

CONSERVATION & HUNTING

ISSUE 7 – OCTOBER 2016



**A great failure
to consult**

Pollies shoot new ground

**Where's the Sustainable
Hunting Action Plan?**



Olympic gold



Wild food



Hog deer victory

A message from Field & Game Australia Chairman Bill Paterson

In September Field & Game Australia hosted its annual Politician shooting competition, the 14th and the first to be held at our ground at Willowmavin near Kilmore. This ground, one of the closest shooting grounds to Melbourne, was purchased by FGA with major funding from the Victorian Government's Shooting Sports Grant.

It was a wonderful opportunity for local, State and Federal politicians to see what a great asset this shooting ground is and the potential it holds. Simulated Field, as shot at Willowmavin, attracts many new people to the shooting sports and has identified many Olympic competitors.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the annual trophy was again won by the team of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, but they were given a good challenge by the Nationals.

The *Shooting Sports Facilities Program* has brought a very welcome infusion of funds into clay target clubs and, as I go around our FGA Branches, I am seeing long used and run down facilities being replaced with new clubhouses, equipment storage sheds, disabled access, toilets and equipment.

Good facilities encourage participation in sports, and clay target shooting is no exception. Breakdowns due to old equipment and the associated delays, barely adequate clubhouses and difficult access, put many people off and we are now seeing the results of the Government funding in increased participation and new faces.

However, all is not rosy on the Victorian front, I note with concern that we are still yet to see the Game Management Authority's Sustainable Hunting Action Plan agreed and signed off by the government. This is now many months overdue and gives us great cause for concern.

Similarly, we are very concerned about the failure to appoint a new Chair of the GMA since the resignation of Hon. Roger Hallam. These two issues make it hard to believe that the government

is taking hunters' interests seriously especially when taken alongside Minister Jaala Pulford's statement below on behalf of the Government, agreeing to the amendment to support the dissolving of the Emergency Closures Advisory Committee:-

Jaala Pulford: 'we have the Game Management Authority that is incredibly well placed to serve the government in terms of providing this advice, that if agreed to by the house and the other place this amendment would require the minister to consider the advice of the Game Management Authority prior to publishing a notice under section 86A(1), which is the relevant provision.

'Ministers will also receive advice from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) pertinent to the environmental impacts of seasonal conditions. In forming this advice DELWP will continue to meaningfully consult with external experts, including Birdlife Australia as the recognised society of ornithologists, and of course the government will rely on the advice of the Game Management Authority and continue to engage with the many organisations that have strong views on this issue.'

It is the second part of this statement that gives cause for concern as the "many organisations" the Ministers have previously sought opinions from, have a stated position of being fundamentally opposed to a Duck Season.

The Victorian Duck Season is legislated in both duration and bag limits. These should only be reviewed in exceptional circumstances and by definition, exceptions do not occur every year.



Bill Paterson
Chairman

A message from Australian Deer Association President David Voss



David Voss
National
President

Three years ago, in the first edition of this publication we said "I want my RSPCA back", finally our voice has been heard.

The Royal Society for the Prevention for the Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) (Victoria) has accepted all the recommendations of an independent review including ceasing public activism against legal pursuits including hunting.

Neil Comrie AO APM, former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police led the Review team.

The ADA and FGA made a joint submission detailing the impact of RSPCA's transformation from an animal welfare organisation to an animal rights organisation, the abuse of its unique position and the conflict of interest between its role as a regulator and its ideological agenda.

In the final report Mr Comrie highlighted the RSPCA's 'unique and privileged position, given its charitable status, ... to investigate and prosecute offences of animal cruelty'.

The Review found that the RSPCA is paying a price for its conflict of interest:

"The position of government officials was that the reputation of the RSPCA as a trusted partner had been compromised by its activism. There was a reluctance to engage in confidential discussions with the RSPCA on the grounds that any sensitive information provided to the RSPCA may be used against the government in activist campaigns."

Presumably, this assessment underpins the concerns of the (RSPCA) Inspectorate about the activist role, which Mr Comrie said placed RSPCA Victoria "... in an untenable position with regard to working with the government that has legislated its authority and empowered it to investigate and prosecute offences of cruelty to animals."

Mr Comrie said it was clear the RSPCA had been active in campaigning (sometimes in conjunction with other animal activist organisations) against lawful activities such as jumps racing, duck shooting and live exporting. He was critical of emotive and judgemental comments like 'Sadly the 12 week duck shooting season went ahead in March' and 'We witnessed this brutality first hand'.

RSPCA (Victoria) chief executive Dr Liz Walker said the organisation would continue animal cruelty advocacy but would no longer engage in public campaigns over existing laws, such as duck hunting and jumps racing.

Both ADA and FGA have been highlighting the RSPCA conflict between activism and enforcement for many years and believe that the recommendations of the Review should be adopted by the RSPCA nationally.

The test for the RSPCA in Victoria is whether it vacates the animal activism field or simply pursues a strategy of sub-contracting out controversial, public activity to organisations such as Animals Australia with which it jointly sponsored a full-page advertisement in the lead up to the latest Victorian elections urging a vote for Greens instead of Labor.

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Professor Marcel Klaassen is working with hunters to capture Avian Influenza Virus in the wild.



Hunters aid virus research

Field & Game Australia members will be on the front line of Australian efforts to capture and study the Avian Influenza Virus (AIV).

The World Health Organization is worried that an avian and human influenza virus might mix creating a strain easily passed from person to person, triggering a pandemic where the disease spreads rapidly around the world, infecting many people.

The influenza pandemic of 1918–19 killed up to 50 million people, more than died during World War I. Dubbed 'Spanish Flu' it was the most devastating epidemic in recorded world history.

AIV is present in wild bird populations around the world. Australia has a specific strain that infects shore birds and is endemic in wild duck populations although few die as a result.

Professor Marcel Klaassen has been collecting samples in Australia and Antarctica to study AIV diversity, the evolutionary dynamics of AIV in wild birds and poultry, and the role played by environmental transmission in AIV ecology.

Professor Klaassen can gather enough samples from penguins in Antarctica and shorebirds in

Australia through trapping but his best hope of capturing the virus from wild duck populations is swabs taken from harvested birds by hunters.

"Avian Influenza is potentially a dangerous virus because it not only infects poultry but can spread to humans as seen with the H5N1 virus outbreaks in South East Asia," he said.

Members from Geelong Field & Game recently received training in how to swab ducks and safely store the samples for the research team.

Professor Klaassen said the more FGA members that participate, the higher the chance of capturing and preserving the virus for research.

"The genetic material that forms the heart of the virus is very unstable, it mutates very rapidly, and two different virus types can exchange genetic material," Professor Klaassen said.

"We want to understand that process better and the project we have together with the



World Health Organization and Sydney University is to get a better handle on how these viruses evolve in nature."

Hunters already lead or contribute to range of science supporting wetland conservation, duck populations, and predator control but this is a new string to our bow.

Ignoring the public

In early September the Victorian Government's Forest Industry Taskforce released its 'statement of intent' which made it clear that this group was actively working towards the creation of new National Parks in the Central Highlands.

Prior to the 2014 election, Labor made a commitment that this Taskforce would consist of 'relevant stakeholders'; when the Taskforce was formed in late 2015 the most relevant stakeholders—the public who use the land—were not included. Interestingly the Taskforce also has no representation from foresters or anyone with a practical understanding of the realities of administering public land.

In response to concerns about the lack of consultation, recreational land users were assured both that they would have 'direct access' for close and regular consultation with the Taskforce, and that the Taskforce would

be solely focussed on the timber industry and would not be considering the creation of any new National Parks. No such consultation has occurred with recreational users and the statement of intent clearly shows that 'establishing new parks and reserves' has been front and centre in the Taskforce's discussions.

The terms of reference set out that the Taskforce would complete its work with the delivery of recommendations (now reframed as a 'Statement of Intent') by the end of June 2016; it is now clear that the Taskforce will continue indefinitely.

Central to the reluctant acceptance by recreational users of the already compromised



Taskforce process was the understanding that the chair would be independent and impartial. The appointment of Professor Don Henry to that position raises serious concerns. For more than a decade (until very recently) Professor Henry was the CEO of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF). The ACF is a vocal supporter of the creation of a new national park in the Victorian Central Highlands and has a member on the Taskforce. The ACF actually shares an office building with other protagonists for new parks, including the leader of the Victorian Greens Party and even other members of the Forest Industry Taskforce such as the Victorian National Parks Association.



Evidence of wallowing by sambar damaging an alpine bog.



Left: The completed fence will help to protect critical habitat.

Fencing bogs for frogs

In early April a group of volunteers from the Australian Deer Association and the SSAA joined Danny Hudson from Parks Victoria to hike up to an alpine bog to erect deer exclusion fencing.

The bog, below Lake Mountain in Victoria provides habitat for a critically endangered Alpine Tree frog.

The species was discovered in this bog in 2009. It is important habitat because the species has suffered significant declines across its known distribution and the bog harbours the only known population to be free of the amphibian chytrid fungus.

The amphibian chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dedrobatidis*) causes the disease chytridiomycosis, which is responsible for worldwide declines in amphibians, and is particularly detrimental in cool climates and conditions such as the alpine areas of south-eastern Australia.

Whilst deer numbers are relatively low in the area around the bog, researchers were concerned about sambar wallowing due to the potential it has to destroy the bog and the possibility that sambar could wallow in a nearby

bog where the chytrid fungus is present and act as a vector for it. Initially the researchers proposed a deer control program in the area but it was determined that fencing would be a far more practical and achievable means of addressing their concerns.

Parks Victoria assessed the area, ordered materials and arranged for a helicopter to shuttle them in. The ADA and SSAA volunteers then joined Parks Victoria Ranger Danny Hudson to hike up to the bog and erect the exclusion fencing.

The ADA works collaboratively with Parks Victoria on a number of deer management initiatives across Victoria including on the Bogong High Plains, the Dandenong Ranges, Wilsons Promontory and in East Gippsland. Whilst many of these programs are centred around lethal deer control they also include deer monitoring and habitat restoration works.



The team of volunteers hard at work erecting the exclusion fence.



Hog deer win

After a quarter of a century of lobbying the Victorian Labor Government has approved a two-year trial of hog deer hunting on Snake Island in South Gippsland.

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio said the trial, commencing in February 2017, would provide further opportunity for safe and sustainable recreational hunting in the area.

Balloted hunting on Snake Island will follow the successful model that has operated at the Blond Bay State Game Reserve and Boole Poole Peninsula for the last 28 years.

Snake Island is home to one of the largest populations of hog deer in Australia.

The Australian Deer Association praised the decision and said the intervention of the Victorian Shooters and Fishers Party MP's had been critical in realising this goal for all hunters.

"Hunters have been asking for this since the

1960's and actively campaigning for balloted hunting on Snake Island for the past 25 years" ADA Victorian President Col Brumley said.

"Snake Island holds a large percentage of Victoria's hog deer and Minister D'Ambrosio is to be commended for recognising that a highly valued and sustainable use of this unique piece of public land has been denied to law abiding hunters without good reason for far too long".

The ADA put forward a fresh proposal late in 2015 after previous attempts failed in 1991, 2004 and 2013.

"It's one of those issues where we are convinced that the principle is sound so we persevered with it," Mr Brumley said.

The ballot and hunting periods will be strictly



regulated by the Game Management Authority, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, and Parks Victoria.

Field & Game Australia general manager David McNabb commended the ADA for keeping focus on achieving a good outcome.

"Our ADA colleagues have been sensitive to the variety of stake holders with an interest in use of Snake Island. ADA has taken an approach that once again demonstrates facts and data are critical to good decisions, and where these support the case, creates the opportunity for multiple use of our public assets," he said.

Changing seasons

Duck Season is legislated in Victoria but we continue to be subjected to uncertainty and sudden disruption. It appears nothing will change ahead of the 2017 season despite the abundance of water and breeding waterfowl.

Hunters are resilient and our passion to be outdoors with friends and family, harvesting wild food, trumps the adversities put in our way.

Habitat is critical whether it is wetlands for ducks or grasslands for quail and research should underpin decision making. There's no substitute for hard facts and data.

The Victorian Government says its principal adviser on game management issues is the Game Management Authority (GMA), which answers to the Minister for Agriculture. However, the decisions about closing and opening wetlands this year were based on advice from the Emergency Closures Advisory Committee (ECAC), which the Government chose to accept or ignore as it pleased. This Committee is responsible to the Environment Minister.

The use of Ministerial powers to suddenly close Lake Elizabeth on the eve of the season opening and the loss of Johnson Swamp State Game Reserve to hunting for an extended period left Field & Game Australia and the Australian Deer Association with no choice but to resign from ECAC which has now been abolished.

The state of affairs affecting hunting really came home with the shock resignation of the Hon. Roger Hallam as Chairperson of the GMA. Roger will be sorely missed, and goes with our sincere thanks for his fantastic contribution to hunting.

Amendments to address concerns with the process of publishing closures, and notionally also re-opening notices, fall short.

Critically, they highlight the need for change at every level to deliver more effective game management decisions.

The Government's approach to closures raises serious questions about the future role of GMA, a real concern for hunters because it highlights increased interference by a few in the long standing, lawful, cultural tradition of hunting.

Unfortunately, it seems little will change.

South Australia looks likely to return to the usual starting date for the 2017 Duck Season, which Victorian hunters, who have traditionally taken the opportunity to hunt interstate, will welcome.

In Victoria, the process for season setting is unchanged. We have a great deal of water throughout Australia, and clear evidence of a major breeding event in critical breeding habitat. The legislated Duck Season should simply occur.

In North America, where the 2016 season is just getting started, the 2017 season is already set providing hunters, commercial operators, suppliers and communities with certainty.

In Victoria, we have a legislated season shrouded in uncertainty, a state of flux that is likely to continue until late January 2017.

The other incredible disappointment is the lack of any tangible progress with Victoria's Sustainable Hunting Action Plan. The original plan was signed off by the previous Coalition government but has been effectively shelved under Labor despite announcing \$5 million in the 2016 State Budget.

There has been much talk but no action on an alternative plan since October 2014.

We can't forget, or indeed ignore, the role of people in the complex equation of wildlife management.

People have created this highly modified landscape and have a responsibility to manage it, a challenge being met by hunters who enjoy the privilege of sustainable harvest.

Unfortunately, our increasingly urbanised society is largely removed from the practical reality of sourcing food and the real needs of wildlife and habitat management.

Still, we have an incredible opportunity to inform with access to technology to gather facts and data and the ability to share that knowledge and information.

However that's not to say we need collaboration for the sake of it.

We should embrace collaboration where it delivers practical results that create a tangible benefit but avoid activism under the guise of consultation.

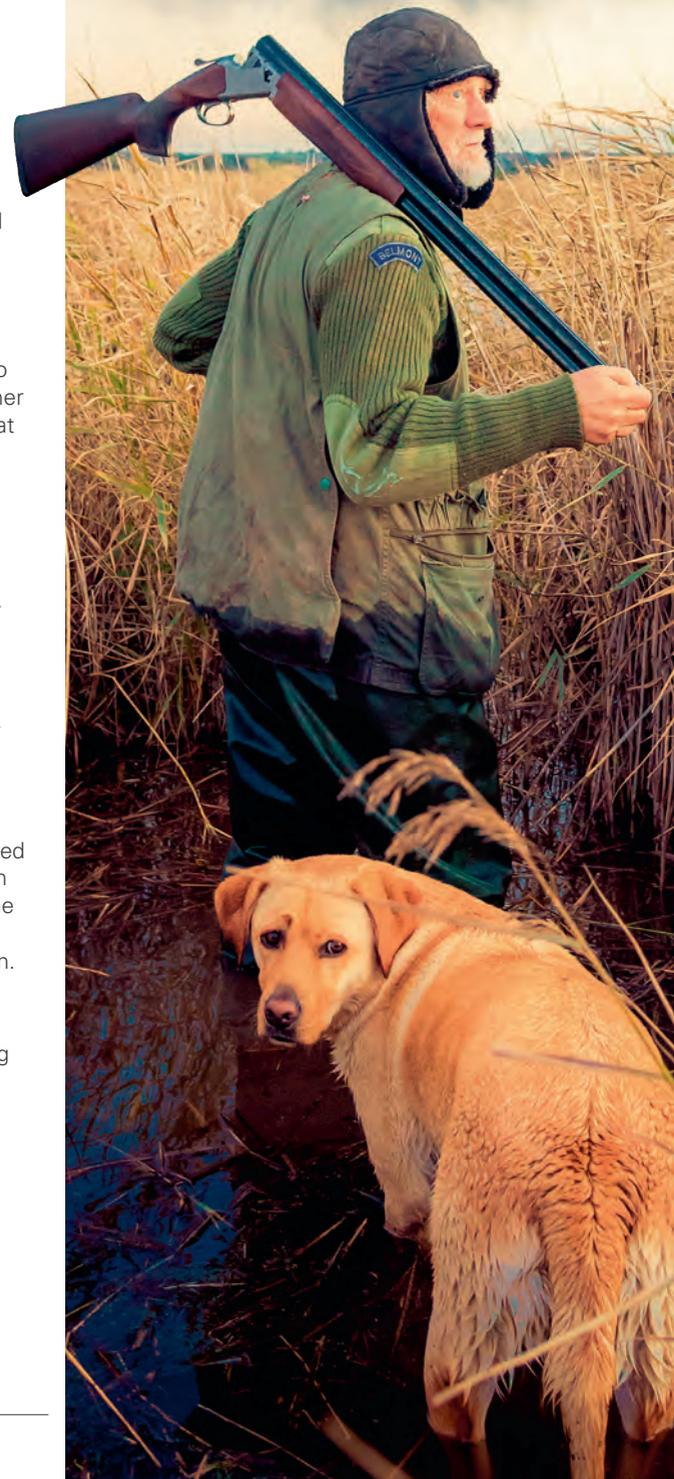
FGA is a hunter organisation heavily invested in conservation, it always has been. We want science and public policy that supports better habitat for wildlife and for us—the people in the equation — to utilise.

That requires a continued and an increased commitment to habitat, water, protection from predators and monitoring to gain the knowledge of our waterfowl and what is required to manage a dynamic population.

A strategy that supports the use of vast infrastructure dedicated to hunting and other use, and grows sustainable hunting in Australia

Adaptive resource management that introduces world best practice into the Australian context, supported with a simple and effective systems approach that integrates research and monitoring. However, it is critical that the data collected is designed for the purposes it will be used for.

We cannot afford to wait 20 years for "the system" to fix itself.





Pollie's cracker shoot



Shooters, Fishers and Farmers' Daniel Young in winning form.



Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie with NT Senator Nigel Scullion.



Olympic gold medal winner Catherine Skinner with Victorian Nationals deputy leader Stephanie Ryan.



Tim McCurdy takes aim.



Nat pack: Tim McCurdy, Stephanie Ryan and Peter Walsh.

Field & Game Australia's annual clay target shoot for politicians is a chance to get together in a relaxed and friendly environment and for the uninitiated it is an opportunity to gain a better understanding.

Handling and using a shotgun under the safe guidance of experienced FGA volunteers helps to demystify firearms. Used properly and safely they are just a tool to do a job, in this case smashing a small clay disk as it flies through the air.

We all enjoyed seeing the smiles of satisfaction on the faces of new competitors when they hit their first target.

For the record, the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, led by Victorian MP Daniel Young took first prize. We hosted competitors from Labor, Liberal and the Nationals who mingled with Olympic Women's Trap gold medallist Catherine Skinner and our youngest shooting Olympian Aislin Jones.

Lunch was served by renowned wild food chef Riccardo Momesso from 400 Gradi, reinforcing the importance of sustainable use.

Importantly, the event took place at Willowmavin, FGA's newly purchased shooting ground. Our guests were able to see firsthand the beautiful environment set amongst rolling green hills and hear of our plans to develop it into a premier national facility.



Wild about food

While the average diner might balk at kangaroo tartare with quail egg and pickled radishes, it was one of many standout dishes served at Field & Game Australia's inaugural Game Night.

The dinner was hosted at 400 Gradi in Essendon under the guidance of renowned wild food chef and keen hunter Riccardo Momesso.

Matt Fowles from Fowles Wine supplied the matching wines from the *Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch* range.

Both chef and winemaker appreciate the flavour, versatility, and sustainability of game harvested from the wild.

Kangaroo, camel, duck, venison, emu, rabbit, and wild goat arrived at the tables reinvented as modern dishes that would please any palette.

Riccardo Momesso has a long tradition with wild food.

"Before we were born Dad worked at the Ford factory and they used to go out the back after work and come home with a bag of quail," Riccardo explains.

The Southern Italian traditions of hunting and gathering were passed on and after a day with his father the young Riccardo would return home with wild meat, mushrooms, and artichokes, then sit, and watch his mum and aunties prepare the food.

"It would turn into a feast," he said.

In the Momesso household, everything hunted was for a purpose and nothing was ever wasted. Riccardo recalls family time around the kitchen table with his father on the plucking machine and the children (like a well-oiled assembly line) trimming and dressing ducks.

At 16 he was apprenticed at Café E Cucina, Il Bacaro and finally, Est Est Est. After five years working in Italy and France, the roll call of dining excellence continued at Circa and Il Bacaro in Melbourne before Riccardo became co-

owner of acclaimed Italian bistro, Sarti, in Melbourne's CBD.

A signature throughout his career has been dishes featuring wild game.

"Nobody did game, still they don't," he says.

"I was the only guy in Melbourne who would have hare on the menu; wild horse, wild camel—I'd give anything a go.

"It is OK to buy your meat from the supermarket but it also OK to shoot it; you shouldn't be judged for it. I am not a shooter, I am a hunter—there is a big difference.

"I've seen the billboards with celebrities saying duck hunting isn't a sport—they are damn right; it is not a sport, it is a lifestyle and you respect the duck and the food it provides."

Matt Fowles has developed many wines specifically to meet the challenge of game meat, which has strong flavours and a unique texture.

"Many people say you need a big wine with game but I believe you don't; you want a wine that is going to sit there in support and not overwhelm the dish," Matt said.

Importantly the game food dinner highlighted the hunters creed; take only what you need, respect the beast or bird and enjoy putting wild food on the table for family and friends.

If more people could taste kangaroo tartare, venison carpaccio, wild duck polpettini and braised wild goat perhaps attitudes and regulations governing game meat consumption might change.

Keep an eye out for our next event.



Chef Riccardo Momesso explains his creations.



Winemaker Matt Fowles and wild chef Riccardo Momesso.

Natural Resources Commission Panders to Ideology and Ignores Evidence

The New South Wales Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has recently provided a report to cabinet on a state-wide pest animal management review ('Shared Problem, Shared Solutions').

Of concern is a recommendation to manage deer as a pest animal, remove deer from the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act* and include deer in a regulation under the *Biosecurity Act*. The practical effect of these changes would be to undermine the successful public land hunting system and to place an unnecessary, expensive and counterproductive onus on private landowners to control deer on their property, whilst adjacent public land is left to act as a de-facto sanctuary.

The recommendations were not supported by evidence, data or a sober analysis of actual results of pest listings in other Australian jurisdictions.

Of the hundreds of submissions received and published on the NRC website less than 10 per cent of independent submissions supported the NRC's recommendation about deer — none of those provided any verifiable evidence.

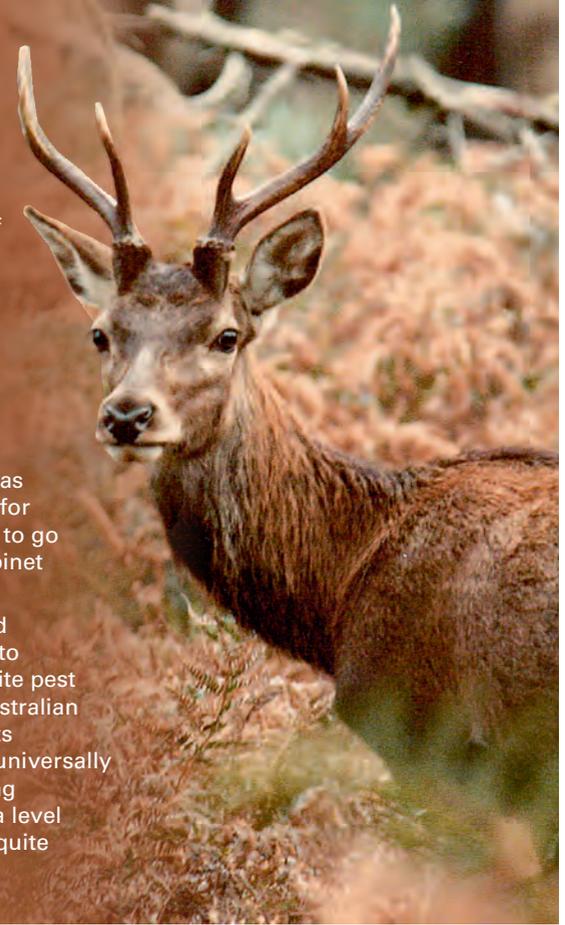
Since the submission period closed representatives of the NRC have taken the

extraordinary step of appearing in the media to actively lobby their recommendations.

The NRC is an independent advisory body which reports to the Premier of New South Wales.

Nowhere in the Commission's enabling legislation or strategic plan is it contemplated that it would actively and publicly lobby on recommendations prior to them being adopted by the Government. This unusual course of action would indicate that the NRC knows that it has not gained the support it had hoped for in the submission process, forcing it to go public to attempt to pressure the cabinet into supporting its position.

Wild deer populations in Queensland and South Australia have continued to disperse and expand unabated despite pest listings in those states, the South Australian Government is currently reviewing its approach in light of this failure. It is universally agreed that the concept of compelling landowners to control deer beyond a level which suits their own operations is, quite predictably, an abject failure.



Attacking gun owners

Mainstream media continues to denigrate those who simply own a registered firearm and enjoy target sports and hunting.

The latest attack in Melbourne's Herald Sun was inspired by a single billboard celebrating the Olympic gold medal of Catherine Skinner and encouraging legal firearms owners to show their pride by posting to social media.

While the article includes quotes or paraphrasing from both sides; the Alannah and Madeline Foundation (AMF), which is anti-gun, and the Sporting Shooters Association, which is in favour of responsible, and legal gun ownership, it still raises concerns. Peter Blunden, the Victorian Managing Director, Editorial for News Limited is a board member of the AMF and while we make no inference of undue influence, we have sought clarification.

"A controversial billboard on one of Melbourne's busiest freeways is encouraging shooters to upload selfies with their hunted prey," the newspaper suggested.

There is no controversy. The billboard featured an image of Olympic Gold medalist Catherine Skinner firing a shotgun at a clay target—exactly what she did to universal acclaim (including a splash in the Herald Sun) in Rio. The opposition of the AMF to

firearms is well known and so too is the viewpoint of legal gun owners, including clay target shooters and hunters. That these diametrically opposed viewpoints exist could hardly be the source of controversy.

"The campaign encourages shooters to 'show your love of shooting' by sharing pictures on social media," the article continued.

No controversy here either. While the AMF might oppose 'any promotion of firearms in a way that normalises their use' it is an extreme and unrealistic view.

None of the images posted breached social media rules yet they were described in the article as "graphic images of hunted animals."

This is where we find the apparent controversy; graphic, in this tabloid context, means shocking, disgusting or sickening; but where is the justification? In the article, the AMF does not raise concerns about the posted images other than that the promotion might "normalise" firearms use.

A simple search of #Iamashooter on Twitter a week after the article produced only a couple of



images showing hunters with dead animals.

We understand that some people may not like to look at a dead pig, but it is a pest animal. The suggestion these images are controversial or graphic is not justified.

Given the lack of any protagonist in the story, we have to conclude that the 'controversial' billboard and the graphic nature of the "selfies" it generated were added to create an adversarial "good vs evil" tone.

By omitting any reference to the majority of family images uploaded using the hashtag the article drew an unflattering and unfair caricature of legal firearms owners. The Herald Sun responded that the article was "reasonable and responsible." We disagree.



Scott Petrie with FGA general manager David McNabb experiencing the great Australian bush.

International exchange of ideas

Delta Waterfowl is the “voice of the duck hunter” in the United States and Canada. During his first visit to Australia, CEO Dr. Scott Petrie gained a newfound appreciation for the freedoms waterfowl hunters have in North America.

Dr. Scott Petrie is a strong believer in the link between hunting and good conservation outcomes for waterfowl.

Like Field & Game Australia, Delta Waterfowl is a conservation based organisation with members investing time in conservation, nesting support and predator management. Delta Waterfowl invests in applied scientific research that underpins policy work and conservation outcomes.

Dr Petrie gave a keynote address about waterfowl management at the Conservation Through Sustainable Use of Wildlife Conference in Brisbane.

Colonisation in North America broke up the landscape for productive agriculture, apex predator eradication and what Dr Petrie described as the “wanton destruction” of good wildlife led to species loss.

“Luckily we went from the era of exploitation to what we call the era of protection from 1929,” he said.

Hunters, concerned by unsustainable use successfully lobbied to end commercial hunting and organisations like Delta Waterfowl shifted focus—concentrating on research that would deliver waterfowl abundance.

Delta Waterfowl opened the Delta Marsh research station in 1938 and has produced 600 scientific papers and supported the work of 300 graduate students.

In the 1990s Delta Waterfowl broadened its approach, diving deeper into wetland conservation and management.

“A reason we decided to change was nest success was declining despite the conservation efforts of our partners,” Dr Petrie said.

The Prairie Pothole region which takes in parts of North and South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana and four Canadian provinces contains millions of small kettle lakes left behind by melting glaciers.

“These things are shallow, they melt quickly, they’ve got this explosion of invertebrates, they provide predator exclusion which breeding ducks want, so it is the most important breeding area for ducks in the world,” Dr Petrie explained.

“Over 75 per cent of the ducks that are hatched in North America are hatched in that one small place.”

Most current research shows nesting rates of less than 15 per cent—less than is required to sustain populations.

The draining of potholes for broad acre agriculture along with loss of grasslands has reduced the options for breeding birds.

“What this does unfortunately is it concentrates nesting waterfowl and ground nesting songbirds and ground nesting game birds and it also concentrates predator effort.”

“They know these areas have a lot of nests and that’s where they go which substantially increases nesting loss.”

Delta Waterfowl works on incentive schemes to encourage farmers to retain wetlands but more than a decade of research has demonstrated the importance of controlling predators such as raccoons, foxes and coyote.

Research sites demonstrated an average increase in nesting success to 39 per cent by implementing a trapping program.

“We can almost triple nest success by managing predators,” Dr Petrie said.

“We now do operational trapping; we are

putting our science into action.”

Delta Waterfowl runs the largest youth hunt program in the world, recruiting and educating the next generation of hunters. Dr Petrie said hunter numbers are important because they are the biggest contributors to conservation in both time and money.

“The uncomfortable truth for many is that hunters contribute \$12 to conservation for every dollar than non-hunters do.”

Dr Petrie said water and predation drive waterfowl populations, not harvest.

“We are tinkering less because we recognise that waterfowl populations are more water driven and predator driven than they are hunter driven,” he said.

“I see very little reason for you to tinker with your seasons in Australia, maybe reduce your bag limit somewhat during drier periods but the law of diminishing returns dictates that when the hunting isn’t very good people will go hunt something else or they hunt less.

The last thing you want is your constituents know knowing if there’s going to be a Duck Season in any given year. If I was managing it I would never pull a season, you might want to have an emergency closure on a certain species that isn’t doing particularly well but I would never close an entire season.”

Dr Petrie was also struck by the aggressive tactics used by opponents of duck hunting in Australia.

“It’s a very different world for waterfowl hunters in Australia,” he said. “Anti-waterfowl hunting sentiment is strong there. It’s amazing how much influence they have. They can often close down wetlands for the season.”

“It was nice to help FGA, and to help provide guidance on how to grow their organisation and deal with anti-hunting,” he said. “It was also great to spread the word about Delta and our conservation programs.”



A hard fought win in Victoria on an important principle

When the Victorian Government started the planning process for the new Alps management plan back in 2009, hunters were the leading stakeholder at every consultation session.

Early on it became obvious that there were some great opportunities for hunters as well as a few threats.

Of major concern was a proposal to create ten “no camping with firearms zones” — this proposal would have excluded hunters from several of the best equipped camping areas in the State. It was not the actual (relatively minor) restriction that was important here, it was the principle.

Hunters are willing to accept reasonable, evidence based restraints on access, in this instance however, despite numerous direct requests at the highest level, no evidence or justification was ever produced for the proposed change.

Hunters fought this issue through three Governments, four Premiers and four Environment Ministers.

In August, after seven years of pushing our

case we received, in writing, the answer we have been working for:

“Following your feedback we have reviewed and revised this position. Our revised position is as follows:

- The final management plan will have no reference to firearm free campgrounds.
- Instead, we will use a variety of education channels to manage the exposure of visitors to firearms, focusing on a select number of campgrounds.
- We will work with you on how we can best educate hunters to minimise the perceived impacts on non-hunters of some hunter activities (e.g. hanging carcasses) in and around campsites that are shared with non-hunters.”

The reality is that we shouldn’t have to fight on issues such as this—we welcome genuine consultation and will always accept evidence—even when it does not suit us. What we cannot countenance are decisions which affect us being based on prejudice and ideology.

Sustainable sense

There a number of inquiries across multiple jurisdictions into invasive animals on public land but a recent international conference on conservation through the sustainable use of wildlife reinforced the value of hunting as a driver for good environmental outcomes.

Field & Game Australia and the Australian Deer Association both presented at the conference, held in Brisbane in late August.

The more than 50 presenters gave local and international perspectives on sustainable use.

The conference threw up numerous examples of real conservation and species preservation and hunters initiated much of it.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust made two presentations on the farmer cluster model it began in the United Kingdom to save the grey partridge by providing incentive to retain or recreate habitat.

Dr Scott Petrie, CEO of Delta Waterfowl in North America spoke of the enormous contribution hunters make through scientific research, preserving important wetlands and predator control in the Prairie Pothole region where 75 per cent of new birds hatch. Nesting success was generally

below the level needed to sustain populations but where hunters are active the success rate has nearly trebled.

The conference was an opportunity for many like-minded organisations to compare notes on the issues affecting hunting and firearms regulation as well as our successes in research and conservation.

It was with a degree of envy that we listened to Bryce Johnson, Chief Executive of Fish & Game New Zealand speak about their model of angler/hunter controlled game management and the manner in which game food is respected and accepted as a cultural norm.

Closer to home, the conference heard about the success of an indigenous business in central Australia. Treated as a pest species, camels were simply “shot to waste” under a government funded control scheme but on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands a better solution was found.



L-R: David McNabb (FGA), Bryce Johnson (NZ Fish & Game Council), Nicholas Aebischer (Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK), Teresa Dent CBE (Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK), and Barry Howlett (Australian Deer Association).

Damage to infrastructure from thirsty camels is an ongoing problem in the region and mustering them for sale pays for their removal cost. The joint venture Ngaanyatjarra Camel Company provides something rare in remote communities, real jobs.

FGA and the ADA are both engaged in wildlife management and conservation and access to land to hunt keeps members active.

It was clear from the array of conference presenters that recreational hunting, along with well-regulated commercial ventures, can provide good conservation outcomes, particularly where overabundant wildlife are having an adverse impact on the environment.

Hunters and commercial operators place a value on invasive species



Delta Waterfowl CEO Scott Petrie addresses the SU Conference.

and derive a benefit from sustainable harvest. Conservation outcomes are achievable through suppression while sustaining both recreational hunting and viable processing industries.



Catherine Skinner with the gold medal every student wanted to touch.

Shock and awesome

Catherine Skinner couldn't hear the commentary as she steeled herself for the final target in the Olympic Women's Trap in Rio "....if she hits the target she wins the gold medal". She nailed it but the look on her face told the story, she could hardly believe it.



Back in Australia a few weeks later with the gold medal draped round her neck Catherine is standing in front of 700 excited schoolchildren and half the town of Mansfield to receive the keys to the city.

The children have made banners and decorations in green and gold, some sport their own cardboard gold medals as they cheer their local hero.

Catherine, who started shooting at the age of 12 because she wanted to "beat my brothers" has a message for them.

"Try everything, you are going to find whatever it is you are good at but the only way to do that is to go and try," she said.

"Once you find that thing that you are so passionate about, stick at it. You are going to fail more than you are going to succeed but at the end of it you can achieve one success that makes it all worth it."

That one success, Olympic gold, is still a bit of a blur. As the weeks pass the memory of the moment is starting to crystallise but even the heavy weight of the medal everyone wants to see and touch hasn't completely erased the disbelief on her face a second after she pulled that final trigger.

"I feel incredibly proud and also satisfied because it shows our junior development programs have paid off in talent identification and development."

"It still feels like a shock to win," she said.

"Quite honestly, during our final I was waiting for it to go pear-shaped because I was having no birds, the wind was picking up, I was just waiting for it to all fall to pieces."

I shot the final target and looked up and I'd won the medal, I thought what's just happened?

I was proud enough to just wear the green and gold and represent Australia because it is so hard to predict, it is not like other sports where you have a predictable form line, it is performance on the day."

Catherine's focus and determination can be measured by an incident in the early rounds when the weather was playing havoc and the wind blew over barriers in the media zone. There were bangs, crashes and a few screams. Catherine's family were in the grandstand and



Excited school children welcome Catherine home to Mansfield

she desperately wanted to turn and check they were okay; instead, she focussed hard, took the shot, and hit the target.

"It is quite incredible to achieve this honour because we have such a strong female shooting group and some fantastic talent coming through," Catherine said.

"I feel incredibly proud and also satisfied because it shows our junior development programs have paid off in talent identification and development."

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