

Hon J Palmer
Minister for Primary Industries
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Minister

Over the next three months, Tasmania's world-renowned wetlands — usually peaceful havens and homes for our unique wildlife — are to be transformed into killing fields by recreational duck shooters.

Native ducks and even endangered and 'protected' birds will be gunned down by shooters. The 'lucky' ones are killed instantly. The unlucky ones — an estimated one out of every four birds shot — will suffer for days or even weeks before finally succumbing to their injuries.

Perhaps most shocking of all? This cruelty is inflicted upon defenceless animals in the name of a 'sport' that the majority of caring Australians oppose.

Recreational duck shooting is already banned in NSW, Queensland, and Western Australia. Over the past couple of years, South Australia and Victoria have seriously limited their seasons and allowable takes. Recently, the Victorian government has established an Upper House committee to examine the future of native bird hunting.

In making these decisions, the mainland states have taken into account the results of recent surveys of waterbird populations and wetland area across the eastern mainland States. These surveys commenced in 1983 to monitor changes in abundance and distribution of 50 waterbird species (including all hunted duck species) in eastern Australia from southern Victoria to north Queensland, but not including Tasmania.

The surveys have shown catastrophic decreases in waterfowl numbers in southeast Australia over four decades and provide incontrovertible evidence that Australia's waterfowl populations are at crisis point. While the current wetter conditions are a welcome change, they have not resulted in improvements in waterfowl population numbers.

We know Tasmania acts as a safety valve for mainland populations, and climate change will see Tasmania's critical role as refuge for southeast Australian waterfowl increase. This reinforces the fact that recreational shooting of waterfowl in Tasmania is indefensible with the ecological knowledge we have for these species and their survival needs — and there is no justification for allowing shooters to kill species that are protected on the mainland, while they are taking refuge here in Tasmania.

A survey conducted by the Victorian Game Management Authority of over 5,000 Victorian duck shooters showed four out of five shooters could not identify species they are permitted to kill; three out of five shooters don't know how to shoot to minimise wounding; 84 per cent don't know how to kill ducks they have shot and injured; and less than 4 per cent could correctly answer questions relating to animal welfare, waterbird identification and safety.

These are horrifying statistics indeed - and there is little doubt the results would equally apply to Tasmanian shooters, especially as the required score to successfully pass the waterbird identification test is lowest in Tasmania.

PO Box 66 Mowbray Tas 7248

Centralised phone number for all RSPCA Centres: 03 6709 8100

Devonport Animal Care Centre: 108 Tarleton Road, Spreyton, 7310

Launceston Adoption & Retail Centre: 3/207 Invermay Road, 7248

Hobart Adoption & Retail Centre: 55-57 Albert Road, Moonah, 7009

Animal Cruelty Hotline: 1300 139 947

Email: rspca@rspcatas.org.au Web: www.rspcatas.org.au



However, despite legislated reporting requirements, there is very little information publicly available to show the total numbers killed, what species were killed, or to confirm that shooters complied with maximum takes.

Only 1115 licences were issued for the 2021 season – which represents only 0.2 per cent of all Tasmanians. No data at all is available for last year as to the number of ducks shot, which species were shot, or bag takes.

That is simply not good enough.

When Queensland's then-Premier, Peter Beatty, announced the ban on duck hunting more than 20 years ago, he said it was *"not an appropriate activity in contemporary life"*. In announcing the ban in Western Australia in 1990, then-Premier, Dr Carmen Lawrence said, *"Our community has reached a stage of enlightenment where it can no longer accept the institutionalised killing of native birds for recreation"*.

Yet, more than 30 years later, this activity continues here in Tasmania, despite broad community support for a ban.

It is clear that the government's policies on this issue are lagging behind the current values and beliefs of our contemporary society.

We understand that duck shooting is not a highly visible cause of animal harm. Relatively few people live near the wetlands where shooting takes place. But out of sight should not mean out of mind – and our native water birds have the right to live unharmed and in peace in their natural homes.

The RSPCA believes that there is no social licence for state-sanctioned slaughter of native wildlife to continue in Tasmania and we have repeatedly called for an end to this barbaric practice.

We therefore call on the government to announce an end to this cruel and unnecessary massacre by the end of 2025.

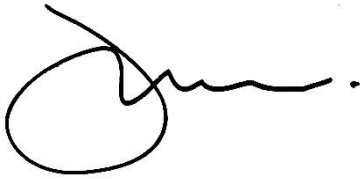
Over that period, we call on the government to implement the following measures to reduce the negative animal welfare and environmental impacts:

- In the current season,
 - reduce bag limits from 10 birds per hunter per day to 4
 - publicly release all information related to past seasons, including detailed analysis of reports lodged by licenced shooters
 - undertake a detailed survey of duck populations and commit to reviewing the length of the season and the permitted take of each species based on this information
 - conduct a survey to determine the wounding rates of ducks and the impact of duck hunting on non-target species, with a maximum non-target fatality rate reducing to 10% over 3 years
 - publicly release details of state-based population survey data for the past ten years, with comparative data from mainland surveys
 - increase resourcing for DPIPW to enforce regulations relating to licences, species take, hide inspections etc
- Ahead of the 2024 season,
 - prohibit recreational shooting in wetlands areas
 - introduce a stringent annual waterfowl identification test as a prerequisite for issue of a duck shooting licence with the successful identification rate required to be granted a licence increasing from 80% to 100% over 3 years
 - undertake investigations to determine the wounding rates of ducks and the mix of target and non-target species shot cleanly and wounded
 - implement mandatory participation in a shotgun education program as a licence requirement

- commission a survey of community attitudes to duck hunting
- Ahead of the 2025 season,
 - prohibit recreational duck shooting on public lands and public waterways
 - implement measures to improve hunter education on issues such as humanely dispatching wounded ducks;
 - mandate interventions to reduce the wounding rate (eg regulate a maximum shooting distance)

We look forward to your urgent response to these issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'J' followed by a series of connected loops and a final horizontal stroke ending in a dot.

Jan Davis

CEO

5th March 2023