



5th May 2023

The Committee Manager
Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

FVTOC Submission to the Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements

Introduction

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is a state-wide body advocating for the rights and interests of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements.

Traditional Owners have rights, interests, and responsibilities to care for Country that stem from their own systems of governance. Indigenous concepts around caring for Country¹ often do not align with the approach taken through mainstream or non-Indigenous management of landscapes. The Victorian government supported the development of the [Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy](#), launched by Minister Thomas in March 2021.

Hunting, game and wildlife management is both a way of life and expression of identity for the Aboriginal people of Victoria. Traditional Owners within Victoria continue the cultural practices of their ancestors, particularly with respect to the animals they hunt as game.

¹ 'Country' is a well-known and widely used Aboriginal term and concept that describes all living, non-living and spiritual parts of the world, as well as the interactions between them. People are responsible for maintaining health of Country by 'caring for' it according to cultural obligations.

Many of these animals have spiritual and ceremonial significance. Traditional Owners throughout Victoria have always been actively engaged in the sustainable management of the resources of their respective Countries.

The [Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy](#) (the Strategy) sets out how Victorian Government departments and agencies will partner with Traditional Owners to deliver practical actions to build Traditional Owner participation in hunting, land management and conservation.

Our submission is concerned with how the Victorian Government, through this inquiry, can honour these commitments.

Key points in response to the Terms of Reference:

(a) the operation of annual native bird hunting seasons

We refer you to relevant sections of the game Management Strategy where the Victorian Government has agreed to work towards collaborative and holistic management of Country. This includes how and when native bird hunting seasons operate, typically broadening the considerations beyond the current narrow focus. A broader range of cultural values may be present and require dual management, for example, harvesting of some native grasses for basket weaving typically occurs at the same time as hunting seasons; the management requirement of the cultural landscape within which native bird hunting operates.

Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy, Action Area 1 - Goal: Encourage a holistic, partnership approach to game management incorporating Traditional Owner led knowledge and practice.

This includes:

- Hunting seasons to reflect each Traditional Owner Nation's TEK, indicators etc;
- Engage directly with each Traditional Owner Nation to determine seasonal operation;
- Implement the actions within the traditional Owner Game Management Strategy, particularly:

- Action 3.1: develop and make available material developed by Traditional Owners about respecting Country, species and cultural and natural heritage values. This may include developing a specific section for inclusion in the game hunting manual
- Action 3.2: Work with the GMA and other partner agencies to include respecting Country, species and cultural and natural heritage values as part of the Respect campaign
- Action 3.3: Explore opportunities to include cultural and natural heritage questions in future game licence tests;
- Action 3.4: Develop stronger reporting mechanisms for Traditional Owners to report activities that risk negative impacts on cultural values.
- Action 3.6: Providing hunters with more information on hunting on Country, on respecting cultural values (important sites, species and habitats) and the ways in which Traditional Owners expect species to be treated.
- Action 3.7: Support work currently being done through the further development of NRAs to enable Traditional Owners to hunt game animals and animals that they consider to be traditional sources of food and materials, by traditional methods through a listing in the NRA (Take and Use Provisions) for each Traditional Owner group.

(c) environmental sustainability and impact on amenity

We again refer you to the Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy, Action Area 1 - Goal: Encourage a holistic, partnership approach to game management incorporating Traditional Owner led knowledge and practice.

We also refer you to the [Implementation Plan](#) for the Strategy, completed in partnership with the Victorian Government. A vital focus of the Implementation Plan are the four Traditional Owner-led pilot projects funded from the Sustainable Action Hunting Plan 2 as an example of collaborative management for a range of values including environmental sustainability. These pilots will identify innovative management approaches to manage for a range of values that can inform this review.

(d) social and economic impact

It is critical that Traditional Owners benefit from hunting on their Country through employment and economic opportunities. These are outlined in the Strategy, particularly Action Area 2:

- Goal: Traditional Owners benefit from economic and employment opportunities associated with game management through active participation, contracting of services to Traditional Owner groups and Traditional Owner led projects.
- Action 2.1: game compliance, information and safety roles;
- Action 2.2: utilise Traditional Owner Corporation NRM teams supporting the rehabilitation and management of Country for all species and habitats, using both traditional and scientific methods, including cultural fire, forest gardening, water (cultural flow) management, nest box installation, seed harvesting and replanting.
- Action 2.3: ecotourism opportunities such as guided cultural tours, bird watching and interpretive signage (some outside of hunting season).

Economic opportunities also feature in Action Area 1:

- Action 1.4: Traditional Owners will have the opportunity to utilise their traditional knowledge and skills by acting as paid environmental monitors on their own Country. Traditional Owners will develop indicators, tools and measures for monitoring game species (e.g. pre and post-harvest waterfowl counts) and incorporate them into Reading Country programs, in partnership with DELWP and Arthur Rylah Institute.

Economic development opportunities are also identified through the Implementation Plan for the Strategy, and as above requires direct engagement with Traditional Owners to determine their self-determined pathways.

Through our submission we emphasise the interconnection between biodiversity, culture and self-determination and seek close involvement of Traditional Owners in implementation.

The Federation would welcome the opportunity to support further Traditional Owner input into this inquiry, and encourage the inquiry to engage meaningfully with

Traditional Owner representatives directly via the Traditional Owner Corporations. For further clarification on our submission, please contact Tanya Vernes at tanya.vernes@fvto.com.au .

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Hackel', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

James Hackel

Manager NRM and Economic Development

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