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6 June 2011

The Hon. Melissa Parke
Postal Address
PO BOX 1224
FREMANTLE, WA 6959

Dear Ms Parke

I write to you today in response to a speech that you made in the House of Representatives on May 11, 2011. In this speech, you discussed the topic of duck hunting.

As a representative of a key stakeholder group in the sustainable management of waterfowl in Australia, I feel more than obliged to respond to some of the statements you made.

Firstly, the Victorian survey in 2007, which you reported as showing 87% of Victorians support a ban on recreational duck shooting, was designed and commissioned by an anti-hunting organisation with a view of obtaining information that they wanted. It was a biased 'leading' poll where only 637 people were selected to be interviewed. It was far from a scientifically robust survey that could be used to reflect the opinion of all Victorians.

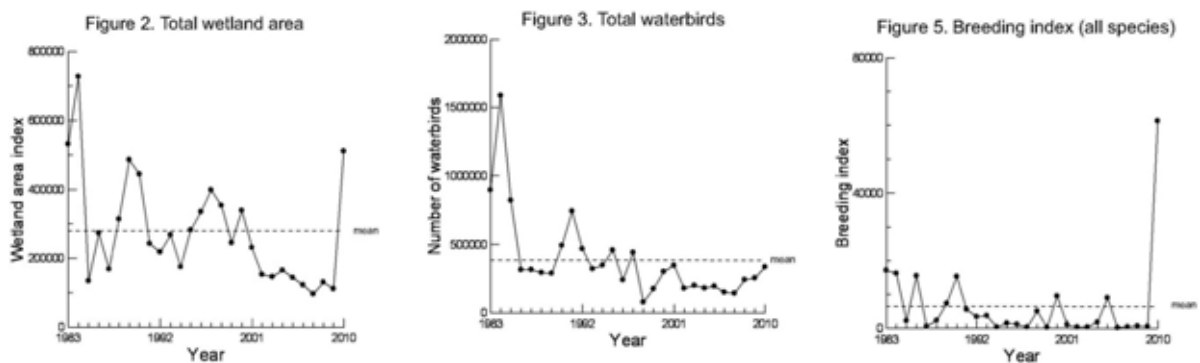
More recent online surveys to a wider audience on online media sites and the RSPCA website have shown overwhelming *support* for the sustainable use of ducks for food. Thousands of people responded to these polls. The RSPCA actually took down their poll after they realised the massive support for hunting and that they weren't getting the result they wanted.

Secondly, you mentioned that aerial surveys by Professor Richard Kingsford had shown waterbirds numbers had fallen by 82% across Australia in the past 25 years. Anti-hunting groups always misrepresent Professor Kingsford's data without really understanding it or its use in displaying a visual trend in waterbird populations. This argument is now obsolete because waterbird populations are exploding across the country due to major flood events, providing unlimited habitat and resources like what was experienced before the start of this survey project.

Recently, Professor Kingsford has said:

"Widespread rain and flooding in 2010 created the largest area of waterbird habitat since possibly the mid 1970s, and duck numbers and importantly breeding records shot up during annual aerial surveys."

Kingsford's latest East Australian Waterbird Survey (EAWS) Annual Summary Report (2010) provides evidence of the expectant explosion in waterbird numbers and habitat in the coming 2011 survey later this year. The following graphs make it very clear that there is no declining waterbird population, no coming doomsday as spread by the anti-hunting groups. They show the unique dynamics of our waterbird populations, how waterbirds respond to Australia's wet and dry cycles, and breed and die accordingly.



Figures reproduced from the East Australian Waterbird Survey (EAWS) Annual Summary Report (2010)

Figure 2 above shows that Total Wetland Area is almost the same as the highest on record and this survey was completed before the major flood events in the late 2010 and early 2011 across multiple states. The Total Waterbirds recorded are back at the level seen in the early years of the survey and rising. Most importantly, the Breeding Index was the highest ever recorded, so the number of waterbirds breeding will create a massive breeding population in years to come.

Everyone with an interest in the sustainable use of wildfowl is expecting a massive increase in the recorded waterbird population due to the large flooding events experienced in 2010-11. It will be a great surprise to everyone if we do not to see the number of waterbirds in excess of those recorded in 1984 (highest on record).

Thirdly, you may have unwittingly repeated common false claims regarding wounding rates. You mentioned that there are studies that show for every duck retrieved, a wounded bird flies off. Other common claims often made by anti-hunting groups include a 50% wounding rates and/or a 66% crippling rates. There are no scientific, peer-reviewed studies relevant to Australia that support these outrageous claims made by anti-hunting groups.

All the anti-hunting groups' claims regarding wounding rates are based on a discredited computer wounding model that was developed, engineered and promoted by an animal rights activist. This model has not (and never will be) passed peer review in any reputable scientific journal. It has only been published in a now defunct computer software newsletter.

Unfortunately, it seems you have fallen victim to the anti-hunting misinformation campaigns on this issue by repeating these claims. Please read the enclosed ASJ insert to find out about the real facts of wounding in waterfowl based on the best available Australian research.

Fourthly, you mention that many Australian wetlands are RAMSAR Sites and Wetlands of International Importance. One thing which you may be unaware of is the ‘wise use’ concept is at the centre of the RAMSAR philosophy.

The RAMSAR website actually states:

“The wise use of wetlands is defined as the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development. “Wise use” therefore has at its heart the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources, for the benefit of humankind.”

RAMSAR recognises and supports the conservation and social benefits of waterfowl hunting to the environment and community worldwide. Hunting as a conservation measure is recognised and accepted worldwide.

Finally, I would like to discuss your final comments implying that duck hunting is a cruel sport. Duck hunting provides everyday Australians access to a sustainable free-range organic food. It is not a ‘sport’ *per se*, but a recreational pastime or activity, just like fishing.

Modern duck hunting operates under accepted state-sanctioned Animal Welfare Codes of Practice and hunters use various techniques to minimise the potential of unnecessary pain and suffering.

When unsubstantiated and false claims are made regarding hunting or hunters, you have the potential to offend many hundreds of thousands of everyday Australians. In the future, please be careful not to spread (others) mistruths, half-truths and lies that have a direct impact on our lifestyle choices.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Godson

SSAA National
Special Project Officer - Wildlife and Pest Management