



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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11 November 2013

The Minister, Department of Primary Industries
The Hon. K. Hodgkinson MP
Level 30, Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000

office@hodgkinson.minister.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Hodgkinson,

Ms Parker, Minister for the Environment, referred to you a letter from the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) concerning bird species listed as game animals under the Game and Feral Animal Control Further Amendment Bill 2012.

HBOC received a reply (27/09/2013) signed by the Executive Director of Biosecurity NSW. The letter does not address our concerns.

The aims of HBOC are the conservation of **Australian birds and their habitat** and the promotion of **bird observation as a leisure activity**. Our current membership stands at over 300.

The Bill includes as game species, Brown and Stubble Quail, Crested Pigeon and Common Bronzewing. None of these species could be classed as agricultural pests capable of “devastating a single crop in one evening” as implied in the letter and to suggest this is grossly misleading.

The letter makes the following claim:

“Duck management in NSW is a critical part of pest mitigation in the rice growing districts in the Riverina. If not properly managed, ducks and other game birds have the ability to devastate a single crop in one night; across a district, this can result in millions of dollars of forgone farm and export income.”

A paper by Bomford and Sinclair (2002) reports:

P. 32 “Field observations (Davey and Roberts 1990) and returns sent in from shooters (Curtin and Kingsford 1997) show that the main species that damage newly sown rice in the Murray and Murrumbidgee irrigation areas are Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Grey Teal (*Anas gracilis*) and Maned Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*). Duck damage depresses final yields even when farmers resow damaged areas. Most damage occurs at night in the four weeks after sowing, particularly on the edges of the cropping area. Damage is highly variable within and between crops and between years and is difficult to predict and measure. Estimates based on grower

surveys are that ducks cause losses of 1–4% of total crop value (Davey and Roberts 1990). Despite these relatively small losses, 89% of growers invest in duck control. Staples *et al.* (1998) reported that the rice industry believes bird damage is responsible for annual losses as high as AU\$5 million although the basis for this estimate is unknown”.

P. 36 “Davey and Roberts (1990) found that most rice growers attempt to reduce duck damage by shooting after damage is observed. Growers who responded to a survey averaged 15 shooting nights per crop and they believed they had lower yield losses than farmers who did not shoot. Scared ducks usually moved to nearby unprotected crops and continued feeding.”

P. 37 “Fleming reviewed shooting to kill as a technique to control bird damage. He considered it to be the ‘most universally practiced and most ineffective bird control technique used in Australia’. Shooting is time-consuming and expensive and birds soon learn to avoid shooters.”

More recent information (December 2007) Fauna Note no. 10, “Destruction of ducks to reduce damage” is available from the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Environment. Only two species are regarded as agricultural pests – the Wood Duck and the Australian Shelduck. Under the subtitle: “Effectiveness of shooting to reduce duck populations” is said:

“Shooting appears largely ineffective as a primary population reduction technique for ducks. However, it may be effective in managing or eliminating a small, localised flock. It may also assist in moving the flock away to another site”.

Ten duck species are listed as game animals in the Bill. Of these only three species are mentioned in literature as causing damage to rice crops in NSW, Grey Teal, Australian Wood Duck (Maned Duck) and Pacific Black Duck. Further, it appears that shooting has little effect in controlling duck species when they attack crops and **may in fact be detrimental**.

HBOC is aware that crops may be damaged by bird species from time to time and we do not disagree with the farming industry protecting its crops where necessary with appropriate management.

However, members of HBOC are opposed to shooting any species of birds as a **leisure time activity**. We care about the welfare of our Australian birdlife and we find it offensive that species are listed as game animals. This designation sends the message: ‘it’s OK to shoot these ones’. Duck shooting for sport may have been culturally acceptable in the past. However, the majority of the NSW population, not just members of bird clubs, considers duck shooting to be a barbaric practice. Maimed birds are often left to die a slow, agonising death where they fall. Protected species are shot in large numbers which shows the inadequacy of identification testing procedure and rare and endangered species become targets.

As a result of the 2013 Victorian duck shooting season over 400 birds comprising of 18 protected species were killed. Completely harmless shorebirds such as Red-necked Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and the diminutive Black-fronted Dotterel were shot. The latter three species do not resemble ducks in any way. One hundred and fifty Freckled Ducks, a rare and endangered species, were shot on one wetland alone (Peter 2013).

Members of HBOC request that the Game and Feral Animal Control Further Amendment Bill 2012 be amended to exclude the listing of all bird species as **game** animals.

We further object to the implication that seven species of ducks are agricultural pests:

Australasian Shoveler, Pink-eared Duck, Wandering Whistling-Duck, Plumed Whistling-Duck, Hardhead and Chestnut Teal.

The listing of these species demonstrates either ignorance about these species which are either not common or harmful to crops or both, or intent to allow them to be killed because a minority of the population in NSW continues to regard duck shooting as sport.

We further request that any suggestion to reintroduce duck shooting into NSW as a leisure time activity be unequivocally rejected by you.

HBOC looks forward to a reply from you with regard to this submission. We would appreciate a list of the literature you have consulted with regard to duck species as agricultural pests so that we too may be better informed.

Yours faithfully,



M. Roderick
President
Hunter Bird Observers Club

Cc Mr. B.O'Farrell, the Premier of NSW
Cc Ms R. Parker, Minister for the Environment
Cc Mr. B. Kay, Executive Director of Biosecurity

References

Bomford, M. and Sinclair, R. (2002). "Australian Research on Bird Pests: impact, management and future directions." *Emu* 102, pp. 29 - 45

Davey, C., and Roberts, J. (1990). "The duck problem on rice fields in New South Wales". In *National Bird Pest Workshop Proceedings*. (Eds P. Fleming, I. Temby, and J. Thompson.) pp. 41-50. Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, Victoria & NSW Agriculture and Fisheries, Orange.

Peter, J. (2013). "It's not game" in *Australian Birdlife*, Vol. 2, No. 3. 2013. p. 12

Western Australian Department of Conservation and Environment, Fauna Note no. 10, "Destruction of ducks to reduce damage" 2007