

Taking aim over duck hunt future

CAITLIN MCARTHUR

MEMBER for Murray Plains Peter Walsh has taken aim at the state government over the future of duck hunting in Victoria.

The state Nationals leader accused the government of having "betrayed" Victoria's hunting community and "considering a ban" following reports Labor MP Lizzie Blandthorn's push to review practice of the sport had attracted grassroots support within the party.

The issue was raised during question time last week, in the last sitting week of state parliament for the year, with state agriculture

minister Jaclyn Symes arguing the motion called for a "review" and should not be seen as an effort to "ban" duck hunting.

"I am considering how as a minister I can respond to that resolution that was passed, but it is not in relation to banning duck hunting," Ms Symes said.

It's not the first time the issue has been raised in parliament this year, with backbencher and Animal Justice Party MP Andy Meddick moving a motion earlier this year that the 2020 duck hunting season be called off.

The resolution mentioned by the minister was a motion by Ms Blandthorn to review duck hunting

in the state, and coincides with the consideration of a similar motion in the state's upper house.

Following Labor's state conference last month, Ms Blandthorn took to social media, posting a photo of herself admiring ducks in a suburban pond with the words: "The recreational hunting of native water birds is completely at odds with the government's (animal welfare) plan. On the eve of 2020, it's time to end this practice once and for all."

The motion is also at odds with the launch of a new government initiative just last week, with a new electronic mapping system show-

ing all public land available for hunters, as well as which species of both game animals and pests can be hunted in specific areas, now available to hunters.

At the time of the launch, Ms Symes reaffirmed the government's commitment to sustainable hunting.

"The new maps are part of our commitment to make sure hunting is conducted in a safe, responsible and sustainable way right across the state," Ms Symes said.

"The app will be a great tool to help hunters stay informed about their favourite hunting locations or explore new ones."

But, Mr Walsh said he was disap-

pointed the government was "considering" a ban and said the government had spent the past five years "sneakily winding back" the duck hunting season.

"The Liberal-Nationals stand side-by-side with our responsible, legitimate duck hunters and will fight any move by Daniel Andrews and Andy Meddick to ban it," Mr Walsh said.

"Labor's new anti-hunting position is disappointing but hardly surprising as Daniel Andrews also claimed he supported timber workers too, right up until he axed thousands of jobs in that industry," Mr Walsh said.

Unwelcome find

JENNY DENTON

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VOLUNTEERS from Turtles Australia came across what they described as the scene of "a massacre" at Gunbower Island recently.

The group found the remains of 23 Eastern long-necked turtles at a site off the Koondrook Track, between the Black Swamp and Goat Island.

Turtles Australia founder Graham Stockfeld said it was an unusually high number of dead turtles to find.

"Most of them were fresh enough that they still smelt bad," Mr Stockfeld said.

"They all had their heads and legs chewed off, and there was fox scat nearby.

"They were all on their back - the foxes flip them on their back.

"My guess is they were crossing between the creek and the swamp, and some fox was just pinging them off one at a time."

The lifelong turtle advocate said the long-necked turtles were "in trouble".

"Not only are foxes preying on the species but they are highly mobile, which leads them onto roads and being killed by cars."

Mr Stockfeld said the animals were an important part of a healthy river system.

"You should have the same biomass of turtles as you do of fish in a river," he said.

"They're like the garbage collectors - they eat anything and are very good nitrogen converters."

Eastern long-necks are one of three turtle types native to the region.

The other two are the broad-shelled and Murray River species.

While Eastern long-necked and Murray River turtles are not yet listed as endangered, the broad-shelled species is.

Broad-shelled eggs can take well over a year to hatch, and in one record case over 700 days.

Mr Stockfeld said the Black Swamp area was a good nesting place for broad-shells, and the volunteers had gone there to check nests.

Luckily, after finding and recording the dead long-necks, they found 14 or 15 live broad-shelled hatchlings.

"It cheered everyone up," he said.

Turtles Australia has been visiting Gun-



ABOVE: An Eastern long-necked turtle pauses while crossing a road. **Picture: JENNY DENTON. RIGHT:** The remains of 23 Eastern long-necked turtles that were killed recently by foxes at Gunbower Island. **Picture supplied.**



bower Island for a decade, usually three times a year, to map and protect nesting areas.

This is done by fitting wire or plastic mesh over the holes where eggs are laid.

Several local residents are involved with the project, and community members are generally very supportive of it, Mr Stockfeld said, with nest protection equipment stationed at various locations around Gunbower Island.

In terms of turtle awareness, Mr Stockfeld said people should be aware that turtle nesting and hatching were both triggered by rain.

"Especially when it's raining, there will be turtles moving around," Mr Stockfeld said.

"Just try to avoid them.

"If you see them on the road, move them off if it's safe.

"And if people see turtles nesting they can call Turtles Australia."

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KEEPING COOL

THE Gannawarra Shire Council is encouraging residents to be prepared for what is predicted to be a summer of extreme heat.

With the Bureau of Meteorology predicting a 75 per cent chance that the average maximum temperature for this summer will exceed the long-term mark of 30.9 degrees, council is running its Be Cool in Gannawarra campaign, which aims to promote ways residents can minimise the risks associated with hot conditions.

"Although hot summers are something we are used to living in northern Victoria, it is important for residents to be prepared," mayor Lorraine Learmonth said.

Cr Learmonth said last summer was a good example of how extreme conditions could get in the shire, noting 16 days exceeded 40 degrees between December 1 and February 28.

This period also included a new record

maximum temperature of 47.6 degrees, which was set on January 25.

"Unfortunately heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster, with those most at risk being older people, young children and those with a medical condition," Cr Learmonth said.

Residents can reduce the risks of extreme heat by:

- Drinking plenty of water;
- Not leaving children, adults or pets in cars;
- Spending as much time as possible in cool or air-conditioned buildings, such as libraries or community centres;
- Cancel non-essential outings and plan essential activities for the coolest part of the day; and
- Look after those most at risk by keeping in touch with family members and neighbours.



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