

MINISTERIAL ANNOUNCEMENT RE DUCK SHOOTING

1. BACKGROUND

On December 12, 1987 the Minister, Mr Hodge, announced a two year moratorium on duck hunting throughout W.A.. The statement also quoted the Minister as saying;

"As well as a two-year moratorium on duck shooting, the Department of Conservation and Land Management has been instructed to give research emphasis to the problem."

The Department has not received this instruction by any means other than the announcement. Nevertheless, on March 3, 1988 a meeting was held between R. Underwood, B. Wilson, K. McNamara and J. Lane to discuss how the Department might respond.

It was agreed at that meeting that J. Lane should prepare a paper setting out what we do now (within CALM and through CALM funding, e.g. of RAOU) and what we might do over the next two years, for further consideration in CALM and possible briefing of the Minister.

2. WHAT WE DO NOW

(This only covers work of direct relevance to the Minister's 20/12/87 statement. For other related research see the Waterbirds and Wetlands section of CALM's 1987-1992 Research Plan.)

2.1 Within CALM

Annual assessment of conditions for waterfowl breeding

Water depth, salinity and pH of 80 wetlands, principally Wetland Nature Reserves, are measured in September and November each year. This monitoring program began in 1977 and will continue for the foreseeable future. From 1978 to 1985 monitoring was at two month intervals and included some 120 wetlands. Nutrients (Total phosphorus) were also measured in 1984/85.

Invertebrates in south west wetlands

Dr Halse has begun field surveys to assess the conservation status of the lentic invertebrate fauna of the south-west and to examine how various environmental parameters (e.g. salinity, nutrients) affect the distribution of species. These surveys are scheduled for completion by 1992.

Diet of ducks in fresh and saline wetlands

Dr Halse is examining food selection in waterbirds in relation to the invertebrate prey available to gain some understanding of how changes in invertebrate species composition that result from salinization would affect

waterbird distribution. This study is due to be completed by 1992.

Lead shot and waterbirds

Waterbird gizzards and wings were collected from shooters during the 1987 SW duck shooting season. These will be used to gain a preliminary indication of the level of threat to native fauna posed by continued use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting in W.A.. This study will be completed in 1988.

(NB. A Murdoch University Honours student was also funded (approx \$2 500) to study the fate (biogeochemistry) of lead shot in three SW wetlands in 1987. This study has been completed.)

2.2 Through CALM Funding

Monitoring of waterfowl numbers

Since March, 1986 CALM has funded the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union to conduct an annual count of waterfowl (ducks and swans) and coot numbers on a large sample of wetlands (approx 450) and farm dams (approx 750) in the south west from Kalbarri to Esperance. CALM staff are also involved in this project. 119 200 to 245 800 ducks, swans and coots have been counted in the past three surveys. This represents a small proportion of total waterbird numbers.

It is proposed that this project will continue as a joint CALM/RAOU exercise for at least the next three years, with funding from the NPNC Trust Account. November counts may also be conducted.

Remote wetland expeditions

Since 1986, CALM has also funded annual RAOU/CALM expeditions to remote wetlands of possible international significance for waterbirds.

Lakes Argyle (181 400 waterbirds of 59 species) and Gregory (239 700 / 57) were surveyed in 1986, and Lake MacLeod (115 00 / 53) and Shark Bay (34 600 / 53) in 1987. The Fitzroy River, lower Ord and Lake Gregory are being surveyed at present (May 1988).

These surveys have greatly enhanced scientific knowledge of these sites and of northern waterbird populations in general.

No further surveys are planned beyond 1988, though much knowledge is still to be gained.

Seasonal usage of important south-west wetlands

RAOU observers continue to collect information on waterbird usage of some important sites in the south-west. This is

needed to fill gaps in our knowledge. Wonnerup-Vasse and Lake Guraga (Dandaragan Shire) are good examples. Recent work has demonstrated conclusively that these wetlands are of major importance to waterbirds; Wonnerup-Vasse at times supporting 30 000 birds.

This work is likely to continue opportunistically, during the next few years at least, as a spinoff from CALM funding of other RAOU waterbird work.

3. OTHER WORK WHICH IS PROPOSED AND IN THE PIPELINE

Waterbird populations of the Swan Coastal Plain
CALM and Water Authority officers are preparing a proposal for a jointly funded (50:50) study of waterbird usage of the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain from Moore River to Bunbury. It is proposed that this begin in May 1989 and continue for three years with an annual cost of around \$100 000.

A CALM -based scientist, RAOU waterbirds officer and several hundred volunteers will be involved. It will be a high profile project.

CALM's funding options include increasing the Program budget by \$50 000, or using my replacement and the difference in salaries when I move to crocodile management.

The CALM-based scientist will inter alia collect data on physical characteristics of the wetlands (size, vegetation, water regime, depth salinity, pH, turbidity, nutrient levels) and will investigate what characteristics make a wetland good for waterbirds, including whether there is a relationship between invertebrates and waterbird usage.

This project is detailed in the 1987-92 Research Plan as the highest priority Proposed New Project. It received overwhelming support during the April 1988 Research Review.

4. OTHER WORK WE MIGHT DO OVER THE NEXT 2 YEARS

In his 20/12/87 press release the Minister is also quoted as saying "the information to hand was that the wetlands were in a state of decline which was putting enormous pressure on the feeding and breeding habitats of ducks."

The Minister is concerned about the declining state (in the broadest sense) of the wetlands. So are we.

The second highest priority Proposed New Project in the 1987-92 Research Plan is titled the "State of the Wetlands". The aim of this project would be to develop procedures for periodic assessment (5 or 10 year intervals) of the rate of

loss (or gain) of wetland types. This information would be used to counteract the current piecemeal loss of wetland resources and to enable policy development, protective legislation, acquisition, management etc. to be targetted on areas of greatest need.

There are no plans to carry out this project during the 1987-92 period, due to lack of staff and financial resources.

Perhaps a proposal could be put to the Minister. EPA would need to be involved; one might even argue that it is more that agency's role than CALM's.

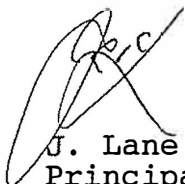
If the proposal were to proceed, most value would be obtained by starting with an assessment of the state of the wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain before looking more widely. The most recent (and only) assessment of these wetlands (or those of any other region in W.A. for that matter) was conducted in the mid 1960's by Dr T.L. Riggert then of Dept. of Fisheries and Fauna. We still have the aerial mosaics he used. A starting point could be to determine what changes have occurred since his assessment. To do anything worthwhile, however, would require additional staff and funding.

In the Research Plan I guesstimated the requirements as;
Phase i) 1 Research Scientist & 1/2 assistant plus \$10k for 1 year,
Phase ii) 1 Research Scientist & 1 assistant plus \$10k per annum for two years.

More recently I have had the opportunity to look at similar programs in Canada and the USA. I now believe a minimum worthwhile project would be more like 1 scientist and \$50 000 per annum for 2 years, plus two assistants for 18 months.

The project would involve development of a biologically meaningful system of classification; remote sensing, principally large scale colour aerial photography but also some experimental work with satellite imagery, and field surveys. Some re-analysis of Tom Riggert's early work would be warranted, due to advances in technology.

This Proposed New Project also received strong support during the recent Research Reviews.



J. Lane
Principal Research Scientist
May 18, 1988.

Jim Lane, Woodville.

Jim, Done of 13/5

As discussed, could you
As elevate this project
in your priorities.

This has become more
urgent on the basis
of pressure on Minister
from P's Society.

Would it work be
possible?

Thanks,

Jim. 14/5



from: ACTING DIRECTOR, NATURE CONSERVATION

To: (2) GENERAL MANAGER
(1) DIVISIONAL MANAGER, RESEARCH

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Enquiries:
Phone:

Subject: MINISTERIAL ANNOUNCEMENT RE DUCK SHOOTING

I refer to the Minister's announcement of 20 December 1987 concerning duck shooting. In one paragraph the Minister says CALM "has been instructed to give research emphasis to the problem". We have not received the instruction by any means other than the media announcement, nor are we likely to.

We could argue that we already give research (and management and reserve acquisition) emphasis to wetlands. On the other hand, however, both sides of the duck shooting debate agree that the most important issue is the loss of wetland habitat and degradation of remaining wetland habitat, and clearly we would like to be doing more about wetland conservation.

In the draft five-year research plan, the Wetlands and Waterbirds Program lists its primary objective number 2 as "to develop procedures for periodic assessment of the "state of the wetlands". It is then listed as number 2 in the High Priority category of Proposed New Projects, but is not listed under "Proposed Projects to be Started 1987-1991 (Existing Resources)", presumably because it cannot be done without additional resources.

I know there are competing priorities but nevertheless would appreciate the views of yourselves and Jim Lane on this matter. (Jim has seen the various Departmental papers on duck shooting and I have also sent him the relevant NPNCA papers.) In particular, do you now see an opportunity to make a case for extra resources in the Budget context or in a submission to the Minister?

K.J. McNamee

Keiran McNamara
ACTING DIRECTOR
OF NATURE CONSERVATION

23 December 1987

KMCN:SK

b/yp
RECOR
K. McNamara on 21/1/88
18/3/88
13/5/88

Not answer yet

Meeting held 3/3 between R. Underwood, B. Wilson, J. Lane & K. McNamara. Left with J. Lane to organise paper setting out what we do now (within CALM & through CALM funding, esp. to RFOG & Murdoch Univ) & what we might do over

CALM & briefing to Minister. 2/12/88

MEDIA STATEMENT
20-12-87.

(S)
MINISTER FOR CONSERVATION
AND LAND MANAGEMENT

The pressure of reduced rainfall and low water levels in the States wetlands, has forced the State Government to implement a moratorium on duck shooting.

Conservation and Land Management Minister Barry Hodge announced today there would be no duck shooting season this year or next. The season was due to commence in January.

Mr Hodge said results from CALM's ongoing monitoring of selected wetland water levels was the basis of the Government's annual decision on whether to proceed with a shooting season or not.

The monitoring programme had been operating since 1977.

He said the information to hand was that the wetlands were in a state of decline which was putting enormous pressure on the feeding and breeding habitats of ducks.

Even with good rains next year the duck population would still be under stress through the summer of 1988, Mr Hodge said.

"As well as a two-year moratorium on duck shooting, the Department of Conservation and Land Management has been instructed to give research emphasis to the problem."

Mr Hodge said the moratorium would not apply to the Mountain Duck where it appeared on farms and other private property. The species was prolific and a recognised pest, particularly in agricultural areas where it despoils farm dams.

Last year there were 2,957 licensed duck shooters in Western Australia.

For further information, please contact the Minister's office
on 325 4133