

Submission to the Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act

Submission by: [REDACTED]

I write my submission as a concerned citizen with many years of bird-watching experience, bush walking and camping in the Victorian bush. I am an active participant in several environmental groups, including BirdLife Australia and Environment Victoria. I am an active member and volunteer with Friends of Warrandyte State Park.

My general concern for better ongoing stewardship by the State government of native fauna has prompted my submission. I have viewed with dismay the destruction caused by deer in the fragile, narrow gully where helmeted honeyeaters are being reintroduced. I have read with dismay of the killing of protected ducks by shooters. But most significantly, over my years of bush-walking in Victoria, I have observed the declining numbers and degraded habitats of many bird and animal species. Some have lost their habitats through logging or land clearing; others have evidently suffered from a lack of protection under the law as they are poisoned or pushed out of their traditional environments.

1.4.1 The Act should prescribe a general duty of care related to wildlife conservation and biodiversity protection.

A flourishing population of Victorian indigenous animals and birds is the responsibility of the Victorian government and its residents. We are all responsible for sustaining the ongoing populations of the creatures that share our environment. As part of this, the Act should remove protections for introduced animals like feral deer and horses. I have seen first-hand the damage done by deer when they remove the vegetation essential as small bird habitat in the Dandenong Ranges. These valleys become stripped of habitat, silent and wasted as birds struggle to feed themselves and their young, and eventually disappear.

As part of the duty of care, populations of native wildlife must have sufficient wild habitat to ensure their continued existence. The Act should guarantee a growing system of National Parks and protected environments to halt the decreasing

populations of indigenous animals. Farmers should be encouraged to be part of this initiative. The Wimmera is an example of an area which holds a combination of protected bushland and farming acres. The birdlife and native animals in this region are spectacular, with rare species such as the red tailed cockatoo only just maintaining a presence in this area. Brolgas visit the local lakes. The capacity of birds and animals to find suitable habitats and to move freely across the landscape is subject to farming practices. The Act should ensure that there is sufficient, geographically linked native vegetation to support local wildlife, on farms and on public land. These habitats should be carefully protected.

The Act should include provision for adequate funding for Parks Victoria so that they are able to monitor wildlife populations. Parks Victoria plays a vital role in educating the public about our natural environment, maintaining our National Parks and sustaining our wildlife populations. It is essential that their vital role is recognized and linked to appropriate funding mechanisms

Furthermore, pathways to prosecution should be clearly set out for individuals or companies that do not comply with regulations. At the moment, there are many violations which affect wildlife numbers and survival. It is well known that logging occurs illegally outside the specified coups, destroying the habitat of endangered species. Farmers clear land without permission. There should be stronger penalties for such actions.

4.2.1 The Act should include a provision that requires and enables the establishment of a scientific advisory committee or advisory panel to provide expert guidance to key decision makers such as the Minister, the Secretary or the regulator on specific matters relating to wildlife.

In order to guarantee the impartial and evidence-based foundation of decision making, it is imperative that decision makers are required to seek the guidance of a scientific advisory panel. Currently, such guidance often comes from volunteer organisations such as Environment Victoria and the Australian Conservation Foundation. While their advice is thorough and impartial, such a process should be fully integrated into the parliamentary framework of the Act. An example of a recent development proposal whose rejection led to favourable environmental outcomes

was the submission by AGL to build a gas import jetty at Crib Point. This inappropriate and destructive proposal required the mobilisation of local community groups, various environmental groups and numerous other interested parties to voice the clear and evident objections to such a project. It could be hoped that a scientific advisory panel would be an effective manner of synthesizing and conveying much of the material produced by these voices.

Any formalisation of such a panel should also guarantee that it can not be captured by partisan politics. For example, community expectations of scientific rigour and impartiality would not be upheld if ideologues or scientists with contrarian agendas became part of the panel.