



30 June 2021

Independent expert advisory panel
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
PO Box 500 East Melbourne VIC 8002

Correspondence via online submission.

Re: Review of the Wildlife Act 1975

Dear Dr Deborah Peterson, Associate Professor Ngaio Beausoleil, Dr Jack Pascoe, and Emeritus Professor Arie Freiberg AM,

The need to protect and conserve wildlife and to prevent wildlife from becoming extinct. One hundred and twenty Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects, and fish are on the brink of extinction, and the recent bushfires have only escalated the situation. The summer's fires burned 1.4million hectares, just in Victoria, and destroyed more than fifty percent of the habitat for 185 rare and threatened Victorian flora and fauna species. Furthermore, decades of under-funding, land clearing, invasive species, and logging have severely damaged Victoria's ecosystems. Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia. Sixty-six percent of the land is cleared of native trees, shrubs, and plants - essential habitat that supports the Critically Endangered greater glider (*Petauroides Volans*), smoky mouse (*Pseudomys fumeus*) and mountain ash eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus regnans*). We need to stop clearing land and vital habitat for wildlife and ecological processes, which sustain humanity.

Emerging issues affecting wildlife protection and conservation, sustainable use, and access.

Key contributing drivers to ecosystem decline include land clearing, impacts of urban expansion, over-extraction of natural resources such as water and timber, and invasive species. Furthermore, climate change is now amplifying these threats, which makes addressing this issue much more urgent. We need to stop the drivers of ecosystem decline. We need to address the pressure on Victorian biodiversity protection laws by removing critical drivers of ecosystem decline such as native forest logging, unsustainable use of water resources, and the impact of invasive species if ecosystem decline is to be turned around.

Encourage compliance with the Act and punish wildlife crime.

We need to impose harsher fines for wildlife cruelty to ensure that people are adequately punished for cruel acts to wildlife. Unfortunately, the penalties are often too late and inadequate to prevent the killing of our native wildlife.

Contemporary values and expectations around wildlife.

Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 is out of date and no longer meets community expectations when it comes to protecting Australia's wildlife. It should be reformed to ensure that it





meets the Victorian community's expectations for how Australia's wildlife will be protected and preserved for future generations. The Act does not reflect contemporary attitudes towards wildlife, especially towards duck shooting. Polling has consistently shown that eighty-five percent of Victorians support a ban on recreational duck shooting - both in the city and country. Six out of eight 'game' species of native waterbird show long-term population decline, and as many as nineteen bird species have had more than half of their habitat significantly impacted by the recent bushfires and fifty-eight others have lost over a third. The numbers of native waterbirds breeding remain very low, with researchers estimating numbers to have fallen by as much as ninety percent in the last four decades because of the ongoing drought. Furthermore, Endangered species such as the freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*) have been shot by licensed hunters. Duck shooting needs to end.

Interests in sustainable use of, and access to, wildlife.

The Society recognises that native plant and animal species are used for human needs and seek thorough representation, advocacy and lobbying to influence government and the public to ensure that harvesting is at sustainable levels, passing or selling to another party should be avoided at all costs, that the decision to allow such use is made based on scientific evidence, that levels of exploitation are checked frequently, and such levels revised based on sound management practices which are themselves based on hard scientific data.

In the case of harvesting is carried out humanely by licensed operators under the control of relevant wildlife authorities, native animal species should not be hunted or farmed to supply human ornament or dress. Where species are harvested for other reasons, such as pest control, it should only be carried out under strict government legislation and monitoring. Meat and skins should not be wasted but should be available for commercial use.

The Society is opposed to taking native terrestrial vertebrates from the wild into captivity except for educational display and research purposes. Repeated capture of a species from the wild for display purposes is unacceptable. The Society recognises that many Australians keep native birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish as a hobby. Native wildlife must not be taken from the wild to satisfy this hobby, but rather captive-bred specimens should continue to be used. The Society approves the keeping of native animals only if they are licensed. The Society encourages responsible pet ownership such as keeping domestic pets such as felines indoors to prevent predation or harm to native wildlife species. Suppose native wildlife such as an echidna or snake enters the backyard. In that case, pets should be moved indoors, and the wildlife allowed to pass through and/or contact the appropriate wildlife organisation.

The impact of eco-tourism and other activities on wildlife.

The Society believes that an integrated system of marine sanctuaries is essential for maintaining marine biodiversity within the marine environment. All states should have a comprehensive network of marine sanctuaries to protect our marine wildlife. There should be no "take" of any kind in a marine sanctuary. Fifty percent of marine parks should



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become marine sanctuaries. Rules should help ensure healthy and sustainable fisheries for future generations regarding recreational fishing and commercial fishing. We suggest that these rules are abided by and the appropriate licenses obtained.

The benefits of activities that foster an appreciation of wildlife.

Encourage and promote wildlife conservation action. Members of the community should be encouraged to participate in projects and campaigns that foster an appreciation of and protect Australia's wildlife. For example, #SnipRingsforWildlife is a campaign that raises awareness and encourages individuals to protect Australia's wildlife by snipping through plastic rings, hair ties, and rubber bands before disposing of them. Another example is WomSAT, a citizen science project that allows members of the public to record sightings of Australia's wildlife. Such a record/database will also assist key stakeholders when implementing conservation management strategies.

Strong nature protection laws will provide the backbone for a healthier future for Victoria's ecosystems, ensuring the people, places, and wildlife we love can thrive for generations to come.

Australian Wildlife Society, founded in 1909, is a national not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation. We are dedicated to the conservation of Australian wildlife through national environmental education, advocacy, and community involvement. The Society encourages your strong support for this action and acknowledging the receipt of this letter, please.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P.W Medway".

Patrick W Medway AM
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

