CONSERVATION & HUNTING

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Meet Australia’s most surprising conservationists

Winchester backs Connewarre Wetland Centre

Holding the line on the National Firearms Agreement

Hunters protecting Victoria’s iconic Wilsons Promontory National Park
A message from Field & Game Australia Chairman Bill Paterson

Chairman Bill Paterson

FGA’s conservation efforts via the WET Trust have taken another major step with the purchase of a wetland adjacent to the Hospital Swamp at Connewarre, on the road between Geelong and Barwon Heads. This is an ideal location to further showcase the conservation work passionate hunters are capable of.

The Geelong Branch of FGA have been active in wetland conservation in this area for over 40 years and the health of the Hospital Swamp and adjacent wetlands are due in no small part to their participation in weed control, monitoring of contamination and salt levels and water flow management. Fundamental to the areas protection was its status as a State Game Reserve, again due to hunters.

The WET project involves the purchase of 39 hectares of wetland and the relocation and re-construction of a large building which will be the centre for activities for FGA members, school groups, birdwatchers and naturalists.

As with the other WET project at the Heart Morass in Sale, involvement of the public in wetland conservation is a key objective. A Bug Blitz program saw 3000 school children and their teachers carry out many days of field activities last year at the Heart and we would hope to achieve similar success at Connewarre.

It is with disappointment that I note the disarray in the management of the 2016 Duck Hunting Season. Early in the year we were assured by the government that the Action Plan for the Game Management Authority was within weeks of being signed off by all departments and their ministers, yet it is still not formalised.

Worse still, is the fact that the ministers for Primary Industry and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning have constantly bypassed the GMA and initiated closures of wetlands to hunting using regulations not previously used for hunting issues and in very short timeframes.

In the worst case, Lake Elizabeth at Kerang was closed at 4pm on the Friday before the opening the following morning and all the hunters who were camped there were given until 6pm to leave the area. This was on the basis of 80–100 protected Blue-bill ducks being present, a duck whose habits make it extremely easy to identify as a non-game species.

Such closures have continued, prompted by court action by Animals Australia and without going through the GMA. The result of this has been extreme frustration for hunters, lack of any clarity on the real role of the GMA and as a consequence, the resignation of the Chairman of the GMA, Roger Hallam and of the Chair and members of the committee to give advice on wetland closures.

This is a very sad situation for hunting in Victoria. The announcement, made at Field & Game Australia’s Heart Morass wetland in Gippsland will support:

- Government agencies working with hunters to improve the promotion of responsible hunting, provide better hunting opportunities, and ensure our game species remain sustainable.
- The development of a Sustainable Hunting Action Plan, to be delivered later in 2016.
- The improvement of information on; and access to State Game Reserves
- The Australian Deer Association - to coordinate its members participation in controlled culls of invasive deer species on public and some private land.
- Funding will also continue for firearm safety courses.

Victoria’s 48 000 licensed game hunters make a significant contribution to the state’s economy, with an estimated $439 million spent annually.

Field and Game Australia inc.
65 Anzac Avenue (PO Box 464), Seymour, Victoria, 3661
www.fga.net.au
(03) 5799 0960
fga@fga.net.au

Australian Deer Association
PO Box 454, Croydon, Victoria, 3136
www.austdear.asn.au
(03) 9870 1175
netmem@austdeer.asn.au

Hunting future funds

In a pre-budget announcement Victorian Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford restated the Government’s support for hunting and released details of a broad ranging $5.33 million funding package over four years.

**BETTER HUNTING ALL PART OF THE GAME PLAN**

Ms Pulford said ensuring that hunting in Victoria continues to be a safe and sustainable recreation for future generations is a key focus for the Andrews Labor Government.

“Responsible hunting benefits farmers and is a recreational pastime for thousands,” she said.

“It’s vital that we continue working hard to ensure that people who want to hunt, can do so in a safe, responsible and sustainable way.”

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Cover Image: Field & Game general manager David McNabb and development manager Daryl Snowdon take a walk through Johnson Swamp State Game Reserve which was closed to duck hunting for the first four weeks of the 2016 season due to a significant presence of Australian Bittern. The closure was extended on April 17 with FGA left questioning the process.
Ambassadors for truth

Field & Game Australia has launched a campaign to tell the true story of Australia’s most surprising conservationists and we have set up a fighting fund to help spread the message. Meet the first two ambassadors, Deb Meester and Ben Richards.

DEB MEESTER
— Sale Field & Game

Deb was introduced to hunting about 20 years ago by her former partner and the attraction remains the same is it was back then, good company, good wild food and quality time spent in the great outdoors.

“He taught me how to shoot and I loved it, I got involved in the clay target competitions as well,” she said.

“Hunting is about being out in the environment which I love and at least I’m putting food on the table rather than choosing it from the supermarket, it is wild meat and I know where it comes from.”

Deb’s opening weekend camp spans the ages, the youngest is 12 and the oldest is 80. Her day job is working as a nurse in an operating theatre and she admits having to explain her hunting passion to colleagues.

“Some ducks from last year I had them made into cabana, I took it into work for morning tea and everyone was surprised how well it tasted.”

Some people say why do you do that, go out and hunt, but I’m just getting my food from the wild!”

While a passionate and regular hunter in season, Deb also spends a lot of time and energy on conservation projects.

“I’ve worked with Field & Game doing nesting boxes on Lake Wellington, it is a social event, we all pile into boats and pull out the old straw and broken eggs and replace it with new straw ready for the next breeding season.

I go on fox drives with FGA where we control vermin and I have done a lot of revegetation at the Heart Morass, we have planted many trees there. It is all about being in the environment for me.

Sometimes you just sit there and watch the birds in their natural environment, you see how they interact and listen to them calling.”

Deb said she relishes the opportunity to challenge the perception of hunters.

“The biggest one is that hunters are rednecks who want to go and shoot things, nearly everyone I know has been involved in conservation work because we want to protect what we have and preserve it for future generations.

My hope is that people get a better understanding of what it means to go and get your own dinner. It is a long time since that was a necessity and I think particularly people in the city miss that opportunity and don’t understand it.”

BEN RICHARDS
— Port Phillip Field & Game

Ben Richards was 12 when he started with Field & Game Australia and his trajectory in the organisation is a familiar one.

Ben always made the connection between conservation and hunting but like many members, he had watched the slow but steady decline of State Game Reserves.

“The State Game Reserve system was set up by Government in partnership with hunters and our fees funded the establishment and conservation of wetlands but over the years the licence fees have been absorbed into general revenue and the wetlands have been neglected,” he said.

The decision by FGA to purchase a degraded but significant site in Gippsland through the WET Trust gave Ben a glimpse of a brighter future.

“When the Heart Morass project came up I got more heavily involved and more recently I’ve been more involved at branch level with Port Phillip where I became conservation officer.

Heart Morass was the opportunity to have a private system controlled by Field & Game that we knew would get the attention it deserved. It is a premier conservation project in our name and under our control.”

Interestingly, Ben never intended to hunt on Heart Morass, he was more interested in the opportunity to help turn degraded farmland into a wetland paradise.

“It was always purely about conservation values for me,” he said.

“It is astounding to look at what is there now, I feel very satisfied to have been a part of its creation, and that also encourages me to be a part of future projects.

I’m often talking to people about how hunters play an important part in conservation around the world; hunters are the biggest drivers of conservation, it comes back to giving wildlife and wetlands a value and nobody values a swamp or wetland like hunters do.”

When Ben reflects on his best experiences in wetland environments his love for nature is evident.

“We are denigrated as shooters but for most hunters that is a very small proportion of the time we spend out in the environment.”

“My best memories are about standing 20 metres from my father watching a pair of platypus between us playing in our decoys.

I have had heron land on the decoy spread I’ve been sitting in, so many sunrises and sunsets and storms. This year we were down the Gippsland Lakes and had dolphins swimming around us.”

It was always father and son adventures but lately Ben’s mum has been joining in and this year his daughter went hunting for the first time.

“Time spent quietly in the bush is something money can’t buy,” he said.
I’m writing this on the day we should have been at Johnson Swamp State Game Reserve, talking with hunters coming in from their morning hunt. While the seasons in Tasmania and South Australia got underway largely unheralded, the big story is the unprecedented actions against duck hunting by both government and anti-hunting animal rights activists in Victoria.

It gets worse. The actions to close Lake Elizabeth State Game Reserve were unprecedented, and we called them out as that. Incredibly, what initially appeared unprecedented is now the norm. In this context, it’s important to look at the restrictions imposed on duck hunting this season and highlight the key issues.

The lengthy delay to announcing a full length season, with modified bag limits, was preceded by the process of submissions to government in December 2015. The Field & Game Australia (FGA) submission is titled ‘Redefining the approach to game management through promotion of the value of habitat and the contribution from hunting to Victoria.’

In this submission FGA recommended that the government proceed with a hunting season as defined in legislation, without modification for 2016; the transition to a simplified and, ideally, standardised approach to regulating waterfowl hunting (from 2016) with no modifications implemented for a defined period (we recommended five years); and a greater commitment to improving wetland habitat for waterfowl, and monitoring waterfowl abundance.

In framing the submission, FGA assessed the economic and other benefits from hunting, the focus on conservation, the sustainability of duck hunting, and simplification of the processes to allow better data collection and analysis.

It is worthwhile testing these against statements from government.

In pre-election campaigning then Opposition leader and now Premier Daniel Andrews stated his support for sustainable duck hunting. In government, the record of support appears to continue, with Ministerial statements that duck hunting is sustainable and delivers a significant economic benefit of $439 million to Victorian communities, the majority of this to regional communities.

The support is there in statements endorsing the important work of the government’s own expert body, the Game Management Authority. The previous Victorian coalition government established this statutory authority prior to the 2014 state election. A statutory authority function far exceeds that of advisory committees, the forum favoured by state governments to assist with game management.

On paper, the statements by government appear to align with the recommendations FGA made in December 2015. Yet, in practice, the government has imposed unbelievable restrictions on duck hunting.

As part of pre-season assessments, a number of wetlands were closed and during the season, the closures have continued raising the issue of inconsistency in the methodology applied.
Lake Elizabeth State Game Reserve was closed suddenly on the eve of the opening. Three issues arise from that decision: the use of a measure of last resort to protect a waterbird that exhibits little or no similarity to game species of duck; use of a closure mechanism outside all the normal game management processes; and the human impact on hunters who had to move off the reserve in two hours and find alternative campsites, and hunting options for the next morning.

Toolondo Reservoir has one water body closed to protect a concentration of freckled duck. Their arrival was identified through the wetland monitoring that continues throughout the season. This partial closure would usually survive scrutiny, except that government did not rely on advice from the GMA—not to mention the sideshow of legal action taken by animal rights activists.

Johnson Swamp State Game Reserve was closed for the initial four weeks of the season to assess rare and endangered waterbirds, predominantly the Australasian Bittern. After weekly surveys with fantastic contribution from FGA volunteers, it was scheduled to open on Sunday, April 17. Incredibly (or incredulously), government also closed this wetland to hunting without prior advice or notice.

The conclusions that can be drawn are these. Government sees provision of a full-length season as satisfactory to hunters, and that in this situation, hunters will accept reduced bag limits. Government will disregard advice from its own experts, the GMA, selectively choosing advice to achieve its own outcomes. Government is unable or unwilling to be consistent in application of standard game management processes.

I’ve written recently that while we may not like the decisions we are handed and we certainly may not agree with some of them, we can operate with consistent and transparent processes, and where there is good communication. This has not been our experience with this government this season. Our preference is to work with government. However, it does not appear there is the likelihood for improvement any time soon, and after careful consideration, we made the decision to resign from the Emergency Closures Advisory Committee, as have our colleagues the Australian Deer Association (ADA). My thanks for the solidarity of our ADA colleagues on this issue, and others are also considering their position.

The government’s approach raises serious questions about the future commitment for the GMA. That’s a real concern. It highlights the interference in the long-standing, lawful, cultural tradition of hunting, by a few. Be very clear, the facts demonstrate the protester reach is out of all proportion to their actual numbers. Their own accounts tell us less than 200 bothered to interrupt opening weekend in Victoria, and only a handful in pink tutus bothered in Tasmania. Balance this with the thousands of licensed duck hunters, and the contribution made by these hunters to regional communities.

It’s ironic two of the wetlands closed during the season are State Game Reserves, designed for two purposes—breeding habitat to offset the loss of other habitat, and to allow for highly regulated hunting. The juxtaposition of these two criteria appears opposed to conservation outcomes. However, it’s proven around the world that applying value to wildlife creates the motivation for ongoing preservation of habitat and sustainable wildlife populations. This has been demonstrated for almost 60 years from duck hunting and the efforts of volunteers in conservation activities. Extremists and government are now effectively removing value from our natural resources by denying access to hunt, ducks are a “public” resource, and their harvest is a legitimate activity. We have to continue to remind government these wetlands would not be here today without hunters, Australia’s most surprising conservationists.

The restrictions imposed on duck hunting make no sense in the context of long-term environmental benefits. Dr Richard Kingsford, long seen by some as opposed to duck hunting, recently stated that habitat is the critical issue for duck populations, and not hunting. This is a very important statement of fact, and counters the fiction put out by extremist animal rights activists.

The other incredible disappointment is the lack of any progress by this government with the Hunting Action Plan. The original plan was signed off by the previous Coalition state government in a whole-of-government commitment to hunting. Shelved as the new Andrews Labor government took power in late 2014, it’s been six months since the last discussion on this important initiative. How long will hunters wait?

A campaign has commenced to build our fighting fund so we can inform and educate the community, telling the facts of conservation and hunting, and dispelling the fiction.
Animals Australia spreads its wings

Rick Brown, CPI Strategic Director and Adviser to Field & Game, looks at the impact of Animals Australia taking the lead role in opposing legal duck hunting

During the 2014 Victorian election Animals Australia and RSPCA Victoria jointly organised a full-page advertisement in The Age opposing duck hunting targeted at Labor which was then in opposition. The effect of their campaign was to support the Greens over Labor in inner-suburban seats.

This initiative was the first indicator that Animals Australia, following on from their success in undermining Australia's live beef export trade to Indonesia, was taking over the anti-duck hunting business from the Coalition Against Duck Shooting.

During the opening of this year’s Victorian duck season, Animals Australia undertook activities ranging from being the voice of the anti-duck hunting movement through arguing for the introduction of mandatory, annual tests for duck hunters, to attempting to sabotage the opening of the duck season.

This development is a reminder of how well resourced and sophisticated animal liberation organisations such as Animals Australia and the RSPCA are today.

For example, in the 2014–2015 financial year Animals Australia undertook activities ranging from being the voice of the anti-duck hunting movement through arguing for the introduction of mandatory, annual tests for duck hunters, to attempting to sabotage the opening of the duck season.

This development is a reminder of how well resourced and sophisticated animal liberation organisations such as Animals Australia and the RSPCA are today.

For example, in the 2014–2015 financial year Animals Australia, after spending $3,333,000 on awareness campaigns, still had a surplus in excess of $1 million. Its retained surpluses now total almost $6 million. RSPCA Victoria alone had an income of more than $33 million for the financial year ending June 30, 2015 and almost $44 million in net assets. They spent more than $1 million on education, campaigns and communications. Bequests are critical for the RSPCA. In the 2015 financial year bequests totalled more than $9 million. In the 2014 financial year they totalled more than $75 million.

Despite this balance sheet, Upper House MP James Purcell understands ‘bad financial decisions have been made whereby it has actually spent $40 million building a new headquarters for its executives, and it has transferred a $30 million profit into a cash-negative situation since 2010. Since that time the government has provided the RSPCA with over $8 million in grants.’ He also understands that ‘costs are increasing out of proportion with the decreasing number of animals that it is looking after’ (Hansard, Legislative Council, 8 March 2016, p.1023–1024).

Mr. Purcell said that Australia remains the only country in the world other than New Zealand where the RSPCA has legislated prosecution and enforcement privileges. He think that this must be reviewed.

Mr. Purcell’s view is shared by the United Kingdom’s National Police Chiefs Council which represents chief constables.

In a submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Environmental Food and Rural Affairs, the Council said that the RSPCAs ‘long standing good work and expertise in this area should of course be recognised but it ought to be right that the primary enforcer with responsibility for this area should be a single agency, preferably a statutory body funded by Government’.

The Council’s decision follows:
• the Crown Prosecutor’s Service assuming responsibility for deciding whether or not to prosecute hunting cases,
• the charity regulator’s telling the RSPCA in March to hire auditors to conduct an inquiry into its organisation and structure, and
• the RSPCAs reining in its inspectors in February by banning them from rehoming animals unless vets have personally seen evidence of suffering.

UK Conservative MP and Committee member Simon Hart said that handing over the role of prosecuting animal welfare cases would allow the RSPCA to ‘repair its tattered reputation’.

He said ‘there is increasing recognition that trying to be a political movement, tireless fundraiser and voracious prosecutor has resulted in a conflict that we would not accept in any other walk of life’.

‘There are numerous examples of other countries and wildlife charities that do good work, but who rely on the police and criminal justice system to implement the law’ (‘RSPCA should be stripped of right to pursue hunts or pet owners through courts’, say police chiefs’, The Telegraph, 9 April 2016 10.00 pm, Christopher Hope).

The interests of the RSPCA are wide and varied, and include advocating for bans on the use of animals in medical testing, education and experiences, and promoting the vegan lifestyle.
Rick Brown, CPI Strategic Director and Adviser to Field & Game, looks at the impact of Animals Australia taking the lead role in opposing legal duck hunting agency, preferably a statutory body funded by Government.

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The interests of the RSPCA are wide and varied, and include advocating for bans on duck and recreational hunting, jumps racing, the use of exotic animals by circuses, the use of foster mares by the thoroughbred industry, and the live export of animals. Animals Australia campaigns on a similarly wide range of issues: duck hunting, live animal export, rodeos, the use of animals in universities and schools for research and education purposes, and advocating vegetarianism to prevent slaughterhouse cruelty. This demonstrates that animal liberation is a business, and a big business at that.

Competition between the players is intense as they pitch to an inner suburban audience with high levels of disposable income for financing by trying to out-do each other in the extremist or courageous (depending on your point of view) image stakes.

The RSPCA has the advantage of incumbency and prestige. However, this advantage is also a liability because many of its financiers (i.e. donors) do not understand its transformation from an animal welfare organisation to an animal rights organisation and would be uncomfortable about this revolution if they did, as the RSPCA in the UK is discovering.

More recent organisations such as Animals Australia, PETA, Voiceless, Animal Liberation and Humane Society International have neither the RSPCA’s advantages nor its limitations. Consequently they are able to be more nimble and imaginative and are less constrained in their marketing strategies.

The alliance between the RSPCA and Animals Australia which obviously is intended to maximise their strengths and limit their weaknesses reflects this competitive environment.
Conservation & Hunting

Wilson's Promontory

hog deer control program

From August 18—20 last year hunters from the Australian Deer Association and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia joined with Parks Victoria and the Game Management Authority in a hog deer control program in Victoria’s iconic Wilson’s Promontory National Park.

The Game Management Authority of Victoria has produced a comprehensive report on the program which is available at gma.vic.gov.au.

Legal hog deer hunting on Wilson’s Promontory ceased in the 1960s.

Over the three days of the program, hunters safely and humanely killed 42 hog deer using both daylight (sit and wait) and night-time (spotlight) hunting methods.

The program came about because Parks Victoria became concerned with a marked visible increase in hog deer populations and the associated impacts and browsing competition with native animals such as swamp wallaby, grey kangaroo and common wombats.

It is worth noting that; whilst these other animals are native to Australia, there is strong evidence to suggest that they are not all necessarily endemic to Wilson’s Promontory.

A pair of grey kangaroos was released onto Wilson’s Promontory by the Acclimatisation Society in 1910 and a further seven in 1912. Similarly common wombats were sufficiently scarce (or absent) by the turn of the last century that five of them were bought across from Kinglake in 1910 and liberated.

Whilst there are undoubtedly political reasons, (it is far more palatable to ‘sell’ the control of exotics like hog deer to the public) there is no logical reason why kangaroos and wombats should not be controlled in the same vein as hog deer, and for the same reasons.

Based on known impacts and regular sightings of hog deer, Parks Victoria selected three areas of the park for hunting during the August program, being the Tidal River Campground and surrounds, Darby River airstrip and the Darby River at Cotters South.

In order to give a statistical measure of the effectiveness of the program Parks Victoria conducted population density estimates before and after the program at the three sites using a spotlight transect method. This rudimentary measure showed a reduction in density at two of the sites and no change at the other.

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<th>Density post-program</th>
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<td>7.75 deer per km</td>
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<td>Darby River Airstrip</td>
<td>7.33 deer per km</td>
<td>4.67 deer per km</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cotters South</td>
<td>0.82 deer per km</td>
<td>0.82 deer km</td>
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Some of this change could reasonably be put down to the usual wariness of hog deer following sustained human disturbance.

The efficiency of daylight hunting diminished as the program progressed (with the first hunting period being the most productive). The returns from spotlight shooting remained consistent throughout. Daylight hunting accounted for 52 per cent of the total harvest and spotlight shooting for 48 per cent.

Of the 42 deer killed, 60 per cent were hinds (25 deer) and 40 per cent (17 deer) were stags. All deer killed were aged (via jawbone removal and tooth wear assessment) and weighed by the Game Management Authority. The weights recorded were consistently low in comparison with deer of the same sex and age class as deer checked through mainland checking stations during the normal hog deer season.

Overall both stags and hinds shot on the program were, on average, around one third lighter than their mainland counterparts.

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The following graphs are from the Game Management Authority report and show the comparison between average weights for age class between deer on the program and the normal hunting season. Some of this can be put down to an expected loss of condition during winter months and some of it may be due to grazing pressure and overabundance.
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All hinds were assessed for reproductive condition. All of the mature hinds except for one were in the late stages of pregnancy or newly calved.

From the 42 deer shot, 39 pairs of kidneys were in sufficient condition to be sampled for kidney fat index. The internal organs of all deer were also examined and showed no abnormalities other than an apparent thickening of heart muscles.

Monash University conducted a study of parasite loading and found that parasite eggs in rectal content were at comparatively low levels. Other tests included examinations for liver fluke and observational analysis of rumen content.

Along with meeting the objectives of Parks Victoria this program, and others like it, also play an important role in normalising the use of hunting and recreational hunters in deer management, in raising the profile of deer hunters in the community and in addressing the misinformation that is promulgated about the safety, efficacy and suitability of recreational hunting on public land.

Programs in high visitor areas such as Wilsons Promontory or peri-urban interfaces such as in the Dandenong Ranges have comprehensively proven arguments that deer hunting is an unsafe use of public land to be false.

Whilst open access for all hunters to places like Tidal River was not politically possible for a number of reasons, the success of these programs is already being used as a part of the case for extended access for all deer hunters on public land.
Crisis averted — for now

Rick Brown provides this analysis of the National Firearms Agreement review and what the political maneuvering means for legitimate firearm owners.

Federal Justice Minister Michael Keenan has announced that the Federal Government will not change the National Firearms Agreement, a decision that sharply contrasts with Labor’s position. Labor tried to apply pressure on Malcolm Turnbull to ban the importing of the Adler lever-action shotgun.

Such a decision would have led not only to a ban on lever-action shotguns, but also provided the basis for bureaucrats to pursue their long-held desire to re-classify lever action and pump action rifles.

The role of the National Party in securing this decision has been vital. When making his statement, Mr. Keenan made the point that imposing even more restrictions on law-abiding firearm owners and the use of registered firearms would not have an effect on the illegal gun market or crimes involving the use of illegal firearms.

The Government’s decision not to impose further restrictions on licensed firearm owners has not been a foregone conclusion. Some bureaucrats and the anti-gun ownership lobby seized on controversy surrounding the Adler to attempt to re-classify lever-action shotguns, and to open the door to fulfill a long-term objective of reviewing the National Firearms Agreement and re-classifying lever action and pump action rifles.

They came very close to succeeding in achieving their aims last year when bureaucrats persuaded key people in the Government to link the Port Arthur Massacre to the Adler, and the Adler to terrorism, in order to justify its banning.

This plan was countered only at the eleventh hour. The outcome was that Adlers with a capacity of not more than five rounds were not re-classified, but the importing of Adlers with a capacity of more than five rounds was put on hold pending the review of the National Firearms Agreement.

Because only very few politicians or their staff own firearms and therefore know anything about them, it was very easy to say that the Adler represented the use of new technology, even though lever action firearms have been around for over 100 years. Consequently, it was critical that Mr. Keenan was persuaded to establish an industry committee to provide him with advice on issues related to the review of the National Firearms Agreement.

They are constantly looking for opportunities to further their cause and we cannot be complacent.

This committee was able to provide a different perspective on the issues from the committee of state, territory and Federal Government bureaucrats and law enforcement officers who conducted the review. David McNabb, the general manager of Field & Game Australia, was a member of the committee. Informing state and federal politicians about the facts and data surrounding lever-action shotguns and the broader implications of re-classifying them has been critical, just as it was critical in responding to the Greens-initiated Senate Committee inquiry into gun-related violence.

As the anti-gun ownership lobby became aware that their plan was meeting resistance, they responded. Labor attempted to apply pressure to then newly-elected Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to ban the importing of all Adlers. That remains Labor’s policy.

While some bureaucrats and law enforcement officers from around the country pointed out that the Adler did not represent new technology and that there was not a basis for re-classifying the firearm, other bureaucrats maintained the position that Adlers with a capacity of more than five rounds should be re-classified so that recreational and competitive shooters would not be able to own them.

Former Prime Minister John Howard appeared at a fundraising function for the anti-gun ownership lobby Gun Control Australia.

When Gun Control Australia appeared at the Senate Committee inquiry into gun-related violence they refused to say how many members they had. It is thought that they have very few.

Subsequently Mr. Howard had star billing on an SBS programme about Australia’s gun laws. It may be that Mr. Howard wants to protect his legacy including talking up the importance of the 1996 gun laws.

But then again in 2002 he said “I hate guns. I don’t think people should have guns unless they’re police or in the military or in the security industry.”

The National Party were critical both in persuading the Government to base its decisions on facts and to stare down the anti-gun ownership lobby and in informing politicians across the country about the facts and the implications of re-classifying the Adler.

While we have seen off this attempt by opponents of private gun ownership to impose further restrictions on law abiding gun owners, this is not a final victory.

They are constantly looking for opportunities to further their cause and we cannot be complacent.

Shooters cannot take their ability to participate in their sport for granted and need to place a high priority on informing and educating a city-dominated society, which is unfamiliar with firearms, about the differences between the legal and illegal ownership of guns and facts about legal gun owners and their firearms.
World class wetland

Winchester Ammunition Vice President Sales Marketing and Strategy Brett Flaugher says the Connewarre Wetlands Centre project is world leading and a model for hunter engagement

The Connewarre Wetland Centre is taking shape with refurbishment of Queenscliff’s former Marine Discovery Centre building, which now sits proudly on the Lake Rd site bordering Hospital Swamps and the Connewarre State Game Reserve.

There is a long way to go but the 36-hectare site between Geelong and Barwon Heads will become a hub for education and a place where hunters can engage with the community on research and conservation.

Winchester has made the journey easier with a generous donation of $300000 and a further $4600 raised from sales of duck load shotshells.

Brett Flaugher took time while visiting Australia to participate in the presentation and to learn more about the project.

Winchester is not a newcomer to conservation and education projects, the company is about to turn 150 years old and the hunters creed of giving back to the environment has always been a part of its philosophy.

John Olin, who led Winchester from the 1930s founded some of the modern conservation principles in the United States.

“He really was the leader of that and is still recognised today, even 40 years after his death, as a leader in conservation throughout the US,” Brett Flaugher said.

“Our philosophy has always been to continue to promote organisations that put back to the natural resources and the environment; because we know that hunters really are the ones that drive good conservation principles.

We were founded on the belief that you have to put back more than you take.”

After a long walk around the perimeter of the wetland site Brett was even more enthusiastic about the potential for the project, an initiative of the WET Trust, Field & Game Australia and Geelong Field & Game.

“People that hunt are sometimes under attack for the wrong reasons and I think it is the responsibility of people who participate in the sport to show what we stand for and how we try to give back to the habitat,” he said.

“I think this is a model, I see it all over the world, and the way you guys are approaching it is as good as anything I’ve ever seen.”

Winchester is also preparing to celebrate 50 years in Geelong and Winchester Australia General Manager Clive Pugh said it made sense to invest in a wetland project that is in line of sight from the company base.

“I see this as something that our employees can get involved in,” he said.

Chairman of the WET Trust and Field & Game Australia Bill Paterson said it was important to note that Winchester initiated financial support for the Connewarre project.

“It is an extremely generous donation and a significant step in our ongoing work to fund the environmental projects we want to undertake,” he said.

“There is a tremendous opportunity for school groups to come here and use the facility and to gain an understanding of what conservation really means.”

Winchester will continue to support the project with a portion of the proceeds from the sale of its popular duck load ammunition.

“It is not a one-time thing, it is an ongoing process for us,” Brett Flaugher said.
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“To be the most effective organisation in the promotion of hunting, recreational shooting and habitat conservation.”

WHO’S PROTECTING THE FUTURE FOR YOUR FIREARMS LICENCE?

Firearm sports in Australia must have:
• Respected representation
• A knowledgeable and unified voice
• All party support and acceptance
• Consistency in media messages
• New opportunities to shoot
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The Deer People

• Extensive branch network established in every State and Territory
• Promoting hunter education and sustainable and safe hunting
• Active in wild deer management and habitat conservation
• Advocating for fair and equitable access to public land for recreational hunting

“Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land”
Aldo Leopold

Photo by: Jamie Stevens