

SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF THE WILDLIFE ACT

LATROBE VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC – JUNE 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the review of the Wildlife Act.

The LVFNC was formed in Morwell in 1960 with the aims of fostering an enjoyment of the world of nature and working for the preservation of the flora and fauna of the Latrobe region.

Below are some suggestions for inclusion into the review recommendations and areas of interest pertaining to the Latrobe Valley.

1. PROTECTION FOR ALL NATIVE WILDLIFE

The Wildlife Act should be for protection of all native wildlife and their habitat. It is needed to protect the diversity and viability of populations, and address the long term decline of even common species. The law is currently geared towards killing animals in the form of permits, but the law's objective should be to take an ecological approach and protect and conserve wildlife more in line with the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

2. REMOVE PROTECTION OF NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Currently the Act protects exotic invasive species that are not native and also listed as a threatening species, ie Sambar Deer. This law competes with other laws that protect native species and was originally introduced when game population numbers were low. Now there are over 1 million Feral Deer in Victoria. They damage wetlands, revegetation projects and water catchments and are increasingly entering built up areas. With deer in these great numbers, they should be registered as a pest species.

The deer problem has recently been discussed by the Yinnar South Landcare group. The group has had tree guards on revegetation sites wrecked and seedlings browsed by these invasive feral animals. Public and private money is spent on protecting seedlings. The guards cost more than the seedlings because they have to be tall and robust to cope with the browsing deer. This makes them more expensive and difficult to maintain.

3. COMPLIANCE AND PUNISHMENT FOR WILDLIFE CRIME

An independent statutory regulator should be established to enforce the Act, along with a dramatic increase in penalties, including prison. It follows on that stronger penalties need to be enforced to reflect the severity of killing wildlife.

An independent Regulator or Statutory Authority with duties to protect, conserve and restore wildlife and habitat would oversee policy, compliance and enforcement.

There also needs to be a mechanism which can be used to defend animals – like VCAT – so that if there is a breach an organisation can step in to have the law enforced as in the recent case with VicForest and Greater Glider Protection.

4. CREATION OF NEW BIRD SANCTUARY

The current act has protection for the rights of hunters, however there is a need for more well-managed wetlands as bird habitat, in particular for wetlands not annually impacted by duck shooting.

Therefore we would like to see the creation of new bird sanctuary at the Morwell River wetlands, currently owned by Energy Australia. When Yallourn Energy closes in 2028 the wetlands should be transferred to State ownership and made into a sanctuary as known vulnerable species of birds including the Blue-billed Duck (*Oxyura australis*) use the wetlands for food, shelter and breeding.

The act has protection for hunters, however we feel that the protection should be for the wildlife and that recreational hunting of waterbirds should be banned in Victoria as it is in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia. There is much evidence to suggest that many duck hunters cannot identify permitted species and many threatened birds are needlessly killed.

5. WILDLIFE IN FUEL REDUCTION BURNS

There is an urgent need for laws to be put in place to protect wildlife and habitat, especially in reserves, from prescribed burning. Currently DELWP make assessments about wildlife based on computer modelling and don't have on-ground surveys before they do prescribed fuel reduction burns. There are currently no avenues to protect wildlife and their habitat that are threatened from these burns.

Ironically in Autumn, South Eastern Glossy Black Cockatoo's (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) habitat was being burnt in East Gippsland even as a Bushfire Recovery Project by Birdlife Australia was in place. Birdlife Australia were working to protect their short-term food supply and increase their long-term food security when thousands of hectares, which included their preferred food the She Oak (*Allocasuarina*) were burnt.

6. NATIVE TIMBER HARVESTING

Native timber harvesting operations should not be exempted from damaging, disturbing or destroying wildlife habitat. There is a propensity to see native wildlife as 'collateral damage' when it comes to logging, and there have been many court cases to halt illegal logging. Stronger wildlife laws should provide critical habitat protection for our threatened species.

References:

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