

CONSERVATION & HUNTING

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**Max Downes: Victoria's
former gamekeeper on
the value of hunting**

**Crisis point for the Game
Management Authority?**

**Sunday Island brought to life by hunter conservation
Northcote isn't about National Parks**

In a joint submission the Australian Deer Association and Field & Game Australia have asked; Is Victoria's Game Management Authority is a good idea teetering on collapse?

The GMA was established in 2014 at the urging of the hunting community in the lead up to the 2010 elections. Its creation coincided with the release of the governance review of the Game Council of New South Wales and the subsequent abolition of that authority in June 2014. The circumstances which caused that review and their proximity to the establishment of the GMA caused the previous Victorian government to take a cautious approach that limited the scope and functions of the GMA more than might otherwise have been the case, particularly given that it was only four months out from an election.

We welcomed the establishment of the GMA at the time but expressed reservations about its limited scope and powers.

We believe that the GMA is close to a crisis point. It is:

- Unable to effectively enforce the Wildlife (Game) Regulations,
- Suffering a large turnover of staff,
- Too limited in its role, and is,
- Largely isolated from the departments with responsibility for land management.

If the GMA is to be effective, it needs to have a broader role and more resources.

Despite the name, the GMA has no mandate to manage game in Victoria and does not see itself as having such a role. It is a regulator and does not seek to be more than that.

The stated objective of the GMA is:

- To promote sustainability and responsibility in game hunting in Victoria.
- By contrast the Victorian Fisheries Authority which was established by the current Government has a broader range of objectives, being to:
- Promote sustainability and responsibility in fishing and fishing-related activities in Victoria,
- Optimise the social, cultural and economic benefits of the fisheries sectors,
- Support the development of recreational fishing,
- Support the development of commercial fishing and aquaculture; and
- Work co-operatively with fisheries management bodies in other States, in Territories and the Commonwealth.

The GMA's enforcement powers have always been curtailed by a policy (inherited from the GMA's predecessors) prohibiting enforcement officers from approaching armed hunters without an escort from Victoria Police. In May 2015, in response to the 'ANZAC day terror plot', Victoria Police implemented a policy of members not working without the accompaniment of another member. This has exacerbated the issues with GMA enforcement as regional police services which had previously been able to occasionally assist the GMA with the provision of one accompanying officer are, more often than not, insufficiently resourced to provide two.



David Voss
Australian Deer
Association national
president

In 2014 a report commissioned by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries concluded that hunting contributes more than \$439million to the Victorian economy. Yet the GMA only receives a grant of \$5.3million a year to fund its operations and governments do not even hypothecate the licensing revenue which is between \$2.0 to \$2.5million a year.

While the reputation of the GMA is declining in the hunting community, it remains the preferred model for the administration of game and game hunting in Victoria but its scope must be expanded and its resources increased if it is ever to be anything other than a less than overwhelming regulator.

I step back into the role of Chairman of FGA in unfortunate circumstances and at a difficult and testing time.

My predecessor Rob Treble had no option but to resign from the Boards of FGA and our Wetlands Environmental Taskforce given his position in the Department of Defence and our issues with them over PFAS contamination at the Heart Morass.

We thank Rob for his service and also thank CEO David McNabb who has left the organisation.

Our new CEO is Richard Light who comes to us from the oil industry, with over 20 years of international experience including a lead executive role in environmental regulatory compliance.

FGA needs strong and skilled advocates to protect and develop hunting, to secure our shooting grounds, deliver great clay target competitions, and ensure that we are absolutely on top of environmental issues such as PFAS.

In Victoria, Duck Season 2018 sees significant changes with a 9am start time on the opening Saturday and 8am the following day across the whole state as part of a trial of opening the season during daylight hours

The GMA will also raise the minimum pass mark for the Waterfowl Identification Test from 75per cent to 85 per cent for any new Game Licence applications.

In addition, new regulations will be introduced to formally require hunters to retrieve all ducks shot and include them in their bag and to retain a minimum of at least the breast meat.

We are disappointed with the changes; we strongly argued for a full season and bag limit with at least two Blue-winged shovellers included and a mid-week start to the season.

We accept that action is needed to deal with a small number of hunters prepared to shoot early and therefore out of season; we want 100 per cent compliance but we fail to see how making hunters stand around in broad daylight while birds fly around them will encourage the wrongdoers to change their behaviour.

The 2017 duck opening was also a failure for compliance and without enforcement that is more visible (and subsequent prosecutions), those who shoot early can keep doing so with impunity.

We have made it clear to our 18500 members and the broader hunting community we reach, that it is up to all of them to abide by the regulations and enjoy their hunting. We are emphasising the RESPECT campaign and stating that if we are ever to lose the ability to hunt ducks in Victoria, it will not be because of the activity of protesters, it will be because of the bad behaviour of a very few hunters.



Bill Paterson
Field & Game
Australia chairman

Why the Greens won Northcote

CPI Strategic director and adviser to Field & Game Australia and the Australian Deer Association Rick Brown, cautions against viewing the Northcote by-election as an endorsement of Greens policy.

Last November the predictable happened: the Greens thrashed Labor in a Victorian by-election in Northcote caused by the death of the sitting member Fiona Richardson.

Experts and pundits who, not understanding of the dynamics of the electorate, relied on insider assessments and a CFMEU-commissioned ReachTel poll conducted nine days earlier, predicted that Labor would win the contest.

The poll was never credible and using it to claim that the creation of a new national park in the Central Highlands was not a critical issue for voters in Northcote was a high-risk tactic.

There should have been a focus on the key issues, which always were going to influence the result.

Since the 2014 state election, there has been about a 40 per cent turnover of voters in Northcote. Many of the new residents live in apartments. Few people living in apartments have children. Because of inner suburban property prices, household incomes in Northcote, and especially in suburbs like Alphington and Fairfield, need to be well above the average. At least a quarter of voters have a tertiary qualification.

This description fits the profile of a Greens' voter.

Secondly, while the personal support for a local member is often exaggerated, there are exceptions.

Fiona Richardson was one of the exceptions. A comparison between federal election results in Northcote booths and state election results suggest her personal support was significant.

Then, the Liberals did not nominate a candidate. In the 2014 state election the Liberal candidate, who preferred Ms. Richardson, obtained 16.5 per cent of the primary vote.

The Liberal Democrats nominated a candidate for the by-election, presumably at the instigation of Labor which they preferred but their candidate obtained only a quarter of the 2014 Liberal vote.

For the best part of 70 years, Liberals and Labor have educated their supporters to put the candidate of the other party last on ballot papers.

Without advice to the contrary, it was foreseeable that many Liberal voters would put Labor last, bearing in mind that traditionally, in a by-election, it is easy to vote against the government.

This combination of factors easily explains a swing of 10 per cent against Labor.

However, the CFMEU tactic has backfired, enabling the Greens to claim that the by-election result is an endorsement of their policy to create another national park.

This result has other ramifications.

It should strengthen the position of those in both Labor and Liberal who argue that their party should focus on issues which are priorities for people living in the outer suburbs and regions, which is where most of the seats that determine governments are located.

During the election campaign, Labor announced a ban on plastic bags to carry groceries, the establishment of a heroin injecting room in Richmond and buttered up to animal liberationists. It did not get them a vote.

Being Green-lite is not the way to beat Greens. Ironically, this is an approach Ms. Richardson vehemently rejected.

Secondly, it has strengthened the argument of those inside Liberal ranks who argue that the simplest way not to waste money acting a siphon for Labor is not to nominate candidates in inner suburban seats.

This way the Liberals leave the Greens and

Labor to battle it out without their having to choose between supporting Greens or acting as a prop for Labor.

Preferencing Greens has not helped the Liberals. The instinct of 80 per cent of Green voters is to preference Labor, and, regardless of carrots dangled by Greens' leaders, their voters would not countenance their entering into alliances with Liberals.

All it has done is to send a message to Liberal voters that voting Green is a valid option.

It seems that the Liberals have learnt the lesson. They have said that they will not contest inner suburban seats in the Victorian elections next year and not nominate a candidate for the federal by-election in Batman, of which Northcote is a significant part.

Labor's buttering up to the Animal Justice Party (AJP) to undermine the Greens was pointless.

The AJP claimed that Labor secured the Party's preferences by promising to spend \$500,000 of taxpayers' money on animal liberation issues, create Animal Welfare Victoria, issue an annual report on animal welfare issues, and devise an animal welfare plan.

Labor dismissed the claims, saying that the AJP had nominated activities the Government already undertook or had intended undertaking.

Whatever the preference deal was, it was a futile exercise. Of the 773 votes the AJP attracted and the additional 160 votes they accumulated, Labor received only 30 per cent.

While the lessons to learn from the by-election appear to be obvious, it remains to be seen how Labor responds to the Greens' challenge in the lead-up to Victoria's state elections next November.



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Time to raise the bar

The latest annual report of Victoria's Game Management Authority (GMA) highlights the limited nature of its role and its determination not to raise its sights.

In the report the Chairman pays lip service to '...the substantial economic, social and environmental benefits of hunting' and their importance to 'Victoria's wellbeing, especially our rural and regional communities'.

However the Chief Executive Officer of the GMA subsequently issues the reminder that '...the inaugural Statement of Expectations issued in October 2014 (by the then Minister) noted that a good regulator cannot both regulate and promote the industry. While not promoting hunting, the Game Management Authority Act 2014 requires the GMA to promote responsibility and sustainability in game hunting, a subtle but important difference.'

In other words the name 'Game Management Authority' is a misnomer. It would be more accurate to describe the authority as the 'Game Regulatory Authority'.

This stands in stark contrast with the Victorian Fisheries Authority created by the current government. Its role includes developing recreational fishing.

Organisations such as Field & Game Australia and the Australian Deer Association argued for years for the need for a statutory game authority and opposed from the beginning the limited role of the GMA. The reason was that limiting the role of the GMA would defeat the primary purpose for its establishment — to promote hunting.

Ironically an independent report on the contribution of hunting to the Victorian economy (\$430 million annually), commissioned by the previous government, demonstrated the concern of hunting organisations. It has sunk without a trace. Since there is not an agency in Victoria responsible for the promotion of hunting, that outcome should not come as a surprise.

The GMA's latest annual report is likely to provide the next example of the price of not having an agency responsible for promoting hunting.

At the urging of the current minister, Jaala Pulford, the GMA has undertaken an audit of Victoria's unique 199 state game

reserves. The result is an indictment on the incompetence and neglect of Parks Victoria, the agency responsible for the administration and management of the reserves.

However, the Audit will not even have the opportunity to collect dust. The GMA has printed only 50 copies and posted it on its website; as any regulator would do.

What is certain is that the GMA will not take up the issue of what happens next and it is hard to imagine that actions arising from the Audit will be on the top of Parks Victoria's to do list.

What the GMA's latest annual report and its Audit of State Game Reserves demonstrate is the importance of the legislation, initiated by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party and passed by the Legislative Council, which broadens the role of the GMA.

Whether the Victorian Government, which controls the agenda in the Legislative Assembly, comes to this realisation will become apparent this year.

Richard Light joins FGA

Richard Light is the new chief executive officer of Field & Game Australia.

Richard has more than 20 years' international experience working in the oil industry culminating with his role as vice president, health and safety for Schlumberger North America. He has a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering and qualifications in management and crisis management.

During his time with Schlumberger he was responsible for their shooting entertainment budget of US\$1 m per year and was a committee member and shoot marshal

for the Gulf Coast SPE Sporting Clays shoot—which attracted 750 competitors.

Richard has competed successfully at World Skeet Championships and has experienced hunting around the world. Richard said he felt privileged to lead an organisation representing 18500 members.

"A lot of us have dreamed of being able to turn our passion into our work, which is the fortunate position I now find myself in," Richard said,

"However, I am under no illusion about



the job in front of me. Our hunting and shooting privileges are under constant scrutiny and threat, and in order to protect these privileges, FGA is critical in giving the broader hunting and shooting community a voice with regulators, law makers and the general community."

Government guarantee still paying a dividend after 50 years

Sunday Island at Corner Inlet, 10 minutes by boat from Port Albert, in South Gippsland is a game management and conservation success story built on a government guarantee.

Para Park Co-operative Game Reserve oversees Sunday Island freehold within Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park with the aim of managing "...the natural attributes of Sunday Island for the production of game species, the major focus being the hog deer, in such a manner as to be in harmony with conservation of the other fauna and flora of the region'.

Para Park Co-operative has approximately 200 members. Each member is a shareholder (which is refunded if the member leaves the co-operative), contributes an annual management fee and a share of the workload (30 work-hours per year).

Para Park Co-operative is administered by a board of seven directors and was established more than 50 years ago by a group of visionary deer enthusiasts, who were able to raise £20,000, a considerable sum in 1965, to purchase the Sunday Island freehold.

This was backed by a Victorian Government guaranteed loan from the former State Bank and ICI Australia. Times have changed and it is not easy to imagine any Government guaranteeing a loan to purchase freehold within a State Park for the purpose of

conserving wild game in today's political climate. Prior to purchase by Para Park Co-operative, Sunday Island had been run as a grazing property from the 1850s. Most notably, by the Stockwell family who, at their peak, had over 2,000 sheep and 300 head of cattle on the island over winter.

The island consists of two management areas. The 'Living Area' comprising 80 hectares which contains residential and other facilities required by the members, and the 'Wildlife Management Area' covering the remaining 1,540 hectares which is under the governance of a Game Management Panel appointed by the members and answerable to the Board. It sounds serious, but the best way to meet people is to go to the working bees, which apart from actual work, involves quite a bit of barbecuing and talking about deer. The population of hog deer is estimated to be around 350 animals. The aim of game management is to keep the population below the carrying capacity of the island even in poor seasons. To that end every year there is a hunting season that generally continues (under permit) for two months or until the required number of animals are taken. Para Park has made substantial contributions to understanding the ecology of hog deer in the past and research continues to this day.

Sunday Island contains six ecological vegetation classes, as well as small areas of improved pasture. The centre of the island consists of woodland sand dune ridges typified by large manna gums and banksias. In low-lying areas, towards the coast is a band of estuarine scrub. Between the scrub



and the high tide mark there are typically extensive areas of estuarine flats grassland, especially on the south side of the island. The grassland blends into coastal saltmarsh and below the high tide mark where tidal flow is moderate there are extensive stands of mangrove shrub land. These diverse habitats, can be found along a two kilometre north-south transect, providing an unusually rich diversity of habitats within the area. This provides for a rich diversity of native animals, in particular abundant bird life.

Sunday Island has a huge range of birds because of the diverse habitat including rare birds such as the white-bellied sea eagle. Formerly the extremely rare orange bellied parrot could be seen on the salt marsh during winter, but the last Corner Inlet record was more than 10 years ago. Although rarely seen, being small and nocturnal, pigmy possums and swamp antechinus are common; both of these mammals are listed as 'near threatened' in Victoria. They survive on Sunday Island because it is free of foxes and cats.

Fifty years on the Victorian Government's decision to support this innovative initiative continues to pay dividends for the community. What would otherwise have become a little used, isolated chunk of public land is a significant economic and environmental asset for corner inlet—hundreds of regular visitors support the economy of Port Albert and infrastructure owned by Para Park, such as a large barge are regularly used to support the administration of public land in the area.

Living life to the Max

91 year-old Max Downes served as Victoria's Superintendent of Game Management from 1953 to 1968 and has spent a lifetime working in wildlife biology so he understands the unique connection between sustainable hunting and conservation.

When we meet Max, he's hard at work at the Australian National Hunting Archive which he maintains.

He points to a photograph of himself as a young man on his first deployment with the Australian Antarctic Division in 1951; it could just as easily be a poster for a swashbuckling Errol Flynn feature film. As it turns out, there is a connection, Flynn's father Theodore was also respected biologist.

Max was on the first Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) to Heard Island, a sub Antarctic island located in the Southern Ocean, about 4000 km southwest of mainland Australia.

The island and surrounding waters teem with wildlife and other natural wonders and Max set about documenting the species.

"I spent a year there as a young biologist; it was the first time I'd seen snow or ice, my first time out of Australia," he said.

That first expedition came after what Max calls the "heroic age" of Antarctic exploration and before the "technical age", where scientists with particular expertise and research goals were sent.

"We learned on the spot, whereas now they teach them before they go," Max said.

He conducted the first census of southern giant petrels and nearly 40 years later he helped repeat the exercise, alerting scientists to a halving of the breeding population.

An account from Nils Lied's diary from October 1951 demonstrates just how rugged and isolated expeditioners were.

"Since the last entry, we have had a most harrowing experience," he writes.

"Our cook, Jack Starr, took ill one

night—last Sunday 7th, in fact, and complained of severe pains in his right lower abdomen. It was diagnosed by Dr Rec as appendicitis, and cables started to fly back and forth between Heard and the Antarctic office in Melbourne weighing the pros and cons of the case."

Medical evacuation was impossible so the 'Heardites' were instructed to cleanse the recreation room and convert it to an operating theatre.

Max Downes was in charge of the operating "implements." The surgery took four hours: one hour to achieve a complete anaesthetic, and three hours to do the actual operation but the patient recovered.

When Max first graduated, adventure in the Antarctic was irresistible but on his return, his childhood hunting with his father would lead him down a more logical path.

"After I returned I looked around for a job and Fisheries and Game was starting up and I got a job straight away; what I liked about it was I was working with hunters rather than working on research, we were working on

applying our knowledge on wildlife," he said.

"I had accepted from an early age that hunting is a legitimate activity; people have been hunting for millions of years, and it is part of being human."

From 1953–1968 he worked as a biologist and held the position as Superintendent of Game Management during a critical period for waterfowl conservation in Victoria.

"I was responsible for the game bird program; for the first two years we had to work out what recommendations to make to Government about game birds."

It took six years but Max was able to convince Government that the real risk to game bird populations was the loss of habitat and climate, not recreational hunting.

"On the one hand, they were worried they would be shot out and on the other hand they hadn't realised the destruction of the swamps and seasonal conditions were far bigger influences on the duck population than hunters," he said.

"In the first years, I was able to show the Department they needed to have some

system to preserve habitat. It took from 1953 to 1959 but the Government adopted a game management program whereby they started State Wildlife Reserves to preserve habitat and Field & Game (Victoria) formed to also preserve habitat."

Max worked with hunters to achieved a conservation outcome long envisaged by the hunting community.

"It took 100 years to get to that stage; the suggestion from hunters for a game tax or licence had been around since the 1800s and there had been 30 attempts to do it," he said.

"It was the community motivation that convinced Government."

Community support for hunting was more broadly felt than it is today, something Max attributes to the demise of commercial game meat which through the city market provided a staple and special source of food for non-hunters.

Max likens the current campaign against hunting to the early 20th century when for 20 years hunting was frowned upon.

"The Ornithologists Union was started by really keen hunters but over time it divided into people who shot and those who considered killing things inappropriate," Max said.

"As part of the propaganda, either side would exaggerate their case; it emphasises the point that without work to compile proper data, the claims of anti-hunters are wildly exaggerated. The advantage hunters have is the national archive and the real facts it contains."

Max has also worked extensively on deer populations, firstly during an eight-year stint in Papua New Guinea

from 1968 doing the first research into the introduced rusa deer.

"I came back in 1976 and worked for the Australian Deer Association as a consultant, which was a difficult job because little work had been done in Australia at that stage," he said.

"Game managers at the time tended to confuse research into game with game management: game management is the application of knowledge, research is discovering how to do it, and they are distinct activities that require different sorts of people and training."

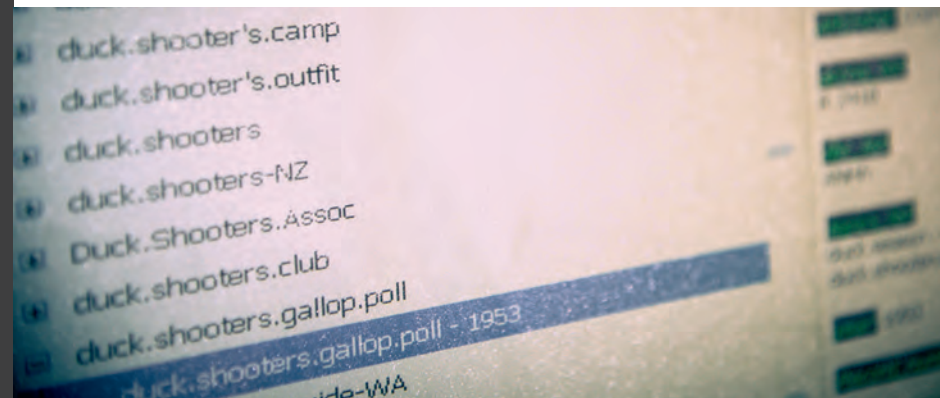
Max was also facing a shift away from game within Government. While he was away, the game management section disbanded.

"They changed the name and their objectives changed at the same time; in effect the people in charge were not interested in game and they did wildlife work."

"Under National Parks and Wildlife they were in effect anti-game: game work stopped, the game reserves were considered little national parks and were managed as little national parks but they had no money to manage them."

The issue is still alive today and Max believes the hunting fraternity can again lay the foundation for significant reform, just as they did in the lead up to the establishment of the State Game Reserve network.

"A really big effort should go into having management of game reserves shift to the Game Management Authority; they are the only ones who will manage them properly," he said.



Contamination a blow to the Heart

The Heart Morass near Sale, Victoria was degraded and marginal grazing land before hunters restored it to a pristine wetland but it now faces another challenge due to contamination from the nearby RAAF Base.

The Heart has been caught up in the national investigation into PFAS contamination from Department of Defence facilities. PFAS (per-and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) is an emerging issue globally. The chemical compounds are extremely stable and were widely used for multiple industrial purposes, including in firefighting foams, non-stick cookware, food packaging, insecticides, and waterproof and fire-resistant fabric. Defence commissioned a Detailed Site Investigation (DSI), which was completed in June 2017. Exceedances of PFOS ecosystems criteria (99 per cent) were recorded at all samples from the Heart Morass and in one of two samples from Dowd Morass. Preliminary results also indicated elevated levels of PFAS in fish, eels and

ducks from the Heart Morass. Victoria's Environment Protection Authority followed up with advice to duck hunters and fishers to reduce and prevent exposure to PFAS by not consuming any animals caught at the wetlands until further assessment could be undertaken. In December, 2017 the further investigation was released in the form of an Interim Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA), and it wasn't good news. The HHERA identified potentially elevated risks associated with the home consumption of duck meat and duck liver recreationally hunted from the Heart Morass even at low consumption rates (i.e. 1 serve of duck/month). Current advice for medical practitioners is that all Australians are expected to have detectable levels of PFAS in their

blood due to background exposures. There is no established "normal" PFAS range for an individual in Australia or internationally and the presence of PFAS in blood is not predictive of health problems in individuals. The short-term impact for Heart Morass is a hit to revenue from the sale of access keys. While hunters will make their own minds up about the current health advice, FGA expects key sales will drop significantly leaving a shortfall in the annual maintenance budget for the wetland. The medium to long-term problem is dealing with the PFAS contamination and we continue to work with Defence, EPA and others. The only clarity we have is that the science, both ecological and human health, is still developing. In the meantime, work to maintain and improve the Heart Morass goes on.



EPA investigates lead levels

The Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) says lead in wetlands around Kerang and Western District lakes poses no human health or environmental issues.

The Lead in Wetlands Study, instigated in response to community concerns that lead shot from duck hunting may have caused lead contamination, found that lead levels posed no risk to human health in either sediment or water sampling. Chief environmental scientist Dr Andrea Hinwood said only a small number of samples were taken for the preliminary investigation. "The results of this preliminary investigation indicate that impacts from the historical use of lead shot to hunt waterfowl has

not significantly affected water quality. Results do not exceed the recommended recreational livestock water quality or sediment quality guidelines for lead," she said. However, the report also noted overall water quality at these lakes can be improved to maintain the ecosystem values and beneficial uses of the lakes. "Lead concentrations in the water and sediment of the lakes tested is low and below guidelines," Dr Hinwood said. Lead shot was banned for duck hunting in

Victoria in 1994. "Though testing methods were different, EPA was able to compare these current results with sampling taken in 1989, which show comparable results giving us additional support for our conclusions," Dr Hinwood said. "We will now work with local stakeholders to establish opportunities to improve the overall quality of these very important waterways." The lakes tested were: Lake Murdeduke, Lake Colongulac, Lake Martin, Lake Colac at Rifle Range, Lake Colac at Camp Ground and Lake Tooliorook, Lake Buloke, Lake Boort, Lake Cullen South, Cairn Curran Reservoir North, Cairn Curran Reservoir South.

Time up for Parks Victoria

Early last year the Game Management Authority (GMA) posted on its website the results of an audit of Victoria's unique 199 state game reserves (SGR) undertaken by it and Parks Victoria.

The SGRs may well be Australia's first public private partnership. By the late 1950s, the future of much of Victoria's waterfowl was bleak. The cause was the draining of swamps for grazing. In response Field & Game lobbied for a deal with the government. Hunters would pay an annual licence fee with the proceeds used by the government for research on the cause of the diminishing numbers of waterfowl and subsequently to buy back and restore former wetlands. The first SGR, the Jack Smith Lake Game Reserve, was proclaimed in 1958. Today, 70 SGRs support threatened species and 18 are listed as wetlands of significant importance under the international Ramsar convention. A 2015 Deakin University study has indicated that wetland ecosystems may be 50 times more effective at carbon capture than rainforest, and these habitats make

vital contributions to biodiversity, water quality, and flood mitigation. None of the SGRs has a very high fuel load rating, 45 (22 per cent) were considered to have a 'high' fuel load rating, 77 (39 per cent) a 'moderate' rating and 77 (39 per cent) a 'low' rating. This situation is not due to the stewardship of Parks Victoria. The Audit is an indictment of its incompetent and negligent management and administration of the SGRs. Each of the 199 SGRs is supposed to have a management plan. Yet 137 do not have targeted management plans and it was unknown whether another 37 have management plans or not. Despite the fact that a study commissioned by the previous government revealed that hunting contributes \$430 million to the Victorian economy, 46 SGRs cannot be accessed due to ambiguous or un-defined

access points or undefinable-leased easements. 116 SGRs do not have two-wheel-drive access and there is no vehicle access to 80 sites. The results of the Audit reinforce the suspicion of hunters that Parks Victoria and the Environment Department at best have no empathy for hunting and at worst are antagonistic towards it. Only 31 were correctly signed as State Game Reserves and a staggering 62 reserves were signed incorrectly as Wildlife Reserves, four as Natural Features Reserve and one a Nature Conservation Reserve. Two years have elapsed since a field audit of every SGR was undertaken and a year after the Audit was published there appears to be no tangible response. That is not surprising. Parks Victoria is hardly likely to turn over a new leaf, and its inaction on the audit demonstrates this body should be relieved of responsibility for the management and administration of SGRs.



Victorian Sustainable Hunting Action KPI report January 2018

Performance indicators: Rating from 1 to 5

1 = Does not meet expectations 5 = Exceeds expectations

Action Status Indicators:

Green Orange Red

OUTCOME: RESPONSIBLE, SAFE AND HUMANE HUNTING			
OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE HUNTING			PERFORMANCE
Responsible hunting actions are focussed on providing better information, education and training programs to hunters, collaborating with stakeholders to promote responsible hunting, and improving enforcement.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Clearly define “responsible” hunting	2
		Timely development and dissemination of key messages in advance of hunting seasons – duck, quail, deer	2
		Youth education programs developed with hunting organisations to address increasing urbanisation and create pathways to ethical hunting	2
		Structured program to deliver key messages and education programs to dealer network; including non-toxic shot, SEP, WIT, deer education (ADA), deer hunting with hounds, firearm safety, marksmanship	2
		Show genuine progress on enabling GMA enforcement officers to operate without Victoria Police support by 1 December 2017	2
		Development and support of hunting tourism strategies with local government (e.g. Towong Shire hunting tourism strategy)	2
ACTIONS			STATUS
1.1	Provide better access to information through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a single, comprehensive hunting website;• improved distribution network for a new hunting manual; and• the upgrading of the game licensing system to allow for more targeted messaging to hunters.		
1.2	Educate and train new hunters by reviewing and releasing a comprehensive manual on how to hunt in Victoria.		
1.3	Improve compliance and enforcement through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a clear compliance policy;• targeting resources to ensure compliance and prevent illegal behaviour by hunters;• improvement of 136 186 help line for proactive reporting of illegal activity;• agreed standards for compliance across all government departments and agencies; and• reporting on convictions for illegal hunting.		
1.4	Work with hunting stakeholders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• continue delivering the ‘RESPECT: Hunt Responsibly’ program;• organise volunteer resources to complement professional agencies in peak seasons, providing peer regulation;• expand distribution of hunting information to hunting organisations and retail businesses; and• attend relevant outdoor events to promote responsible hunting.		
1.5	Update hunting-related welfare codes to ensure hunting practices are humane and encourage the considerate treatment of animals that are hunted and used for hunting.		
1.6	Improve firearm carriage, transport and storage compliance by working with Firearms Safety Foundation (Victoria) to develop information and run relevant safety courses.		

OUTCOME: FULL UTILISATION OF GAME			
OBJECTIVE 2: GROWING HUNTING’S BENEFITS			PERFORMANCE
Hunting’s benefits will be maximised by using social media to announce upcoming seasons and variations, making game meat processing easier, monitoring economic benefits and facilitating tourism.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Government to communicate environmental, economic and social benefits of hunting, mirroring the approach applied to “Target 1 Million’ recreational fishing initiative	2
		Incorporate benefits from hunting within State Government tourism communications, top five local government area by economic benefits (refer to the 2014 DEPI economic benefits of hunting report)	A
		Variations to hunting seasons are by exception only, and underpinned by contemporary, science-led, management frameworks agreed by government and relevant hunting organisations	TBA
		Commercial processing of wild deer for personal use effective 1 December 2017	2.5
		Measurable progress with commercial processing of wild duck, quail, and exotic game birds demonstrated by 1 December 2017	2.5
ACTIONS			STATUS
2.1	Improve seasonal announcements by effectively communicating information to stakeholders when seasonal variations are required or areas are temporarily closed to hunting. (Early advice will be provided through the Victorian Game Hunting App, Twitter and Facebook.)		
2.2	Facilitate game meat processing by investigating and reducing barriers to the processing of wild harvested game meat to allow optimal use of game harvest.		
2.3	Monitor social and economic benefits by conducting a study every five years to determine the contribution of hunting to the economy. This will inform investment decisions, and improve services and regulatory outcomes.		
2.4	Promote regional hunting opportunities through targeted communication with relevant regional agencies and organisations.		

OUTCOME: INCLUSIVE REGIONAL GROWTH			
OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVING HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES			PERFORMANCE
Hunting opportunities will be improved by providing clear information on where, when and what people can hunt, improving access to hunting locations, expanding pest and game hunting opportunities, and working with Traditional Owners.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Government and agencies websites and other channels to incorporate information relevant to hunting, updated at the time of each announcement	TBA
		‘State Game Reserve’ status and ‘hunting’ icon to be used on all physical signage and printed or electronic references (e.g. ‘Wildlife Reserve’ the current primary classification and avoids use of ‘State Game Reserve’)	2
		Government maps to include reference where there are hunting opportunities	1
		Scope of expanded game and pest animal hunting opportunities to be communicated to relevant hunting organisations by 30 June 2017	3
		Prioritise action to create or improve access, where currently limited, to State Game Reserves	2
		Scope how hunting and Traditional Owners can be mutually inclusive by 30 June 2017	1
		Erect and maintain clear and appropriate signage on entrance points to all National Parks where seasonal deer stalking is permitted.	2
ACTIONS			STATUS
3.1	Improve hunting location knowledge through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">developing a map set for Victoria showing where different game hunting can occur on public land;improving signage on State Game Reserves; andimproving signage on other public land where hunting is permitted including National Parks and high-use State Forests.		
3.2	Provide better hunting access through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">improving physical access to State Game Reserves; andreviewing opportunities to use existing helipad facilities in alpine regions (excluding areas reserved under the National Parks Act 1975) to facilitate improved access to areas where hunting is permitted.		
3.3	Expand pest hunting by exploring further hunting opportunities by game licence holders at State Game Reserves, subject to appropriate pest control protocols.		
3.4	Expand game hunting by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">removing restrictions on hunting other deer species in areas reserved under the National Parks Act 1975 where Sambar Deer hunting is already permitted;promoting hunting opportunities in Victoria to niche tourist markets, both interstate and internationally, including expanding delivery of game licence accreditation (e.g. WIT) to provide for interstate hunters; andexploring options to expand hunting in Victoria in partnership with Traditional Owners, land managers and relevant stakeholders.		
3.5	Partner with Traditional Owners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">continue to build participation in land management and conservation, anddevelop a Victorian Traditional Owner Game Hunting Strategy.		
3.6	Develop an online game licensing system that allows online processing and payment of game licences.		

OUTCOME: SECURE THE FUTURE OF HUNTING			
OBJECTIVE 4: ENSURING SUSTAINABLE HUNTING			PERFORMANCE
Sustainable hunting will be secured through sound research, habitat improvement, working with hunting organisations on control programs, developing a deer management strategy, and improving data collection.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Deliver audit of State Game Reserves to hunting organisations by February 2017	4
		Science-led approach to develop habitat improvement for State Game Reserves, including food sources	TBA
		Develop a draft deer management strategy and put to external review by properly qualified game managers by December 2017, allowing sufficient response time for external stakeholders to seek independent expert advice	2.5
		Investment in game management research demonstrated by government, incorporated within regulator and policy development	2.5
ACTIONS			STATUS
4.1	Undertake research, monitoring and evaluation through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• developing a game species research strategy to better understand the distribution, abundance and recruitment of game species and the impact of hunting activity;• basing policy and decisions on relevant data and information regarding abundance as opposed to point-in-time location;• researching land and habitat management techniques to benefit native game species;• tagging, banding and monitoring game to better understand movements and breeding cycles;• assessing relationships between hunting seasons and local ecosystems around hunting reserves; and• implementing the Waterfowl Conservation Harvest Model to ensure the sustainable management of game ducks.		
4.2	Improve State Game Reserve habitat by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• building on an audit of all State Game Reserves;• developing management principles to maintain quality habitats; and• establishing two demonstration sites, in collaboration with hunting organisations, where the new management principles will be put into practice.		
4.3	Develop a deer management strategy that sets a strategic plan to maintain sustainable hunting opportunities, while reducing the impact of deer on biodiversity on all land tenures in the state.		
4.4	Improve control programs by working with accredited volunteer shooters to contribute to pest and deer control programs by establishing additional agreements with hunting organisations.		
4.5	Improve data collection by exploring new ways and technologies to collect hunting activity information		
4.6	Support the National Hunting Archive by helping the Archive to develop an electronic catalogue system of historical information that can be accessed by the public.		

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