

Submission for the Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975

To the Panel, Dr Peterson, Assoc Prof Beausoleil, Dr Pascoe and Em Prof Freiberg,

Hi! My name's Pete, I'm an Australian citizen and [REDACTED], and I'm writing to advocate for changes to the Wildlife Act 1975 that's coming up for review.

I work as an operations manager at a coffee roaster [REDACTED] as my career, but wildlife and animal justice are an enormous passion of mine and an integral part of my life, civilly and personally. My partner and I spend at least 6-8 hours a week interacting and engaging with wildlife (hiking, bird-watching, amateur naturalist activities and citizen science surveys).

I think that strong protections for all native wildlife species are of the utmost importance to Australian citizens for multiple reasons:

I believe:

- Biodiversity is intrinsic to healthy ecosystems, which in turn provide a healthy and safe environment, clean air and water, and food for both the people and animals that share this land
- Australian wildlife have an enormous cultural significance both for society at large, and for indigenous communities who are often underrepresented and unheard by the Australian government.
- Native or wild habitats offer a strong benefit for people's mental health.
- It is the responsibility of any government and lawmakers to protect and preserve national resources for the public trust – and I believe this includes wildlife.

It is my belief that the current Wildlife Act 1975 falls short of adequately protecting native wildlife, and needs to be updated to achieve the following outcomes:

- Provide protection under law for all native wildlife regardless of threatened status.
- Prevent the killing of native wildlife by any person or organisation besides qualified vets, wildlife handlers and government groups (other than the GMA) for humane reasons – repeal the Authority to Control Wildlife for all private citizens, non-government bodies, the Game Management Authority and any other hunting related organisations.
- Remove protections for non-native wildlife – specifically all species of deer – as they have been shown to have a large and negative impact on native habitat and agriculture.
- Ban / prevent the hunting and killing of all bird species regardless of threatened status – and at the very very least, prevent the hunting and killing of ANY species with a designation of Vulnerable or worse under the IUCN 3.1 (International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species). No native species experiencing population and survival issues should ever be killed for any reason (other than humane euthanasia or critical ecosystem control).
- Include outlines for the protection of the habitat of wildlife, especially those that are threatened or critically endangered in the Wildlife Act and in accordance with any overlapping legislation; specifically the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987, National Parks Act 1975 and Animal Care and Protection Act 2001
- Provide harsher penalties and jail time for breaches of the act.

Evidence of the Importance of Better Wildlife Protections

- Mental health – 8 years ago I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and attachment disorder. I have attempted suicide more than once, but am

lucky to have never been hospitalised. In my personal experience, interacting with nature, and my growing curiosity and passion for learning about native plants, animals and funghi were integral to my recovery. I am doing so much better now than I have in the past, I've found medication that helps me to manage my systems, but I still use my relationship with Australia's natural world as an enormous part of my treatment and recovery whenever I experience and increase in severity of mental health symptoms.

- A survey study and meta-analyses "Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing" (White et al, 2019) showed that humans across a range of demographics and ages showed higher rates of Health and Wellbeing (outlined in the study via a range of factors). Furthermore, "living in greener urban areas is associated with lower probabilities of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, asthma hospitalisation, mental distress and ... mortality"
- Further studies – referenced in the scientific review "Nature and mental health: an ecosystem service perspective" (Bratman et al 2019) show through controlled laboratory studies that contact with nature demonstrates benefits to "affective, cognitive and physiological dimensions" and that "nature exposure plays a causal role in improving affect in the short term."

Economic benefits

Wildlife protection is integral to ecotourism and wildlife related businesses. From the article "The Economic Benefits of Protecting Wildlife" (Steiner, 2014) "The global diving industry is worth more than \$4 billion dollars", "a study conducted by the United States fish and Wildlife Services found that birdwatchers contribute \$32 billion annually to the US economy" and "safaris in Kenya generate close to \$1 billion in annual revenue"

Governmental Responsibility

The Australian Government currently holds a number of responsibilities to the Australian people with regards to environmental protections – and to wildlife – including Constitutional Federal land management, state responsibilities for environmental protections, management of pollution and waste, wildlife protection and habitat protection, as well as international environmental treaties. The Constitution also stipulates that the government has a legal responsibility to act in the public interest. As such, it is the duty of the government to enact and carry out the proposed changes to the Wildlife Act 1975 listed above.

Thank you for taking the time to review my submission.

Resources I accessed in drafting my submission:

<https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/biodiversity/topic/2016/importance-biodiversity>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/biodiversity-and-health>

<https://www.globalissues.org/article/170/why-is-biodiversity-important-who-cares>

<https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/protecting-wildlife/protecting-wildlife>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3>

<https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/7/eaax0903>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/11/economic-benefits-protecting-wildlife/>