

SUBMISSION TO PARKS VICTORIA SEPTEMBER 2020

BY REGIONAL VICTORIANS OTDS INC.

A BETTER WAY FOR TOWER HILL

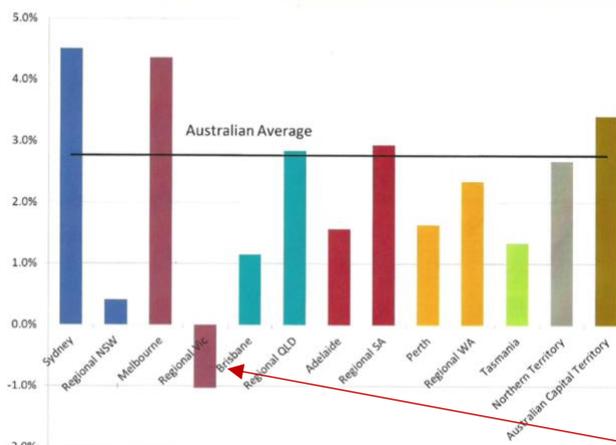
REVITALISE TOWER HILL RESERVE, PROTECT WILDLIFE UNIQUE TO OUR COUNTRY AND INCREASE JOBS AND GROWTH

BACKGROUND

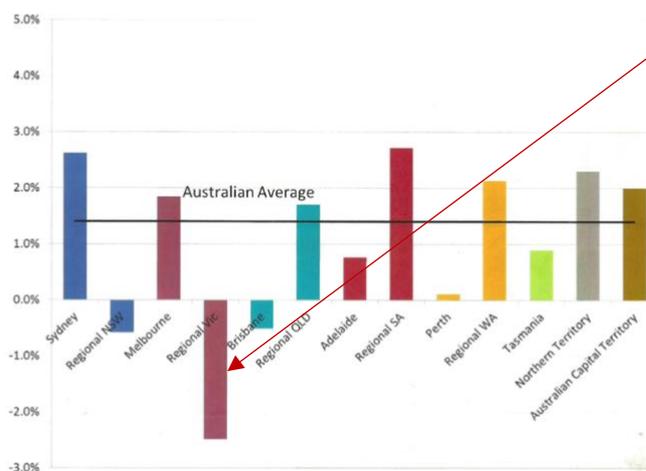
The Auditor General's report followed by SGS Economics and Planning analysis 2016 and 2018 showed Victoria's rural towns are in serious financial trouble. And that was before COVID 19.



2015-16 GDP Growth



2015-16 GDP Per Capita Growth



Regional Victoria

From the Auditor General's report and SGS Economics analysis which showed rural Victoria's communities were faring worse than any other states', to the Census data depicting 8 out of the 10 most disadvantaged areas in Victoria were rural, to ATO data showing 5 out of the 10 lowest income postcodes in Australia were in rural Victoria, it can't be any clearer.

Rural Victorian communities are struggling socially and economically.

The Solution is in Our Nature

Meanwhile, across Australia, tourism contributes more to the economy than agriculture (agriculture, forestry and fishing) and for the fourth consecutive year, annual growth in direct tourism GDP outperformed the national growth rate (*Tourism Satellite Account 2019*).

Nature-based tourism, growing faster than all other forms of tourism combined, is worth over \$41 billion to our country (The Tourism & Transport Forum / *Unlocking the Great Outdoors 2017*).

Tourism Research Australia National Visitor Surveys consistently show bushwalking as a top pastime of domestic and international tourists. And, for the year ending December 2019, for the first time, birdwatching data was included. A whopping 866,000 domestic tourists went birdwatching across Australia, more overnight tourists went birdwatching than visited the reef.

This is in line with global trends.

US Fisheries and Wildlife Service' latest national survey (2016) showed while interest in hunting had declined, a third of the population over 16 years old watched wildlife, an increase of 20% since 2011. Wildlife watchers' spend also increased 28%, up to \$75.9 billion USD.

Victoria – A sleeping giant

As per Parks Victoria's own draft document, nature-based tourism is worth \$2.6 billion and one in four jobs in Victoria. But where is it going?

While regional Victoria is attracting more tourists, it's mainly the usual contenders reaping the rewards. The Great Ocean Road/Twelve Apostles, Phillip Island Nature Parks, Sovereign Hill and so it goes.

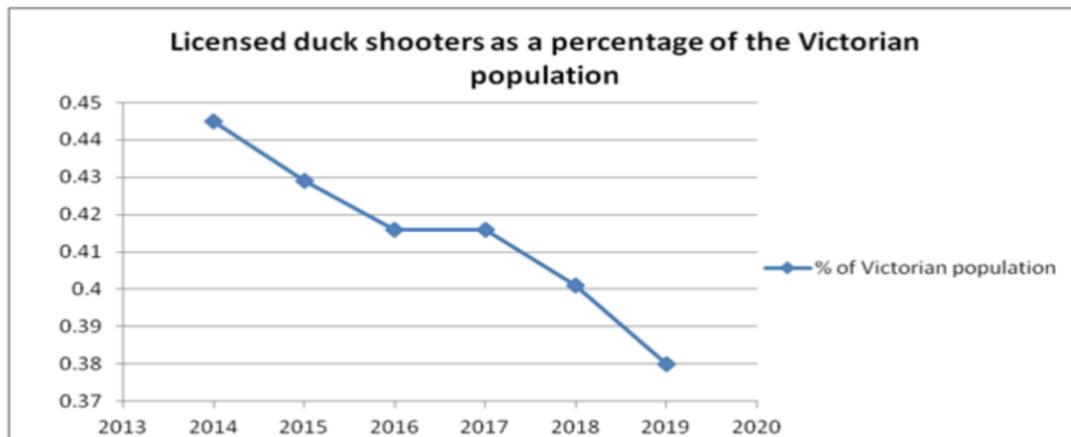
Already, Phillip Island Nature Parks contributes \$500 million a year and 2100 jobs to Victoria's economy (remember the penguin is not unique to this area) and the Great Ocean Road attracts 5 million visitors a year with their \$1.3 billion spend. Lake Tyrell in the State's north is already pulling up to 1000 visitors a day.

How many visit Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve?

While it is unknown at this stage what the cost is to taxpayers of these consultations by Parks Victoria, it is known that most taxpayers oppose recreational bird shooting.

Hence it is even more disappointing that Parks' Victoria continue to write documents which many would view as duck shooting promotions, making little mention of wildlife/birdwatching opportunities.

Of the 295,000 visitors to Tower Hill, there would have been very few duck shooters. In fact, there were only 13,000 active duck shooters across the whole of Victoria last year.



Less than half of one percent of the population shoot ducks, a percentage that is declining. Source: Game Management Authority license statistics.

The adverse impact of duck shooters even in their small numbers is significant. While some shooters try to do the right thing, studies have shown that only 16% of tourists would not be deterred by shooters (The Australia Institute “Out for a Duck”).

Their fears are founded. Headlines run across newspapers every year to do with non-compliance to rules and the risks posed to other recreational users.

www.theage.com.au › National › Victoria › Victoria Police

'Coked-up shooter': Police seize guns, drugs on day ... - The Age

May 20, 2020 - The state government approved a **2020 duck hunting** season in February amid increasing pressure to cancel this year's season due to drought ...

www.weeklytimesnow.com.au › victoria › news-story

Duck opening: Three protesters arrested; 30 hunting, firearm ...

Mar 20, 2019 - KIRRILY CARBERRY, The **Weekly Times**. March 20, 2019 12:00am ... **hunting** area during prohibited times and failing to follow directions of authorised officers. There were also **30 hunting** and firearms offences, including **hunters** ... the seizure of firearms and a number of **infringement** notices were issued.

Camper's terrifying night at Lake Burrumbeet on ... - The Courier

Mar 27, 2019 - An artist from Ballarat has described a "scary, scary" night camping on Lake ...

Camper's terrifying night at Lake Burrumbeet on the eve of duck ...

Studies have also shown that inevitably, threatened and protected species are collateral damage. A recent Freedom of Information Request has resulted in our obtaining reports which show up to 972 non-game / threatened species have been killed each year by duck shooters just at the few waterways which happened to be monitored. It is therefore highly likely, given the vast majority of areas where shooting is allowed are not monitored, the number would be far higher.

The same studies showed **“partial closures” of waterways do not protect threatened species** like the Freckled duck, Australia’s rarest waterfowl.

Other studies report that migratory species are particularly vulnerable to shooting disturbance. Tower Hill is blessed with these species which Australia is under numerous international obligations to protect.

Whilst Parks Victoria have quoted a hunting plan in their key source documentation, it appears there is no regard to any social/ economic impact studies of hunting on the wider community, nor risk assessments, nor reports by scientists of the shocking decline of our wildlife.

The State of The World’s Birds 2018 and The Living Planet Index 2020, for example, show the terrifying reality that we are rapidly losing the very assets which attract tourism.

Latest reports show over two thirds of the world’s animal populations have been lost in just over four decades. Australia, indeed Victoria, is one of the worst offenders.

While Australia is blessed with a rich array of iconic species found nowhere else on earth, they are being killed off at a rate unmatched by any other developed country. Victoria has the highest number of threatened species by sub region in Australia.

Despite not yet being classed as “threatened”, populations of our native waterbirds allowed to be shot each year in Victoria for recreation - many species unique to our country - are also plummeting.

Parks Victoria should be protecting our native fauna, not promoting an unpopular activity which places them, as well as the wider community, at risk.

Table 29 Number of specimens of non-game wildlife found dead around waters used for hunting during the 1993 duck open season. The data for birds collected by members of animal welfare organisations are counts made by CNR officers of birds delivered to CNR Heidelberg during the season.

Species	Collected animal welfare	Collected by CNR	Total
Freckled Duck <i>Stictonetta naevosa</i>	229	57	286
Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	242	35	277
Blue-billed Duck <i>Oxyura australis</i>	84	7	91
cormorant species	44	4	48
Black-tailed Native-hen <i>Gallinula ventralis</i>	0	43	43
Black Swan <i>Cygnus atratus</i>	29	14	43
Galah <i>Cacatua roseicapilla</i>	21	11	32
small grebes	19	5	24
Musk Duck <i>Biziura lobata</i>	19	1	20
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	14	1	15
Australian Magpie Lark <i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	0	13	13
corella species	7	5	12
ibis species	8	3	11
White-faced Heron <i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i>	3	6	9
Red-necked Avocet <i>Recurvirostra novaehollandiae</i>	6	1	7
Yellow-billed Spoonbill <i>Platalea flavipes</i>	0	6	6
migratory waders	1	4	5
Australian Magpie <i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	0	4	4
Silver Gull <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	4	0	4
tern species	0	3	3
Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>	0	3	3
raven species	3	0	3
Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	2	1	3
Dusky Moorhen <i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>	2	0	2
raptor species	1	1	2
kingfisher species	0	1	1
Noisy Miner <i>Manorina melanocephala</i>	0	1	1
Australian Pelican <i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	0	1	1
Fairy Martin <i>Cecropis ariel</i>	0	1	1
Little Friarbird <i>Philemon citreogularis</i>	0	1	1
Brush-tailed Possum	0	1	1
Total	813	159	972

Conclusion

Allowing recreational native bird shooting to continue at Tower Hill is in no way synonymous with the stated goals of:

- Maintain safe and sustainable operations
- Improve visitor experience
- Protect and enhance inherent natural values

With its stunning views and rich array of wildlife unique to our country, Tower Hill is well poised to be able to leverage our natural assets and with low key initiatives sensitive to the natural environment, tap into a consistent flow of sustainable tourism.

Shooting our dwindling populations of wildlife with guns for recreation is neither cultural nor compatible.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views and we would welcome the opportunity to further discuss.

References Include;

- US Fisheries & Wildlife 2016 National Survey
- Tourism Satellite Account 2019
- Tourism Research Australia International and National Visitor Surveys over a recent three-year period.
- SGS Economics and Planning 2016 & 2018
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, Griffiths University
- The Australia Institute “Out for a Duck” 2012
- Phillip Island Nature Parks Contributes \$498 Million Media Release
- Tourism Research Australia Domestic Overnight Tourism Results year ending December 2019
- "A New Way Forward for Tourism in Regional Victoria" - Government Release March 2019
- <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/single-post/2019/04/08/Birding-could-Boom-in-Rural-Victoria-too> and <https://www.regionalvictoriansotds.com/single-post/2019/02/24/20-Days-to-Open-Fire-on-Victorias-Native-Waterbirds>
- Centre for Ecosystem Science Annual Aerial Waterbird Surveys, University NSW
- Living Planet Index 2020

