



Duck hunting

- the sustainable harvest of organic free-range food

A reply to the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife (Ban on Hunting Protected Animals) Amendment Bill

Hunting in general always draws an emotive response from certain sections of the community. There are two reasons why law-abiding citizens hunt. Firstly, hunters assist in pest or population control of animals and secondly, to harvest food for the family dinner table. People from animal rights backgrounds always try to portray hunting as a 'blood sport' and that hunters 'kill for fun'. In reality, it is a pastime similar to fishing which often results with dinner on the table.

Duck hunting provides the ultimate in organic free-range food. In today's society, we are told to buy both free-range and organic foods. Based on what we are being told about eating healthy foods, is it right to prevent someone with the skills and desire to harvest their own healthy food from doing so? Environmentally, duck hunting is sound. Having a regulated open season based on seasonal conditions where hunters take a small part of a 'doomed' surplus of wild duck is much better than managing ducks as pests. An ad hoc pest control regime provides limited opportunity for people to eat this sustainable food resource.

The South Australian National Parks and Wildlife (Ban on Hunting Protected Animals) Amendment Bill introduced by the Hon. Mark Parnell should not be allowed to pass. Noting that the Hon. Mark Parnell's party has alliances with extreme animal rights groups, all of the information provided is questionable. The simple fact that he failed to state the involvement of other stakeholder groups in the process of assessing season conditions that

made recommendations that supported an open season is simply misleading and wrong.

Native ducks are in tune with the environment and they quickly take advantage of changing environmental conditions, especially Australia's unpredictable rainfall. Ducks are migratory and with the recent flooding in large parts of Queensland and New South Wales, ducks from South Australia have taken flight to take advantage of what can be only be termed as 'ideal' breeding conditions. A number of South Australia's public Game Reserves in the Lower Lakes are currently dry or providing unsuitable habitat conditions to hold ducks. It was stated that representatives of environment departments have commented that very few ducks had been taken in those areas. The fact is that ducks don't sit on dry ponds and there were still many other public and private areas with water that held ducks during the season.

Duck hunting groups are committed to protecting and restoring the habitat of ducks. The majority of those who oppose duck hunting have no desire to do this or fund such conservation programs. Over many years, hunters have demonstrated a fine example of conservation through the sustainable use of wildlife. Duck hunters restore wetlands that not only provide habitat for the limited number of duck species that they choose to hunt, but also hundreds of other species of waterbirds that directly benefit from their work. The introduction of this Bill will reverse the conservation gains made as a result of hunters' work and this will lead to habitat loss and neglect.

The Hon. Mark Parnell makes a point that duck shooting is banned in Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. This is misleading and is plainly incorrect. The fact is that ducks are still shot in those states as pests under destruction permit arrangements. In New South Wales, there are more ducks being shot under pest permits than there were taken by hunters for food during past regulated open seasons. Strangely, the Hon. Mark Parnell even states that his Bill will allow ducks to be destroyed as pests. This makes no sense. He wants to stop hunters shooting ducks for food where there is an obvious conservation benefit, but is happy for them to be killed as pests and left to decay. Is it not better to treat ducks as a valuable natural resource than a pest?

The Hon. Mark Parnell makes the point that the RSPCA oppose duck hunting of the grounds of cruelty. Cruelty is avoided where 'effort' is taken to 'reduce unnecessary pain and suffering'. Like farmers who tend to their livestock, hunters work hard to provide habitat to enable ducks to live as wild animals free from the constant interactions faced by livestock. Hunters put much 'effort' into sharpening their skills and techniques to ensure a quick and clean shot is delivered.

The source of information in regards to wounding rates in which the Hon. Mark Parnell relies heavily upon in his Bill was reviewed back in 1998 by Dr Grahame Webb. Dr Webb is one of the Australia's leading scientists in the field of sustainable use of wildlife. In his review, he stated that "the computer simulation model used by DDC [Duck Defence Coalition] for predicting wounding rates cannot and does not predict accurately, and for the purposes of discussing real rates of wounding in the field should be ignored". It has been more than 10 years since that review and there hasn't been any new information to substantiate the claims of DDC. Dr Webb also expresses the "the wounding of animals during legitimate, legal hunting activities can be minimised by various means, but not avoided altogether. It is equivalent of incidental catch in fishing operations and should perhaps be treated in a similar way".

If a duck falls wounded, it is quickly collected and despatched by the hunter; this retrieval usually takes only a matter of seconds. To put this situation in perspective, one should look at the minimal timeframe it takes to harvest wild duck and compare it to the life of a livestock animal. These animals are bred, caged, transported and held in yards before being slaughtered. They have human-animal interactions all their lives where there always is some degree of pain and suffering. In terms of 'perceived' suffering, livestock animals seem to have a much worst



fate than a wild duck. Wild duck are free from human interaction until harvested; whereas livestock have it life-long. Dr Peter Singer and his book *Animal Liberation* are credited as the philosophical foundations of the modern animal rights lobby. He even asks... "Why for instance is the hunter who shoots a deer for venison subject to more criticism than the person who buys a ham at the supermarket? Overall, it is probably the intensively reared pig who has suffered more."

In summary, duck hunting in South Australia is managed under the principles of adaptive management and sustainable use. Regulated duck hunting will never have a negative effect on overall duck populations. Duck hunting is undertaken to provide an ultimate free-range organic meal for the family dinner table. Fees from hunting permits and the groundwork by hunters provide conservation benefit far beyond the duck species they choose to hunt. Allowing ducks to be treated as pests and not a valuable food source is unacceptable.

The Hon. Mark Parnell states that the rationale for this Bill is both conservation and animal welfare. This is clearly not the case. It's solely about animal rights over human rights. The bill is intended to prevent people from having the 'right to choose' to harvest a sustainable food resource by pushing emotive animal rights ideology. Even if there was a zero per cent wounding rate, the animal rights groups behind this push would still try to prevent ducking hunting. It is this fact alone that reveals the real intentions and ambitions of the groups behind this Bill. It is to prevent people from all walks of life from hunting, fishing, farming, consuming and utilising any animal for food or product. ●