

Sustainable Hunting Action Plan

2016-2020

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Minister's foreword

In Victoria, we have the best of everything. With our deer, duck, quail, pheasant and partridge populations, we are regarded as having some of the best hunting opportunities in Australia.

Many Victorians have a long tradition of spending quality weekends camping with family and friends and hunting game, be it close to home or further afield.

It is important that game hunting in Victoria continues to be a safe, responsible and sustainable recreation for generations to come. That's why I am pleased to release the Sustainable Hunting Action Plan.

Earlier this year, the Victorian Government allocated \$5.3 million in the 2016/17 Victorian Budget to support the development and delivery of this plan. We're taking steps to support hunters, because we know the importance of education, access, awareness and good communication.

This plan is a significant milestone for game hunting in Victoria. Never before has government and community partnered to develop and see through so many measurable outcomes. Over the next four years, the Government will work with our agencies and the community to:

- promote responsible hunting
- maximise the economic, environmental and social benefits of hunting to Victoria
- improve hunting opportunities
- ensure that game hunting remains sustainable.



Victoria has a rich history of hunting. Hunting and gathering practices were central to Aboriginal life for thousands of years. The Victorian Government recognises the importance of hunting for Victoria's Traditional Owners. Through this plan, we will partner with Victoria's Traditional Owners to support their hunting practices, now and into the future.

And recreational hunting is growing in popularity too. There are now more than 50,000 licensed game hunters in Victoria, an increase of about 8,000 in the last five years. Together with people who shoot pest animals, these tens of thousands of Victorians contribute over \$439 million to the economy each year and support almost 3,500 jobs. Much of this benefit is seen in small towns and regional cities across country Victoria.

I want people to make the most of our natural environment by getting out and enjoying all of the wonderful hunting, fishing, boating, camping, bushwalking, four-wheel driving and outdoor opportunities Victoria has to offer. This plan will support and guide the long-term growth of responsible game hunting. On public land, hunting will be managed to ensure that it is consistent with a wide range of other values and users.

I look forward to working with stakeholders to successfully implement the Sustainable Hunting Action Plan. The Victorian Government is committed to maximising the benefits of safe, sustainable and responsible hunting.

Jaala Pulford MP

Minister for Agriculture

Our vision

Victorians will gain from growing the economic, environmental and social benefits of responsible, sustainable and safe hunting, now and into the future.



Our approach



The Victorian Government recognises that hunting is an important and popular activity in Victoria. Hunting makes a significant economic contribution to the State and encourages people to participate in an active outdoor lifestyle.

Hunting opportunities are available on both public and private land. Victoria's public land provides for a wide range of uses. The government recognises that this diversity of recreational opportunities is important to the community. A substantial proportion of the State's public land is available for recreational hunting, including large areas of State forest and 200 State game reserves. At the same time, there are also substantial areas where hunting is not permitted, including many areas where conservation is a primary objective.

This plan for hunting in Victoria has sustainability at its core. Sustainable hunting requires sound game, conservation and land management. It must also incorporate the principles of responsible, safe and humane hunting to ensure environmental, economic and social benefits are maximised.

The sustainability of hunting for future generations can be achieved through:

- research and planning
- sound game, conservation and land management
- better hunting habitats and site access
- improved information and communication
- contemporary education and training programs
- collaboration between government departments, agencies, Traditional Owners and hunting stakeholders
- effective regulation and enforcement
- well-informed and skilled hunters promoting respectful, responsible and humane hunting
- better understanding in the community of how hunters contribute to conservation.

This action plan is designed to ensure that hunting continues to be safe, sustainable and responsible. All relevant agencies will work together to support opportunities for sustainable hunting.

Our focus

The Victorian Government will deliver:

- sustainable game management based on the best available science and evidence
- improved access to game resources
- healthy and productive habitats
- improved hunting opportunities and increased areas available to hunting where appropriate
- a growing hunting industry contributing to thriving regional communities
- more people enjoying Victoria's natural environment.

Our plan takes a common sense approach to ensuring the long term sustainability of hunting in Victoria and concentrates on practical actions that will maximise benefits for the environment, the economy, the community and hunters.





Vision

Sustainable Hunting

Victorians will gain from growing the economic, environmental and social benefits of responsible, sustainable and safe hunting, now and into the future.

Outcomes

**Responsible,
safe and
humane
hunting**

**Full utilisation
of game**

**Inclusive
regional
growth**

**Secure the
future of
hunting**

Objectives

**Promoting
responsible
hunting**

**Growing
hunting's
benefits**

**Improving
hunting
opportunities**

**Ensuring
sustainable
hunting**

Actions

- Provide better access to information
- Educate and train new hunters
- Improve compliance and enforcement
- Work with hunting stakeholders
- Update hunting-related welfare codes
- Improve firearm carriage, transport and storage compliance

- Improve seasonal announcements
- Facilitate game meat processing
- Monitor social and economic benefits
- Promote regional hunting opportunities

- Improve hunting location knowledge
- Provide better hunting access
- Expand pest hunting
- Expand game hunting
- Partner with Traditional Owners
- Develop an online game licencing system

- Undertake research, monitoring and evaluation
- Improve State Game Reserve habitat
- Develop a deer management strategy
- Improve control programs
- Improve data collection
- Support the National Hunting Archive



Promoting responsible hunting

The cornerstone of responsible hunting is making sure hunters have access to accurate information that improves their education and training. As part of that education and training, all participants, including hunting organisations and the industry, must promote responsible hunting, including the humane treatment of all animals hunted and used for hunting, and recognising the non-hunting activities of other users in those areas where hunting is permitted.

Initiatives in the action plan include:

- developing relevant technology and materials to give hunters accurate and accessible information
- improving training and education for new hunters
- engaging major stakeholders to continue the 'RESPECT: Hunt Responsibly' program
- developing a best practice compliance and enforcement approach.

The Government will also update hunting-related welfare codes and improve information on firearm laws, including transport and storage.

Hunters are continuing to improve their skills through the new DuckWise education video and the Shotgunning Education Program.



Growing hunting's benefits

In order to grow the social and economic benefits of hunting, the action plan will inform hunters of seasonal arrangements using social media and other technology, make game meat processing easier, monitor the economic benefits of hunting to inform future decisions and facilitate hunting tourism.

To protect threatened, endangered and at-risk species, hunting regulations, including where hunting may and may not occur, are sometimes varied at very short notice. To make it easier for hunters to plan, the action plan will examine the most effective ways to tell stakeholders about seasonal variations, including better use of technology and social media.

There are currently obstacles that stop game and pest hunters from fully utilising the animals they hunt. To minimise waste and help hunters maximise the use of harvested game, the action plan will investigate and remove barriers to game meat processing.

Non-residents of Victoria, who have the appropriate firearms licences, can apply for a Victorian Game Licence and come to Victoria.



Improving hunting opportunities

Actions within this plan will improve hunters' access to accurate and easily accessible information on where, when and what they can hunt. Actions will also improve hunters access to hunting areas and expand game and pest hunting opportunities where appropriate.

Key initiatives to provide accurate and easily accessible information include new and updated maps and better physical signage on public land. This will increase awareness of hunting locations, conditions and opportunities, aid hunter compliance and improve public understanding. Better access to hunting areas like State Game Reserves and the Victorian Alps is also important to improving hunting opportunities.

Native title holders have the right to hunt on their traditional lands in accordance with the Commonwealth's *Native Title Act 1993*. Victoria's *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* also recognises Traditional Owner rights to access and use natural resources. For recognised groups who have entered into a recognition and settlement agreement, this may include the right to hunt game and other wildlife on Crown land for traditional purposes. The action plan will partner with Traditional Owners to build participation in hunting, land management and conservation. A Victorian Traditional Owner Game Hunting Strategy, that links to Traditional Owner's country plans, Natural Resource Management Plans and Natural Resource Agreements, will be developed in partnership with Traditional Owners. More broadly, Aboriginal Victorians will be engaged to avail themselves of game hunting as participants.

The action plan will examine ways to facilitate the hunting of other deer species where Sambar deer hunting already occurs, and investigate enabling pest animal hunting to occur in State Game Reserves where appropriate.



Ensuring sustainable hunting

Sustainable hunting relies on good science, research and sound game, conservation and land management.

The plan includes developing a sustainable hunting research strategy for Victoria in order to better inform decisions about the current status of game resources, sustainable harvest levels and the impact of hunting activity. A major initiative is to implement the Waterfowl Conservation Harvest Model. The Waterfowl Conservation Harvest Model will use the best scientific methods to predict the impact of environmental factors and hunting on game duck populations.

Improving habitat management in State Game Reserves will also be a priority, along with helping land managers to work with hunting organisations on integrated pest management and deer control programs. A statewide deer management strategy will reduce the impact of deer on native biodiversity and their damage to property, while maintaining hunting opportunities.

In order to improve decision making, the plan will investigate ways to improve data collection on hunter activity and utilise the valuable resources of the National Hunting Archive.

Case Study: Hunters' own work - Heart Morass Wetland

Hunters and environmental conservationists have come together in a long term commitment to conserve the Heart Morass wetland. In a joint initiative between Field & Game Australia, Bug Blitz, Watermark Inc. and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, the Heart Morass wetland has been rehabilitated from a wasteland in 2007 to a thriving wetland at the mouth of the Latrobe River in Gippsland. Following initial funding for the land purchase from members and branches of Field and Game Australia and the Hugh Williamson Foundation, the wetland is now a place of national significance for waterbirds and other wetland dependent flora and fauna.

Implementation



A partnership approach, led by the Game Management Authority, is critical to the success of the Sustainable Hunting Action Plan as it will be delivered by a range of government departments and agencies including:

- Game Management Authority
- Parks Victoria
- Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

The Government will also partner with Traditional Owners to develop a Traditional Owner Game Hunting Strategy and to integrate Traditional Owners' ecological knowledge into current planning processes.

Importantly, hunting organisations and the hunting industry also play a vital role in delivering key actions like the 'RESPECT: Hunt Responsibly' program. Specifically, funding will be allocated to the Australian Deer Association and the Firearms Safety Foundation (Victoria).



Objective 1: Promoting responsible hunting

Responsible hunting actions are focussed on providing better information, education and training programs to hunters, collaborating with stakeholders to promote responsible hunting, and improving enforcement.

Actions

- 1.1 **Provide better access to information** — through a single, comprehensive hunting website, an improved distribution network for a new hunting manual, and the upgrading of the game licensing system to allow for more targeted messaging to hunters.
- 1.2 **Educate and train new hunters** — by reviewing and releasing a comprehensive manual on how to hunt in Victoria.
- 1.3 **Improve compliance and enforcement** — through a clear compliance policy and agreed standards for compliance across all government departments and agencies.
- 1.4 **Work with hunting stakeholders** — to continue delivering the 'RESPECT: Hunt Responsibly' program, expand distribution of hunting information to hunting organisations and retail businesses, and attend relevant outdoor events to promote responsible hunting.
- 1.5 **Update hunting-related welfare codes** — to ensure hunting practices are humane and encourage the considerate treatment of animals that are hunted and used for hunting.
- 1.6 **Improve firearm carriage, transport and storage compliance** — by working with Firearms Safety Foundation (Victoria) to develop information and run relevant safety courses.



Objective 2: Growing hunting's benefits

Hunting's benefits will be maximised by using social media to announce upcoming seasons and variations, making game meat processing easier, monitoring economic benefits and facilitating tourism.

Actions

- 2.1 **Improve seasonal announcements** — by effectively communicating information to stakeholders when seasonal variations are required or areas are temporarily closed to hunting. Early advice will be provided through the Victorian Game Hunting App, Twitter and Facebook.
- 2.2 **Facilitate game meat processing** — by investigating and reducing barriers to the processing of wild harvested game meat to allow optimal use of game harvest.
- 2.3 **Monitor social and economic benefits** — by conducting a study every five years to determine the contribution of hunting to the economy. This will inform investment decisions, and improve services and regulatory outcomes.
- 2.4 **Promote regional hunting opportunities** — through targeted communication with relevant regional agencies and organisations.

Objective 3: Improving hunting opportunities



Hunting opportunities will be improved by providing clear information on where, when and what people can hunt, improving access to hunting locations, expanding pest and game hunting opportunities, and working with Traditional Owners.

Actions

3.1 **Improve hunting location knowledge** — by:

- developing a map set for Victoria showing where different game hunting can occur on public land.
- improving signage on State Game Reserves.
- improving signage on other public land where hunting is permitted including National Parks and high use State Forests.

3.2 **Provide better hunting access** — by:

- improving physical access to State Game Reserves.
- reviewing opportunities to use existing helipad facilities in alpine regions (excluding areas reserved under the *National Parks Act 1975*) to facilitate improved access to areas where hunting is permitted.

3.3 **Expand pest hunting** — by exploring further hunting opportunities by game licence holders at State Game Reserves, subject to appropriate pest control protocols.

3.4 **Expand game hunting** — by removing restrictions on hunting other deer species in areas reserved under the *National Parks Act 1975* where Sambar Deer hunting is already permitted and exploring options to expand hunting in Victoria in partnership with Traditional Owners, land managers and relevant stakeholders.

3.5 **Partner with Traditional Owners** — to continue to build participation in land management and conservation, and develop a Victorian Traditional Owner Game Hunting Strategy.

3.6 **Develop an online game licensing system** — that allows online processing and payment of game licences.

Objective 4: Ensuring sustainable hunting



Sustainable hunting will be secured through sound research, habitat improvement, working with hunting organisations on control programs, developing a deer management strategy, and improving data collection.

Actions

4.1 **Undertake research, monitoring and evaluation** — by:

- developing a game species research strategy to better understand the distribution, abundance and recruitment of game species and the impact of hunting activity
- researching land and habitat management techniques to benefit native game species
- tagging, banding and monitoring game to better understand movements and breeding cycles
- assessing relationships between hunting seasons and local ecosystems around hunting reserves
- implementing the Waterfowl Conservation Harvest Model to ensure the sustainable management of game ducks.

4.2 **Improve State Game Reserve habitat** — by building on an audit of all State Game Reserves, developing management principles to maintain quality habitats, and establishing two demonstration sites in collaboration with hunting organisations where the new management principles will be put into practice.



- 4.3 **Develop a deer management strategy** — that sets a strategic plan to maintain sustainable hunting opportunities while reducing the impact of deer on biodiversity on all land tenures in the state.
- 4.4 **Improve control programs** — by working with accredited volunteer shooters to contribute to pest and deer control programs by establishing additional agreements with hunting organisations.
- 4.5 **Improve data collection** — by exploring new ways and technologies to collect hunting activity information.
- 4.6 **Support the National Hunting Archive** — by helping the Archive to develop an electronic catalogue system of historical information that can be accessed by the public.



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