



**EXTRACT FROM
PARLIAMETARY DEBATES
*HANSARD***



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

23 MARCH 2022

Mr Melhem

Western Metropolitan

Speaking on a Motion

DUCK HUNTING

Mr MELHEM: I also rise to speak on Mr Bourman's motion. We have had two cracks this morning at the same subject, so he will finally get it right. This motion is not about prosecuting whether duck hunting should be allowed or disallowed in this state. It is a very narrow motion. It is about what is a safe distance.

My reading of Mr Bourman's motion, whether it is 10 metres or 30 metres or 100 metres, is to make sure it is safe for the hunter and safe for the protesters. That is the main focus of Mr Bourman's motion. You cannot hold this up and talk about whether or not duck hunting should continue or discontinue, as I said earlier, but I am sure other speakers will talk about that. What I just want to go through is that there are strong views in the Victorian community both in favour of and against recreational duck hunting, but I want to put on the record that this government continues to support safe, responsible, and sustainable recreational duck hunting.

As many in the chamber know well, each year arrangements for duck-hunting seasons are reviewed on the advice of the Game Management Authority to ensure that hunting is sustainable, responsible, and safe. The 2022 duck-hunting season advice is based on independent harvest modelling by two experts in waterfowl ecology and population dynamics, professors Klaassen and Kingsford, using the latest and most comprehensive data available, so the GMA accepted the modelling and recommended a restricted season. All duck hunters must pass the waterfowl identification test with 85 per cent to obtain a game licence and correctly identify all non-game species, including protected species.

Illegal hunting and irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated, and I want to echo the comments made by the Premier yesterday to that point, about making sure all illegal behaviours are basically stopped and put an end to on both sides of the argument. Arrangements have been put in place in recent years to ensure that those that engage in lawful duck hunting during the declared season can do so without the sometimes dangerous and irresponsible interference from those opposed to this activity.

But I go back to what I said earlier. Let us be clear that people are very much entitled to be opposed to duck hunting and engage in protest activities, but they must respect that it is a lawful activity in Victoria and not endanger themselves and others during those activities. I think Mr Bourman touched on that, and I think we can agree on that—those protesters have the right to protest and hunters in the state

of Victoria have got the right to go about duck shooting as is allowed under the Victorian legislation. The reason the 10-metre rule was introduced was to ensure the safety of protesters and hunters alike. This rule was introduced by the coalition, and it is something that the Andrews Labor government has strongly supported. We can have a debate about safety. Firearm safety is one of the core priorities of the government and maintaining safe distances between individuals while firearms are in use ensures everyone is safe.

The GMA and partner agencies, including Victoria Police, continue to work this year, as they have done in previous years, to ensure compliance with hunting and animal welfare laws. In the opening days of the season the GMA patrolled 120 wetlands, checked more than 970 game and firearm licences and inspected more than 800 hunter bags. Several breaches of game-hunting and public safety laws were detected, and I can assure the house that the GMA and partner agencies, including Victoria Police, will continue to patrol both public lands and private properties during the 2022 duck season to ensure compliance with hunting, animal welfare and public safety laws and ensure anyone doing the wrong thing is dealt with appropriately. The GMA and partner agencies are using drones, off-road vehicles, boats and body-worn cameras to monitor behaviour on the wetlands this duck season. The government reviews seasonal arrangements each year on the advice of the Game Management Authority to ensure that duck populations remain sustainable and duck hunting is done in a responsible and a safe manner. Based on the GMA advice the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change approved a modified season for 2022, including a daily bag limit of four birds. The season commenced on Wednesday, 16 March 2022, and will go until Monday, 13 June, inclusive. The hunting start time was delayed until 8.00 am across the state from Wednesday, 16 March, to Sunday, 28 March, inclusive. Also, the blue-winged shoveler and the hardhead are prohibited from being hunted in 2022.

To go back to some of the points, we can have a debate about 10 metres, 30 metres, 50 metres or 100 metres; I think it is important to know that we all have responsibility to make sure we practise whatever we practise lawfully and in a safe manner. For example, the 10 metres, the 20 metres or the 30 metres could be redundant if the hunter decides to shoot a bird that is already on land or on water, and that could be quite dangerous to the person in front of them. But if you are shooting at a bird up in the air in full flight, the danger is less. So, there is always

going to be an argument about what is safe practice. Distance itself is just one aspect; you need to make sure that you keep that safe distance between the activists, the protesters, and the hunters. But it is also the responsibility of hunters when they are aiming to shoot a bird to make sure they look at their surroundings. That is very important.

I am a shooter myself. I have handled firearms in my life, and I still do. It is very important to pay attention. There is a responsibility on hunters and firearm users to make sure they use the firearms in a safe manner, because sometimes distance can be redundant. The distance is one measure, as a minimum safety measure.

Duck shooting is lawful. As I said, we can have an argument about whether duck shooting should continue or not, but that is for another debate. I am not here to debate the issue itself about whether duck seasons should be terminated, full stop, or should continue. Whilst it is still legal to practise in Victoria, there is a responsibility on duck hunters, on the shooters, to make sure they use safe operating procedures and make sure that they look at their surroundings and that they do not put people in harm's way. Also, there is an equal responsibility for the activists and animal lovers and people who want to protect animals or save animals—and I think they do a great job—to make sure that they do not put themselves in harm's way. They need to make sure they maintain a safe distance, they go about their activity in a safe manner, they respect the rights of everyone else and they comply with the rules.

I also call on the various enforcement agencies—which I am sure are doing a great job in ensuring they are enforcing the rules and regulations surrounding duck hunting—to make sure there is full compliance by all. I echo the comments made by the Premier yesterday, and I go back to that point: should some duck hunters or shooters fail to observe these rules and break the rules, the full force of the law should apply to them and equally to the activists who do not comply with the rules. I think the law should apply equally to everyone. With those comments, I will leave my contribution at that.