

Wildlife Act Review

The Friends of Mallacoota is an environment group with 150 members which welcomes the above review.

It is widely agreed by conservation biologists, environmentalists and those with a knowledge of our wildlife that the current Act is not fit for purpose. It does not adequately protect our wildlife, rather it serves to legalise their destruction. Ironically it actually protects some species of vertebrate pests such as Sambar deer.

It is very disturbing that under the Act permits have been issued to allow the killing of species found in East Gippsland such as Grey-headed Flying Foxes, Hardhead Ducks and Satin Bowerbirds.

Permits have also been granted to destroy Brolgas and Magpie Geese which State Government instrumentalities such as Serendip Sanctuary have been breeding in captivity for release into the wild to build up depleted numbers.

The penalties that exist under the Act are both insufficient and often not enforced. The destruction of over four hundred Wedge-tailed eagles in our area and the subsequent poisoning of over 100 birds in Violet Town and the killing of at least 80 koalas in a former bluegum plantation at Cape Bridgewater in 2020 and the resulting legal actions serve to highlight the weakness of both current penalties and compliance practices.

The Wildlife Act of 1975 allows the shooting for sport of duck species and quail, something that the Victorian public overwhelmingly wants banned (Roy Morgan Research survey 2006). The commercial harvesting of kangaroos is another case where native animals are not protected from cruel practices, where wounded animals suffer painful deaths, and pouched joeys are killed by being bashed against tree trunks. Permits are also given too readily to hobby farmers to kill kangaroos that they believe are competing for fodder with pet horses and other domestic animals.

It is incredible that the present Act actually protects deer during their breeding season. This is a sop to the small number of deer hunters who wish to protect their hobby. In Mallacoota, both before and after the recent bushfires, Sambar Deer are completely out of control, damaging regenerating flora, causing erosion along streams and even invading residents' gardens. ParksVictoria has had to expend resources badly needed in bushfire recovery in efforts to slow down their increase. The fact that earlier this month a deer was killed in Johnston St. Fitzroy shows how much this species is spreading. Clearly the Act needs updating to protect native animals, not exotics introduced for sport.

If the Act is seriously meant to protect our wildlife then it must protect their habitat. Logging of all native forests, not just old growth, has to be prohibited.

The Game Management Authority is not a suitable body to oversee wildlife policy. It should be replaced by an independent scientifically staffed and oriented group with no political agenda.

In summary, the Wildlife Act should be redrafted to protect Victoria's native fauna, not to regulate their destruction.

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For Friends of Mallacoota