

## **The Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act**

### **Reason for Submission**

I am a concerned citizen and nature-lover. I am a member of Friends of Merri Creek and [REDACTED]. I am also a Nature Steward, (part of Outdoors Victoria.) I am concerned with the many issues around animal welfare and in this instance Australian Native wildlife, especially Australian Native Water birds. I have spoken to many people in my community and all agree the Wildlife Act 1975 needs updating and attention. The Act does not address the current situation with Australian wildlife and changed social attitudes and values in relation to Australian wildlife. There have been several recent incidents that have propelled me to write this submission.

### **Wedgetail Eagles**

In 2018 over four hundred Wedgetail Eagles were killed in rural Victoria by a farmer. The farmer injected insecticide into lamb carcasses and poisoned 406 Wedgetail Eagles on his property. I read about this incident and was appalled that the punishment for this sort of killing was minimal and laughable. The farmworker who was just "following orders" was fined \$25,000 and jailed for two weeks. The land-owner paid \$25,000 and 12-month community correction order with 100 hours of unpaid community work. There was a public outcry and many people felt that the punishment was grossly inadequate.

The Wildlife Act needs to address this sort of action and should put into place strong deterrents against killing or harming Australian wildlife like this.

I'd also like to add that the Wedgetail Eagle is known as Bunjil to the people of the Kulin nation and is the ancestor spirit of the country that we live on. This killing seems ominous and doubly upsetting given the significance of Bunjil for Kulin peoples – and therefore should be respected by all Victorians.

### **Traditional Owners**

First Nations people have lived and prospered in Australia and especially Victoria for Millenia. They have developed complex cultural understandings of wildlife and habitat. The Wildlife Act is a great opportunity to develop contemporary legislation that reflects and respects First Nations knowledge. This is an opportunity to practice what we often say – Acknowledgement of Country.

### **Habitat Loss through Logging**

If we are to protect Australian Native wildlife then we MUST protect their habitat. The ancient old-growth forests of Victoria are home to vast numbers of animals and birds (and plants) found nowhere else on Earth. These rare rainforests are spectacular relics of Gondwana. Many scientists have attested that the biodiversity of these forests is vital to the health of the country and many birds and animals will be driven to extinction without these forests, for example the Leadbeater's Possum, and the Greater Glider. Professor Lindenmayer, a world leading authority on the Ecology of Forests, attested at the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria in April 2021,

“... Leadbeater’s Possum cannot persist in a forest environment without access to large old hollow-bearing trees in which to nest and den... The long-term data show that levels of site occupancy by Leadbeater’s Possum have declined by 50% since 1997 (Lindenmayer et al. 2020a). The decline is linked to a decline in the abundance of hollow-bearing trees and the increasing amount of logging in the landscape (Lindenmayer et al. 2020a).”

The Wildlife Act must not exempt timber harvesting and logging from the legislation. These forests are essential habitat for animals and birds, and must be protected if we want unique animals like the Greater Glider and Leadbeater’s Possum to survive into the next generation. There must be accountability for damage and destruction of wildlife habitat.

### **Native Water Birds**

The current Wildlife Act treats native water birds and native quail as sport for recreational shooters.

The Kingsford study has been operating for over 30 years and is entrusted to report waterbird abundance to the Minister. This year they found waterbirds had dropped a further 23% bringing Eastern Australia’s total waterbird loss to 90% in the past four decades! During duck shooting season threatened species are shot every year, even birds such as Black Swans, Crested Terns and Freckled Ducks all birds that are supposedly illegal to shoot. But most shooters cannot identify what they are shooting. They cannot identify the different duck types even on paper let alone at a distance, at speed, in the sky.

When I visited Lake Lonsdale wetlands this year during the Victorian 2021 duck shooting season it was immediately obvious to me that the number of water birds was very, very low. I witnessed a Black Swan that had been shot and left for dead.

With the vast majority of Victorians both urban and rural opposed to “duck” shooting, there is no social license for this blood sport to continue. Please visit this website for more info on rural Victorians opposed to duck shooting. <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com>

As a Nature Steward, I am aware of the importance of encouraging and finding opportunities for people of all ages to immerse themselves in forests and other natural environments. There are many well-known health benefits, both mental and physical when we experience wild and natural places like forests. Well-regulated Eco-tourism is a great opportunity for rural communities to attract tourists and share their knowledge of the forests and animals. Eco-tourism is something that many rural communities would prefer, to shooting ducks and other destructive activities. It’s a good opportunity for everyone.

**NO NATIVE WILDLIFE SHOULD BE HUNTED FOR SPORT**

### **Deer is an invasive species**

The current Wildlife Act protects invasive species like deer. Yet deer populations across Victoria are seriously affecting every natural area and habitat type. Their extensive use of bogs and wetlands affects water quality and quantity. Their numbers have exploded since

the 1990s and is now estimated at 1 million in Victoria alone. Their presence is having a detrimental effect on native wildlife habitat.

Deer need to be understood as invasive species and humane methods developed to control or eliminate them from the environment.

### **Community Attitudes and Values**

There has been an enormous shift in community values toward Australian wildlife since 1975. There is greater understanding of the intrinsic value of our native wildlife and environment. And there has grown a greater understanding of Indigenous Australians and growing respect for their complex knowledge of wildlife and habitat. This needs to be reflected in the Wildlife Act.

There is also a greater understanding of global warming and the human effects that are causing climate change and damaging the environment. Rachel Carson wrote over 60 years ago of a “silent spring” referring to the reckless use of DDT and other chemicals on populations of birds. We need to heed this call from long ago which is still relevant as Glyphosate and other dangerous chemicals are used willy nilly. There are a range of human activities that are having a detrimental effect on our climate, environment and our wildlife and they need to be addressed in the Wildlife Act.

### **Kangaroos on the Golf Course**

Another example of changing values

Earlier this year Heritage Golf Club in Chirnside changed Management. The new Management immediately decided the family of kangaroos that had lived on the golf course for many years, needed to go. They were marked to be shot. The kangaroo family was well-known and well-loved in the local community, and people looked out for them, even taking the big male kangaroo, called Big Al, to the vet when he got sick. When it was known that the kangaroos were going to be killed the locals were shocked and deeply upset and wrote and protested to the management. Word spread across social media where I heard about it. On the night of the shoot, local people came out on masse and bravely stood in front of the shooters blocking any possibility to shoot their beloved kangaroos.

Yet, there are now reports that kangaroos are being found dead around the Golf Club, probably poisoned or set upon by dogs. There is no recourse for the community to stop this sort of senseless killing because the Wildlife Act has no provision to protect our native wildlife. Other golf clubs have embraced the native wildlife, especially kangaroos as part of the golfing, outdoors experience. This is a case that needs good guidance by authorities following strong Wildlife laws to step in and stop the killing.

The current Wildlife Act from 1975 needs updating. First, it should be retitled the **Native Wildlife Act** and should protect ALL native vertebrate fauna. It needs to have clear principles that are followed with greater transparency and monitoring.

- the Act should guarantee the protection of species of cultural significance to Traditional Owners.

- the Act should ensure populations of native wildlife have sufficient population size, diversity and suitable habitat to maintain or improve the capacity of species to persist and evolve in the wild.
- the Act needs to increase protections for wildlife and wildlife habitat by providing new tools such as “wildlife protection zones” and wildlife protection orders”
- the Act should upgrade to legislation the current regulation that a person is “not to damage, disturb or destroy any wildlife habitat.”
- the Act should ensure adequate monitoring of native wildlife populations and habitats
- An independent statutory regulator should be established to enforce, monitor and report on the administration of the Act.

National Parks and Reserves need to employ a LOT more Rangers to ensure these protections and laws are followed and enforced.

Thank-you for your attention  
Maria Miranda