were wounded – FGA believes it should be noted that these birds survive – so shouldn't be counted as lost or as birds that suffer "long slow deaths".

The green represents the vast majority of birds shot at during a season that (other than being harvested, which is a purely ideological debate) do not suffer any adverse welfare outcomes at all.

These birds are instantly killed (welfare is not dependant on being recovered) rendered unconscious immediately and never recover, are wounded but recovered and dispatched immediately or are clean missed.

None of the birds in any of these categories suffer significant adverse welfare outcomes.

4. JEFF BOURMAN Page no. 11

Question asked to Lucas Cooke:

You made comments in your submission using terms like 'caring for country' and 'healing country'. What are Field and Game's shared interests and aims with the traditional owner corporations, and how do FGA's principles align with the traditional owners represented by registered Aboriginal corporations?

Response:

The terms "Caring for country" and "Healing country" are rooted in Indigenous Australian culture and are closely tied to their spiritual and cultural relationship with the land. However, FGA members, including non-Indigenous hunter conservationists adopt similar principles and values in their approach to land stewardship and conservation efforts.

Caring for Country: In the context of non-Indigenous hunter conservationists, "Caring for country" can be understood as a commitment to responsible land management practices, conservation, and a deep respect for the natural environment. It involves recognising the interconnectedness of ecosystems,

promoting sustainable hunting practices, and ensuring the long-term health and vitality of the land and its wildlife. This understanding of the entire ecosystem is why FGA focus on caring for entire wetlands – not just ducks!

Caring for country means adhering to ethical hunting practices, respecting bag limits, and supporting scientific setting of sustainable quotas to prevent overexploitation of wildlife populations.

Healing Country: The concept of "Healing country" in Indigenous Australian culture refers to the restoration and rejuvenation of the land and its ecosystems, which have suffered from various threats such as environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and the impacts of colonization. Healing country is an ongoing process of repairing the damage done to the land and restoring its ecological balance.

Again, Field and Game Australia recognise and support the broad scope of meaning behind this term, it's not just repairing the physical, its about the spiritual connection and care for the environment.

As we have learned through years of work at our own and publicly owned wetlands, Healing country does involve the physical restoration – acts like engaging in activities such as planting native vegetation, removing invasive species, and supporting initiatives that rehabilitate degraded habitats.

It's also about supporting initiatives that protect and rehabilitate endangered or threatened species, such as habitat protection, and predator control.

In the future FGA hope to collaborate more closely with Indigenous groups and landholders to learn from their traditional ecological knowledge and incorporate their cultural practices into land management and conservation efforts.

By adopting the principles of caring for country and contributing to healing country, FGA believe non-Indigenous hunter conservationists can play a vital role in preserving and protecting the natural environment, fostering biodiversity, and ensuring the sustainability of ecosystems for present and future generations.

5. SHEENA WATT Page no. 11-12

Question asked to Lucas Cooke:

Can you talk to me about funding? Does Field and Game receive any government funding for wetland management and for the work that you do on Heart Morass?

Response: Field and Game Australia does not currently receive any funding from government for our conservation activities.

FGA are the trustee of the Wetland Environmental taskforce (WET). WET is a public trust and registered charity. It has received funding from multiple sources in the past, but not direct from government, and has only really come from arrangements like the commercial VicRoads tree offset – that is an arrangement that is not exclusive to the Heart Morass. Most of WETS income is from either donations from the public, or for sale of access keys to members of the public who want to visit the land to camp or (in season) hunt.

WETs finances are public – you can check them here:

<https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/a60d6b44-39af-e811-a963-000d3ad244fd/profile>

6. SHEENA WATT Page no. 12

Question asked to Danny Ryan:

I just want to ask about the trustee's obligations under the terms of the trust deed. I am trying to really understand what it is that Field and Game's obligations are for the continued management of the site – Heart Morass and others. Have you got –

Danny Ryan: That would be under the WET trust. We have a separate committee of WET trust governors that looks after that, so I will take that question on notice, and I will get that one back to you.

Response:

There are very specific terms for the operation of the trust, and of the trust fund. They are set out in the deed of trust – which is also a public document: [Available here on the ACNC website](#)

FGA have specific obligations as the trustee – but they are also answerable to a committee of management that is made up of people with significant involvement and roles with the conservation community – and are not from FGA.

I think perhaps what the committee most want to know is that FGA cant just fold the trust and take ownership of the property.
If the trust were to be wound up – then any surplus assets are required to “be transferred to another fund listed on the register of environmental Organisations that has similar objectives”.

Its not possible for FGA to just walk away from this property or sell it. We have made significant investments into WET, and are dedicated to seeing it succeed. The fact is though that WET does rely on the input of time and money by hunters – and would stand to lose the capability to maintain the properties it holds if hunting were banned or restricted too heavily.

7. SHEENA WATT Page no. 12

Question asked to Danny Ryan and Lucas Cooke:

I am very keen to sort of understand the beneficial interests of the trust, what are the permitted activities and uses for the trust land and understanding more about governance arrangements and decisions.

Danny Ryan: Oh, that is easy to answer. The trust manages the land. Field and Game Australia owns the land.

Sheena Watt: ... yes, okay. Anything you can provide me to help shape that up would actually be very helpful.

Lucas Cooke: We will take it on notice ...

Response:

Within the deed of trust the objectives of the trust are set out as:

1.1.8"“The Trust is established as an environmental organisation for the following purposes:

-(a) to conserve and protect the natural environment, particularly as it relates to wetlands;

. (b) to conserve, create and manage wetlands, its flora and fauna, in an ecologically sustainable way;

(c) to seek to raise community awareness of the value and benefits of wetlands and to achieve community and private sector participation in the management of wetlands;

(d) where appropriate, to purchase, repair and manage wetlands wisely, and

(e) to generally comply with the "wise use" principles of the Ramsar Convention.

Just to be clear on the above response from Danny. FGA does NOT own the land at the Heart Morass – The trustee of the Wetland Environmental Taskforce Trust owns the land. This Trustee can be changed. FGA can NOT take ownership of the land in its own right. The land is 100% protected as a conservation project, and the trustee is obliged to operate it within the objectives above.