

Wildlife Act Review

Issues Paper questions – Response 43:

Contributor: Individual

Primary interests:

- Protection and conservation of wildlife and habitat
- Rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife
- Wildlife welfare
- Eco-tourism involving wildlife
- Protections for marine mammals
- Offences and penalties relating to wildlife
- Traditional owner cultural values and use of wildlife

Question responses

1.3.2 Should the Act recognise the cultural significance of Country and wildlife to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians? Should the Act explicitly recognise the value of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge for the stewardship of Country and the conservation of wildlife?

Since the bush fires of 2019/2020, the value of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge for the stewardship of Country and the conservation of wildlife has become abundantly clear to all Victorians. The act should reflect this shift in consciousness.

1.3.3 Should the Act prescribe a role for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians as key partners in decision making about conserving wildlife? What could that role look like?

Yes. The role could entail traditional burning and other ongoing tasks related to caring for country. They could be performed by traditional owners with intimate knowledge of country, who can operate in an appropriate timeframes instead of performing tasks based on times imposed by government (this could be described as a bottom up approach, rather than top down).

1.3.4 Should the Act afford additional protection and the ability to return species to country because of their cultural significance?

Not necessarily. Climate change and other environmental impacts mean that habitats are changing. Reintroducing a species into a particular area, may have negative outcomes for individuals of that species and/or negatively impact others in the area. Concerns of traditional owners must be respected, but ultimately the act is there to protect wildlife (this includes species and individuals of those species).

2.4.1 Do property rights related to wildlife need clarifying? If so, how?

It is time to move away from a model of wildlife as property. Most Victorians now recognise animals as sentient beings who deserve care and respect. Just as we have moved away from ideas that women are the property of their husbands, we need a similar shift in relation to wildlife.

2.4.2 Should private landowners have greater rights to use of wildlife on their property?

No. For reasons stated above. Private land owners should be able to engage in commercial activities dependant on wildlife (eco-tourism etc) as long as the animals themselves are not negatively impacted.

2.4.3 Should the Act recognise sentience of some wildlife and, if so, what would this achieve? How would this recognition affect the rights and responsibilities of governments, businesses and individuals?

The answer to this is a resounding yes. This would help us move away from a model of property, use and disrespect toward a model based on care and respect. Such a shift will ultimately have ripple effects throughout society and may eventually coincide with reductions in domestic violence etc.

2.4.4 What rights and responsibilities should Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians have related to wildlife?

Traditional owners have intimate knowledge of Australian wildlife and their habitats as well as a deep care and respect for country. The rights of traditional owners should be extended so long as they are ultimately in the best interests of wildlife species and individuals.

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