
Questions on Notice

Question 1:

Details of survey methodology (Sample selection, methodology, weighting, margin of error, confidence intervals etc.)

Answer:

Like the taxpayer-funded Victorian hunter surveys (conducted by RMCG in 2013 and 2019), our respondents were self-selecting, so not a random sample. However, the postcodes of our respondents showed they were geographically well spread across the state. To be clear, unlike the government funded hunter surveys, ours was self-funded.

The methodology for our survey was simple. It was an online survey via Google Forms where results cannot be manipulated once received. The questions and answers are publicly available on our website, and in our Submission to this Inquiry (link [here](#) to our submission attachment).

In terms of weighting, we value the voice of each regional Victorian equally. Each regional resident has the right to feel safe and enjoy the amenity of the peaceful surroundings where they have chosen to live and work. We hope that politicians (on both sides) will also respect the voice of each regional resident.

Like the taxpayer-funded Victorian hunter surveys (conducted by RMCG in 2013 and 2019), no margin of error or confidence limits were provided for our survey. But unlike those quantitative hunter surveys (RMCG estimated expenditure and alleged economic benefits), ours was a qualitative survey. We did not come up with a numerical estimate, so “margin of error” and “confidence intervals” are irrelevant for our survey. Our survey collected the views and experiences of regional residents which have never been sought or listened to by the GMA or politicians (on both sides). We query why no politician (on either side) or relevant government agency, has ever appeared to ask about margins of error or confidence intervals for RMCG’s hunter-surveys. The numerical results of those hunter-surveys (expenditure, GSP, jobs etc) have been widely quoted in support of native bird hunting and to justify pumping millions of taxpayer dollars into promoting and supporting native bird hunting. It would be impossible to calculate margin of error or confidence limits for the RMCG hunter-surveys, as they rely entirely on hunters’ memories (and possibly hunters’ desire to exaggerate to make the results look more impressive), and RMCG did no checks against hard evidence such as receipts.

It’s true we present some of our survey results in the form of pie charts, for example on p39 of our submission, it says 52.7% of respondents said safety was a concern for them with bird shooting nearby. Perhaps this should have been rounded off to 53%. But unlike electoral (voter) polls where a percentage point, or part of a percentage point, can be critical, the purpose of our survey was to reflect how regional people are feeling about native bird shooting. In this example, our results clearly show that a significant number of regional residents (half or more of 821 people who responded in a 3-week period) feel unsafe because there is bird shooting nearby. That is a message that politicians need to hear.

Unfortunately, despite the GMA's mandate to *"monitor, conduct research and analyse the environmental, social and economic impacts of game hunting and game management"* and make recommendations to relevant Ministers (s 6(h) and (i) of the GMA Act 2014), the persistent failure of GMA to survey those who are not game hunters, or even take their complaints seriously, suggests that GMA suffers a serious conflict of interest (in favour of bird hunting).

Despite the significant growth of the regions (25% of Victorians now live here), there has also been a glaring absence of:

- Safety checks around shooting sites, despite proximity to homes, businesses and farms.
- Any review of the old legislation from decades ago when bird hunting was apparently allowed on all (unleased) public land by default, unless specifically prohibited. It seems that this old, last-century legislation still determines the many thousands of bird shooting sites across regional Victoria. It is a legacy from an era when men dominated in politics and in society, sustainability was not an issue, and bird hunting was largely unquestioned. Victoria is very different today. The "social licence" of native bird hunting has well and truly expired.

The main themes identified in our survey were that over half of the respondents felt anxious and unsafe near bird shooting, many are jaded by ineffective compliance monitoring, most (over 90%) do not believe bird hunting brings economic benefit to their community and that government funds should be directed elsewhere. Many respondents live within close proximity to shooting; 16% within 350m, and five percent within 60m. These are all issues which government would naturally want to know about.

In terms of compliance monitoring, as we discussed at the hearing, many people don't bother making reports of illegal hunter behaviour because they believe nothing will be done about them. Even when members of the public "do the regulator's job for it" and hand over non-game birds illegally shot as confirmed by x-ray, nothing is done either. Refer the following example.



Left: Juvenile Great Crested Grebe (protected species), found shot and abandoned in the 2023 duck shooting season.



Left: X-ray showing 7 pellets lodged in the bird.

Below: GMA response.

On 29 April, the GMA was contacted by a veterinarian to report she was in possession of a Grebe that had been found by herself and two others on the shore of Lake Bael Bael on Thursday 27 April 2023.

It was organised with a GMA Officer to hand the grebe over, as she had just conducted an X-ray on the carcass which showed 7 shotgun pellets lodged in the body of the bird. A mountain duck was also handed over at the same time. The GMA officer was informed that the Grebe had been located in the reeds. The bird was stored securely at the Kerang Agriculture Victoria depot while inquiries were made based on the information provided to the GMA by the veterinarian. The inquiries were not able to produce evidence as to whom may have shot the bird and the case has now been closed.

Regards



██████████
Chief Executive

████████████████████
www.gma.vic.gov.au



We acknowledge Victorian Traditional Owners and their Elders past and present as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, including their connection to country and culture through hunting, and commit to genuinely partnering with them and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



Question 2:

(Bev McArthur) So, on page 11 of your submission to this inquiry, you claim that, in many cases, answers to the WIT are even provided to test participants. This test is administered by government employees, and the accusations that you make here are serious. Do you have any evidence of this accusation that you can table here today for the committee, or will you provide evidence on notice or withdraw that claim?

Answer:

The WIT is a test which consists of 22 multiple choice questions concerning species identification. Participants are shown footage of species and must then tick the box next to the correct species on their test paper.

Before participants take the test, they are encouraged to view a video of footage of different duck species. Usually, the exact same footage is used in the test, which means if participants have memorised the flight sequences and background of the footage, they can ascertain the correct answer without really understanding the species' real differentiators. This is highlighted in a video by Honker Hunters "[How to Pass a WIT Test](#)", @ approximately 8 minutes, 20 secs, where viewers are told to memorise the sequences.

Further, the footage of the ducks is unrealistic. It is taken in ideal conditions: daylight, with no other species in frame.

In answer to Mrs McArthur's specific question, we are advised that signals such as "coughs" in the room have led participants to correct answers.

We are also advised that in the Ballarat government offices (likely DSE) when DSE ran the WITs circa 13 years ago, participants were led to correct answers with a comment like "Can you re-answer this one?".

Many of today's duck shooters would have sat their once-only WIT many years ago.

Finally, we are also advised that it has not always been government employees administering the tests, that they have also been administered by or in conjunction with, FGA. Further, that on one occasion, a member of the public posed as a shooter and attended a WIT session at FGA premises in which he states "there was a guy up the back calling out the answers".

Since GMA's existence, we note that FGA have held evening training and WIT tests, such as this [February in Geelong](#), May [2021 in Yarra Valley](#) and [Natimuk New Years Eve 2021](#). The activities of GMA and FGA at these sessions are unclear.

Perhaps an even more concerning scenario however, is when people go for their gun safety test.

We are advised one participant did the gun safety test in Broadmeadows which was run by government employees (police) about 13 years ago. To "save time" of the police and the participants, the participants were told "how about I just give you the answers" (or words to that effect).

We are advised that these days, gun safety courses can be administered by gun stores. In November 2021, a participant attended a gun store in La Trobe st Ballarat to do the course, where it was observed another participant got an answer wrong six times yet was given a seventh opportunity to get it right. Also, that the father of a twelve year old who was sitting the gun safety test, gave the child the answers. The cost of doing the test was said to be \$100, of which \$25 was a voucher to spend in the gun store.

*NB RVOTDS spoke with these witnesses over the last seven days in order to prepare this response. Each of the above statements have been confirmed by the witnesses.

Supplementary Information

RVOTDS 90+ supporting organisations.

Mrs McArthur asked about the 90 organisations we said we "represented". RVOTDS did not say we represent these organisations, who represent themselves very well. We represent our own direct supporters, and are supported by the 90 organisations, listed [here](#), who co-signed our latest letter to relevant Ministers on the subject of duck shooting.

Trust for Nature Exemption for FGA

Mrs McArthur also said there was no recreational hunting at Heart Morass which is covered by a Trust for Nature (TFN) Covenant. [Please see the attached four letters \(Attachment 1\)](#) of exemption by TFN, obtained via Freedom of Information, which show there is an exemption in place for FGA to hunt native ducks and native quail including with toxic lead, at this property. Given the property is home to many threatened species, has been the subject of significant taxpayer funds for "conservation", and is covered by a TFN covenant normally associated with the protection of native fauna, it is disappointing that such exemptions are in place. Perhaps unsurprisingly, other documents obtained via Freedom of Information showed that [Heart Morass was one of the wetlands found by EPA to have lead levels in ducks unsafe for human consumption](#). See the ABC's 2021 coverage of it [here](#).

Taxpayer funds provided for FGA wetland projects

At the hearing, Mrs McArthur seemed upset that we had "accused her of lying" in relation to funding for FGA (she stated they were not given government funding – Hansard 17/3/2021). Whilst this Inquiry is not about Mrs McArthur, we felt it was important to clarify we have not accused her of lying. Rather, it appears she may be misinformed, including about funding for Geelong FGA. See below:

Public Funding for FGA wetland projects:

Contribution	Donor	Reference ³
\$100,000 donation	Trust For Nature (TFN) ⁴	2011-12 annual report p17
Supervision and planning services for Heart Morass enhancement	West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) - State government	2012-13 annual report p20
\$504,000 over 10yrs for Heart Morass; responsibilities include weed control	VicRoads offset funding (via TFN)	2013-14 annual report p11
\$30,000 for weed control at Heart Morass	State government	2016-17 annual report, p17
\$200,000 for improved water regulator at Heart Morass	State government	2016-17 annual report p17
Consultants' report recommending major water infrastructure at Heart Morass and adjacent Dowd Morass: total cost of proposal would be \$1.3m <i>(Consultants' fees unknown)</i>	WGCMA – State government ⁵	Refer link . Unclear if all this proposed work has been completed.
Funds for FGA Sale to plant 8,000 trees at Heart Morass	Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee (funded by State government)	2017-18 annual report p15
Water-watch program at Heart Morass	WGCMA – State government	2017-18 annual report p15
\$14,739 for Australian	State government	2018-19 annual report p13

- This is not a comprehensive list; there may be more instances of funding from the public purse.
- All annual reports are FGA Annual Reports. These used to be publicly available on the web but in recent times all but the last 3 have been removed. Fortunately, some people made copies before they were removed.

See more following:

\$14,739 for Australian National Hunting Archive in 2018	State government	2018-19 annual report p13
\$20,041 for Australian National Hunting Archive in 2019	State government	2018-19 annual report p13
Funding for track upgrades and recreational access infrastructure in Heart Morass	Waterway Recreational Values program administered via WGCMA (funded by state government)	2020-21 annual report p9
Funding for Bug Blitz (FGA's <u>schools</u> program) including field days in east Gippsland	Bushfire Recovery Victoria (funded by state government)	2021-22 annual report p9
\$40,000 for FGA's Bug Blitz <u>schools</u> program at Heart Morass and Connewarre - in conjunction with FGA Sale and Geelong Branches	Sustainable Hunting Action Plan (SHAP) 2021-2024 – funded by state government	https://djsir.vic.gov.au/game-hunting/action-plan/grants
\$48,134 to Geelong FGA for 300 nest-boxes at Connewarre (\$160 each)	Sustainable Hunting Action Plan (SHAP) 2021-2024 – funded by state government	https://djsir.vic.gov.au/game-hunting/action-plan/grants
\$40,000 to FGA to enable it to “prepare for the delivery of conservation and ecosystem management-based courses.”	Sustainable Hunting Action Plan (SHAP) 2021-2024 – funded by state government	https://djsir.vic.gov.au/game-hunting/action-plan/grants

Neither Mrs McArthur nor Ms Bath have responded to our requests to meet over the years. It is perhaps hence unsurprising they are not aware of impacts of shooting on community, or of taxpayer funds going to FGA. (See Attachment 2).

Distance between shooters and the public.

At the hearing, Mr. Bourman appeared to seek RVOTDS' support to increase the distance between “protestors” and shooters. To be clear, RVOTDS does not support his view on this matter. We do not support duck shooting at all. RVOTDS applauds the efforts of volunteer rescuers (we see them as rescuers as opposed to “protestors”) especially as there is no government assistance for wounded birds. It is our firm belief that unmonitored shooters should not be in public areas, but rather at controlled, monitored (clay target) shooting ranges only, which are appropriately well away from residents and other members of the public.

We discussed the Firearm Safety Code which states a shotgun danger range of 250-750m. *Firearm Regulations* also state shooting should not occur within 250m of a dwelling. Yet, as per our survey, residents are living well inside these distances which is a direct risk to health and safety. To re-iterate, sixteen percent lived within 350m and 5% within 60m.

Noise

One of the health and safety risks is noise. The table below outlines [EPA's guidelines](#) for noise i.e. db(A) from firing ranges.

Table 1. Recommended levels for shooting range noise

		Days of shooting per week	<1	1	2	3-5	6-7
Long established range	Day	Monday - Saturday	80	75	70	65	60
		Sunday	75	70	65	60	55
	Evening	Monday - Saturday	75	70	65	60	55
		Sunday	70	65	60	55	50
Operating range	Day	Monday - Saturday	60	55	50	45	45
		Sunday	55	50	45	45	45
	Evening	Monday - Saturday	55	50	45	40	35
		Sunday	50	45	40	35	35
Planned range	Day	Monday - Saturday	60	55	50	45	45
		Sunday	55	50	45	45	45
	Evening	Monday - Saturday	55	50	45	40	35
		Sunday	50	45	40	35	35

Note: <1 means shooting on no more than one day per month.

A typical shotgun is 155 db(A). According to an acoustic engineer, at 350m, the noise level would still be 100db(A) and at 60m, 85 db(A) – well outside safe noise levels. This is not accounting for open country or wind carrying the noise. It should be noted that there [are restrictions in place](#) for the use of gas guns which are quieter than shotguns (one of which is that they are not to be used within 300m of another's property.)

Wounding rate

Mr Bourman also raised our wounding rate calculation of 80%, however we were not able to complete our response before he moved to the next question. For completeness, our wounding rate calculation (and to be clear this is not for Quail, as suggested by Mr Bourman at a subsequent hearing) is as follows, based on GMA's data and descriptions in section 5 of the WRAP.

To calculate the "crippling ratio" (number of birds wounded for each bird bagged) based on first year ducks (GMA, Monitoring Trends in Waterfowl Wounding 2022, p2):

- Percentage x-rayed with shrapnel = 7.5%
- 2022 harvest = 262,567
- Estimated duck population at season start 2.9m (according to GMA's helicopter count)
- Harvest rate = harvest / population at start of season, so 262,567 / 2.9m = 0.09
- Crippling rate = wounding rate / harvest rate, so 0.075 / 0.09, = **0.83**.

*NB this does not account for the birds that had already died from their injuries.

Whilst this figure may seem high, remember the crippling rate reported in Denmark prior to their robust testing measures, was 1:1.

Plastics

To further clarify the issue of plastics (an excellent question posed by Ms Watt), please see below a clearer copy of the relevant section of the GMA Board paper obtained via FOI. The 2.2 million plastic shotgun components entering Victoria's environment each year, assumes duck shooters have collected 50% of their shotgun shells. The figure does not account for the plastic shells or wads from quail shooters (or any other shooters using shotguns).

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contamination in commercially available wild-shot game meats. A major UK supplier has recently moved to no longer selling wild-shot game meat harvested with lead shot/bullets.

Plastic waste in waterfowl hunting

Duck hunting contributes plastic litter into the environment through discarded plastic shotgun shells (hulls) and plastic wads (used to contain the shot payload as it travels down the barrel on discharge). Upon firing at a target, hunters may fail to pick up ejected spent shells and they can drift away or sink to the bottom of the waterbody. Wads cannot be retrieved as they are propelled from the barrel some distance away after firing.

Research conducted in Denmark has found that wads and shells feature among the top ten litter items found on reference beaches (hunting of sea ducks is a popular activity) and contribute an estimated 13 tons of plastic litter into the environment annually. This plastic waste may take hundreds of years (and longer if covered by sediment) to breakdown and it accumulates at sites, presenting an aesthetic problem and posing a hazard to the health of ecosystems and wildlife that try to eat them. Decomposition of these macro plastic items into microplastic particles or beads can be ingested by small animals and filter-feeders and accumulate up the food chain, creating hazards for ecosystems, other wildlife and human health.

In Denmark, it has been estimated that it takes four shots to successfully harvest a duck/goose. If this same figure was applied to Victoria, and given the average annual harvest of game ducks (not including those lost to wounding) of approximately 370,000 birds, this would equate to 1.48 million spent shotshells and 1.48 million wads being deposited into the environment each year. While an unknown proportion of spent shotshells may be recovered by hunters, this would still mean that almost 1.5 million wads alone are deposited into the environment on average each year by duck hunters. If hunters conservatively recovered half of the spent shotshells fired and the remainder (740,000) entered the environment, this equates to 2.22 million plastic shotgun cartridge components, or pieces of plastic waste, being deposited into the environment each year by Victorian duck hunters. By any stretch, this is unacceptable and must be addressed.

The "pest" furfie

As noted in our main submission, most farmers appreciate the role of ducks in eating the fluke snail, and are more concerned with trespass, lead and plastics. The committee may be interested in the following reports by CSIRO:

- ["On the whole, ducks are a very minor pest"](#)
- ["Ducks were not the pest rice-growers supposed them to be and that much of the damage attributed to them was, in fact, caused by other factors."](#)

If a farmer was concerned about ducks, there are non-lethal means of control. The following letter in Weekly Times, sums things up well:

Pest control excuse shot down

Weekly Times 12/7/23

WITH duck hunting under fire in Victoria, shooters are talking up pest control.

The NSW rice protection program has culled only 5 per cent of the number of ducks killed for recreation in Victoria (eight-year average) and Victoria's rice production is minimal. Down our way on

Mornington Peninsula a lettuce grower regularly complains that wood ducks are chomping his greens. But in 2021 another local vegie grower installed laser devices that deterred the ducks and saved his crops. Waterbird expert Professor Richard Kingsford doubts that shooting wood ducks at wetlands will protect lettuces. These ducks prefer farm dams and can easily move from one to another. Kingsford urged government to invest in developing readily accessible, non-lethal alternatives.

Many of our native ducks are "dabbling ducks" that feed "bottoms-up" in shallow water. They're not a threat to crops. Let's separate fact from fiction.

**Margaret Walker,
Capel Sound**

Health and Wealth from Birdwatching as a substitution

Latest Tourism Research Australia data shows that the spend of domestic overnight tourists who birdwatched in our country in 2022 was \$635million¹. This has increased 50% in just three years, and does not include additional revenue from international or day tourists who birdwatched. Over 1.4 million tourists (International and domestic) birdwatched in Australia the first year data was collected, spending over \$2.9 billion AUD.²

Shooting birds with cameras does not put harmful lead or plastic shotgun components into our environment, nor does it cost taxpayers, or upset growing numbers of regional residents. Further, it is known to be more than just an economic driver.

It is fast being realised that birding brings tremendous mental health benefits as reported in [Time Magazine](#) and [Neuroscience News](#) to name a few.

More information can be found in our recent newsletter [here](#).

The rise in birdwatching is a global phenomenon. The US Fish and Wildlife Tourist Surveys which were run in 2011 and 2016, clearly show a marked decrease in hunting, and an increase in "non-

¹ Tourism Research Australia National Visitor Surveys year ending December 2022

² Tourism Research Australia National and International Visitor Surveys year ending December 2019

consumptive” wildlife *watching* between 2011 and 2016. (To our knowledge the 2016 survey is the latest published USFW survey).

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

The 2011 USFWS survey showed 33 million people fished and spent \$42 billion USD. 14 million people hunted and spent \$34 billion USD. 72 million people watched wildlife and spent \$55 billion USD.³

In 2016, the number of people who fished grew slightly to 36 million, spending \$46 billion USD. Those who hunted declined to 11.5 million, with their spend also declining, to \$26 billion USD. The number of wildlife watchers grew to 86 million, with a spend of \$76 billion USD⁴. Most wildlife watchers were birdwatchers (p 38).

In Australia, the success of Winton Wetlands – designated as a Wetland of Distinction by the Society of Wetland Scientists, the first wetland outside the USA to be given this honour – is clear. There is no native bird hunting here (and no lead or plastic shotgun components)– just conservation success and tourists. Pre-covid, 65,000 tourists visited Winton wetlands in a single year (2019)⁵. *This is more than five times the number of active duck shooters there are for the entire state.*

Another example is the penguins at Philip Island which bring \$120 million and 800 jobs just to the Bass Coast LGA. **(See Attachment 3).**

Birdwatchers are known for “[staying longer and spending more](#)”, also for [visiting rural areas](#).

Recommendations

We did not include recommendations in our submission, other than to ban native bird hunting. We would like to list further recommendations as follows:

1. Re-direct government funding away from hunting clubs, towards causes which have a far more positive impact on far more Victorians such as:
 - The creation of sanctuaries which will assist biodiversity, tourism and jobs.

³ [2011 US National Survey of fishing, hunting and wildlife watching, p4.](#)

⁴ [2016 US National Survey of fishing, hunting and wildlife watching p4.](#)

⁵ [Winton Wetlands Annual Report 2018/19](#)

- Incentives for landowners who create and maintain native habitat on their properties and share their land with wildlife.
 - More funding for community conservation groups, and wildlife rescue/rehabilitation.
 - Construction of wildlife-land bridge overpasses to allow wildlife to cross roads safely. Overseas there are hundreds of these, keeping wildlife and drivers safe⁶ (with a proven reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions by 80%). Victoria has none. This would be a tremendous source of jobs, keep our drivers safe, and assist in biodiversity protections.
2. Ban the use of lead ammunition in any hunting and immediately issue public warnings on the dangers to
 - i. Human health of consuming wild game shot with lead
 - ii. The environment, as lead does not break down, posing a risk to wildlife and crops.
 3. Charge hunting and shooting clubs – not taxpayers – for environmental clean-up. Decontamination of lead at shooting ranges has cost taxpayers \$11 million according to Treasury Budget Papers 17-18 and 18-19.
 4. More rigorous monitoring of firearm license “genuine reasons” given over half use hunting as a genuine reason, yet most game license holders are not active.
 5. No exceptions to be made for any race or religion. Exceptions can provide loopholes. We are confident that most Traditional Owners do not support the use of firearms for hunting native wildlife.

RVOTDS would welcome the opportunity to assist in implementing any of the above.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Letters of Exemption from Trust for Nature for Field and Game

Attachment 2: Unanswered requests to meet with Mrs McArthur/ Ms Bath (together with questions also unanswered)

Attachment 3: Phillip Island Nature Parks Media Release

⁶ [Wildlife bridges saving lives and money.](#)

