



## COALITION AGAINST DUCK SHOOTING

### SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE

“In 2013, 44 Victorians were killed in incidents arising from family violence. In the 12 months to June 2014, more than 65,000 reports of family violence were handled by Victoria Police, up from 60,500 the previous year and 35,700 in 2009-10.”

“What is needed is profound cultural change as well as constant reinforcement of the message that violence is not, and never will be, acceptable in our community or in our homes.”

– *The Age* editorial, January 21, 2015<sup>1</sup>

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting welcomes the establishment of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the commitment from Premier Daniel Andrews that “nothing will be off limits” and the government will implement all of its recommendations.

The Terms of Reference provide broad powers for the Commission to consider all relevant matters in providing practical, effective methods to stop the criminal violence in our homes.

As stated by Premier Andrews, family violence is the biggest law and order issue in Victoria and nationally. In 2015, the accelerated increase in reported cases, crisis calls, and particularly deaths as a result of family violence show the urgent need for immediate and long-term strategies and policies for prevention.

Australian family violence experts and relatives of deceased victims have called for government leadership, including changes to the law so killers who shoot their partners cannot escape a murder conviction (Rekiah’s Law)<sup>2</sup>. We support their call for a focus on perpetrators and a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to preventable family violence.<sup>3</sup> However, the measures canvassed and implemented to date seem more focused on known offenders rather than the majority of perpetrators.

The key concern of this submission is the urgent need to save lives and prevent the constant fear and threat of lethal violence by removing all guns from homes. According to Victoria Police, the majority of guns in Victoria are licensed for periodic, recreational purposes only<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, women and children are being killed and are living in fear of lethal violence. These days, with more people using ice, clearly a gun in the home is an invitation for trouble.

The evidence into family violence prevention from the World Health Organisation, Victoria’s Berry Street and other experts, referred to below, shows the presence of a gun in the home – regardless of how it is stored – constitutes ‘situational violence’ and significantly increases the likelihood of homicide, suicide and accidental shootings as a result of family violence.

We support recent calls for another national gun amnesty<sup>5</sup> and recommendations in international reviews by the World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>6</sup> and other experts calling for legislative action and ‘means control’ measures to limit access to guns as key strategies in family violence and suicide prevention<sup>7</sup>.

While the Coalition Against Duck Shooting, a non-profit organisation, is not actively involved in the field of family violence, we do know about gun violence and cruelty on Victoria's wetlands during recreational duck shooting seasons.

Over almost 30 years, CADS' campaign against recreational duck shooting has raised public awareness and helped change public opinion, so today the majority of Victorians regard the activity as animal cruelty and socially unacceptable.

The numbers of licensed duck shooters in Victoria have fallen from approximately 100,000 in 1986 to around 23,000 today and make up only 0.4 per cent of Victoria's population. Reducing the numbers of duck shooters in Victoria would consequently have reduced the numbers of shotguns in the community.

The promotion and government funding of duck shooting (and hunting generally) by previous Labor and Coalition governments has only led to an increase in the number of guns in the community.

### **1. The need for a 'no guns in homes' policy**

The evidence shows that the presence of a gun in the home significantly increases the likelihood of family-related homicide, suicide and accidental shooting deaths<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, results show that "regardless of storage practice, type of gun, or number of firearms in the home, having a gun in the home was associated with an increased risk of firearm homicide and firearm suicide in the home".<sup>9</sup>

The *Boys and Violence Literature Review*<sup>10</sup>, commissioned in 2011 by Berry Street, notes that easy access to guns increases the risk of 'situational violence'. On this point, the *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*<sup>11</sup> identifies "reducing access to guns" as a key strategy to prevent interpersonal violence and calls for "stronger legislation and enforcement of laws relevant for violence prevention".

We strongly believe that all firearms should be removed from Victorian homes (with certain exemptions, e.g. farm use for animals in distress). This would be an important step in the prevention of family violence and result in women and children, whether in violent relationships or not, feeling much safer in their own homes. Neighbours also have a right to know there are no guns stored near their homes or the places where their children play.

All guns should be stored safely with the Victoria Police. For example, guns could be stored in secure central and regional locations overseen by government and police. Currently in Victoria, security guards are required to keep their guns at work. (There are similar laws applying to security guards in Israel, and police officers in some US states, based on evidence of a higher incidence of family-related gun violence.)

- A 'no guns in homes' law would also make it safer for police officers and other first responders attending domestic disputes.
- It would prevent home sieges and stop unstable males with guns from holding relatives as hostages.<sup>12</sup>
- The police would be aware of the names and addresses of shooters who signed out their guns, together with their pattern of use.
- It would stop gun theft from homes which can currently lead to further crime.<sup>13</sup>

- Police would need extra resources for this new function, but finances would be recuperated as domestic violence and other gun crime reduced.

In one example, on May 29, 2015, in a radio segment on family violence on ABC's World Today, a victim 'Kate' said her partner "would do everything from punching and relentless punching, he's tried to run me over, I've had a double-barrelled shotgun at my head". Recent callers seeking legal advice on Jon Faine's program, ABC 774 Melbourne, include 'Joe in Korumburra' about an armed and increasingly dangerous neighbour (May 26, 2015); and an earlier caller who said the police confiscated but soon returned a gun to her abuser.

Following the Port Arthur massacre that killed 35 people in 1996, former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard showed vision and courage by banning semi-automatic weapons, making all Australians safer.

Howard had been warned that banning these weapons could end his political career, but still pushed to implement the ban because he believed it was the right thing to do. Even though he experienced the wrath and anger of the gun lobby, the public supported his policy and he not only won the next election (1998) but also remained Prime Minister for the next decade.

In the US, following the shocking Sandy Hook primary school shooting of 20 children, Republican and Democrat politicians in Congress and the Senate prevented President Obama from introducing tougher gun laws. The irony is that many of those politicians who had visited and cried with the parents of the slain children then bowed to pressure from the gun lobby and voted against tougher gun laws.

There is evidence that the number of guns in our society is related to the amount of crime. Since banning semi-automatics, no mass shootings have taken place in Australia. Also Dr Andrew Leigh MP (Time Magazine, June 2014) reports that comparisons across the different Australian states show the larger the number of guns turned in for John Howard's buyback, the bigger the drop in gun deaths.<sup>14</sup>

The World Health Organisation (WHO), in its 2014 Report on family violence prevention, recommends legislative action and restricting easy access to lethal weapons as key strategies for prevention. *Violence prevention: the Evidence* (World Health Organization 2010) also states "limiting access to firearms can prevent homicides, suicides and injuries and reduce the costs of these forms of violence to society. ... Jurisdictions with restrictive firearms legislation and lower firearms ownership tend to have lower levels of gun violence."

## **2. Children and guns**

Currently, children from the age of 12 (who are considered too young to vote or drive a car) can legally use lethal shotguns to shoot native waterbirds on Victorian wetlands during recreational duck shooting seasons. They can also use high-powered weapons to shoot deer.

While helping wounded birds in 2011, a female duck rescuer was shot in the face, not by an angry shooter but allegedly by a careless, inexperienced 14-year-old wielding a powerful shotgun.

A cycle of violence is handed down from father to son, commencing when shotguns are put into the hands of children from the age of 12. Instead of being taught kindness and compassion for animals, these children are taught to ignore the suffering of their victims crippled by shotgun pellets. The attitudes of their adult role models perpetuate a culture of callousness, insensitivity and a lack of empathy.

Government support and encouragement for shooters sends a contradictory message to the children and men who like guns. When state governments subsidise duck shooting and deer shooting, as well as the new Game Management Authority<sup>15</sup>, the message is that it's 'manly' to inflict fear, wounds and death on one's victims.

There is a large body of evidence showing an association between cruelty towards animals and antisocial behavior including violence and aggression toward other humans (Gullone, 2012).<sup>16</sup> See below: 2015 paper by Monash University Adjunct Associate Professor, Dr E. Gullone, 'Recreational Hunting, Animal Cruelty, Aggression against Humans: What's the difference?'

Animal abuse, including hunting and abuse of wild animals, has been linked to child abuse, the emotional development of the child, family violence, and serial murder (see: 'The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence', edited by Professor Andrew Linzey, 2011, <http://www.sussex-academic.com/sa/titles/CulturalSocialStudies/Linzey.htm>). The Victorian Government's own website provides information on 'The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence' (<http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets/care-and-welfare/animals-and-people/the-link-between-animal-abuse-and-human-violence>).<sup>17</sup>

The evidence shows an overlap in different types of violence and a close relationship between cruelty to animals and violence, aggression and anti-social behaviour towards people.<sup>18</sup> Yet currently in Victoria, a tiny minority of duck shooters – including children as young as 12 – are allowed and encouraged to use shotguns to kill and wound native waterbirds for recreational enjoyment.

The Victorian Government presently supports the 0.4 per cent of Victorians who shoot native waterbirds for recreation, yet ignores the 99.6 per cent who do not. The decision to allow this activity in 2015 follows bans established by Labor governments in Western Australia (1990), New South Wales (1995) and Queensland (2005) and contradicts long-standing policies of Victoria's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee and the RSPCA.

At a time when aggression across the world is escalating, Labor in Victoria is allowing children to be taught that violence and cruelty to sentient beings is acceptable. Surely society would benefit if this negative attitude was replaced with kindness and compassion.

We fully support Premier Dan Andrews in establishing the Royal Commission into Family Violence. He has said: "I can't promise to keep every woman and child safe, but I am prepared to try. The whole system is broken. It doesn't protect the vulnerable, it doesn't punish the guilty and more of the same policies will only mean more of the same tragedies."<sup>19</sup>

So we hope the Royal Commission will put the safety and security of women and children ahead of the interests of Victoria's recreational gun owners and seriously consider the proposal to remove guns from homes.

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## **Recreational Hunting, Animal Cruelty, Aggression against Humans: What's the difference?**

Animal cruelty happens for a number of reasons. These can range from the satisfaction that the perpetrator experiences from causing the suffering of another sentient being to the instrumental motivation of achieving another desired end (e.g., harming an animal as revenge against the animal's carer). For the perpetrator, the suffering of the animal is either the desired outcome or an inconsequential part of achieving their goal. When a lack of consideration or care for the suffering of the victim is present, animal cruelty has been committed.

Following extensive review of the literature, in my 2012 book, I defined animal cruelty as *behaviour performed...proactively by an individual with the deliberate intention of causing harm (i.e. pain, suffering, distress and/or death) to an animal with the understanding that the animal is motivated to avoid that harm*. Recreational hunting clearly fits within this definition. Such behaviour demonstrates compromised empathy and compassion.

The self-conscious emotion of empathy serves to connect individuals with the emotional state of others. As a social species, our need for interpersonal attachments and social relationships is strong. Feeling connected to others through the formation of social attachments is fundamental to our physical and psychological health. Social emotions, including empathy are central to meeting our need to connect. Not surprisingly, humans have an innate tendency to attend to and recognize the emotional needs of others (Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1990).

Compassion is also central to meeting our connectedness needs. It has been described as a state of mind that promotes healthy interpersonal connections and healthy societies. Compassion is a mental attitude of nonviolence. It promotes behaviour that is non-harming and nonaggressive and is based on the desire that others are free of suffering. Compassion brings about a feeling of unbearableness when faced with the suffering of another sentient being including non-human animals.

Compromised empathy and compassion are dysfunctional for a social species such as humans.

Killing animals in the form of hunting for purely recreational purposes is no less than a demonstration of compromised empathy and compassion. How could it be otherwise since deriving enjoyment from a behaviour that causes suffering and harm must be devoid of compassion. Suffering is an inevitable part of hunting. There are few quick deaths. A documented one in four waterbirds shot down will not be killed but will die a slow and painful death. (see: <http://www.rspcavic.org/issues-take-action/duck-shooting/>).

Despite majority opposition from a concerned public, hunting of our native water birds for recreational purposes remains a legal activity in Victoria and South Australia. The changing tide of public opinion regarding the way we should interact with wildlife has seen a significant and steady decline in numbers of licensed shooters. For example, the number of licensed duck shooters in Victoria, Australia has declined from 95,000 in 1986 to 26,000 in 2013. Once commonly regarded a legitimate form of recreation, it is now seen by the majority of the Australian population as outright animal cruelty (see: <http://www.rspcavic.org/issues-take-action/duck-shooting/>) and is engaged in by only a minority of the Australian adult population. Highlighting this, in 2012 the number of licensed firearm holders was documented as being 3.32% (see: <http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/australia>). This number is smaller still for recreational shooters since not all licensed gun owners actively engage in hunting. Thus, hunting is a behaviour representing a clear minority of the Australian adult population and can be considered non-normative (i.e., deviant).

In an investigation of the associations between violence, animal cruelty and hunting behaviours, it was found that those who reported that they hunted were approximately twice as likely to engage in violence toward animals as non-hunters (Flynn, 2002). Hunters were also more than twice as likely compared to non-hunters to have damaged or destroyed someone else's property during their high school years. This finding is consistent with a large body of evidence showing an association between cruelty



toward animals and antisocial behaviour including violence and aggression toward other humans (Gullone, 2012).

The belief that our treatment of animals is closely related to the way we treat our fellow human beings has a long history as documented in the works of classical writers including Pythagoras and Porphyry, medieval scholars including Thomas Aquinas, and early philosophers such as Montaigne (1533-1592) and John Locke (1632-1704). Although lost and forgotten for a period this thinking began to resurface in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when prominent individuals (e.g., Margaret Mead) again expressed the view that cruelty to animals hardens the heart and desensitizes one to the suffering of others.

By the late 1900s, acceptance of the relationship between the way we treat animals and the way we treat each other strengthened, based largely on consistent findings of a relationship between cruelty to animals and aggression toward humans. It is now accepted by professionals and scientists alike that mistreating animals is not an isolated behaviour but part of a constellation of antisocial behaviours. The strong co-occurrence between animal cruelty and human aggression has been referred to as “the link” (<http://nationallinkcoalition.org/>). Indeed even Australian government bodies have acknowledged the link (<http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets/care-and-welfare/animals-and-people/the-link-between-animal-abuse-and-human-violence>).

Children who are cruel to animals are more likely to bully other children. Adults who are cruel to animals are more likely to commit other crimes, particularly violent crimes including partner or child abuse. At the more extreme end of this behavioural continuum, there is evidence supporting a link between serial and mass murders and obscene animal torture.

There is also evidence that the incidence of crime is associated with the number of firearms in circulation in society. The 1996 legislation which limited the availability of firearms, resulted in a documented decrease in crime in Australia. In a Time Magazine Opinion piece (June, 2014) (<http://time.com/author/andrew-leigh/>), Andrew Leigh noted that in the decade prior to the 1996 buyback, there was an average of one mass

shooting (five or more victims) every year in Australia. In the decade since that have been no mass shootings.

Other data provided by Mouzos and Rushford in their 2003 paper indicate that the numbers of firearm-related deaths between 1991 (pre-gun buy back) and 2001 (post-gun buy back) were 629 and 333, respectively. This represents a 47 percent decrease. According to Leigh's numbers, comparisons across the different Australian states indicate that the bigger the number of guns turned in for buy back, the bigger the drop in gun deaths.

Leigh concluded his piece by stating that: *"Gun deaths are more likely to occur when a depressed teen finds dad's gun, when an angry spouse turns a rifle on their cheating partner, or when a young boy opens the bedside drawer and starts playing with the a loaded pistol inside.... more guns, more crime."*

Regardless of the reason for owning that gun, its mere presence poses a risk for society and encourages violence. Thus, a ban of recreational shootings, which would further decrease the number of firearms in circulation would very likely result in a further decrease in crime. This is particularly true since recreational shooters are such a small (3%) non-representative group of the Australian population who more likely than not have compromised levels of compassion.

We also know that there is an association between how strongly human and animal rights are observed. In nations where human rights are violated and compassion is compromised, there are higher levels of abuse toward humans and toward animals. Aggression is more likely to be accepted and tolerated. Much has been written about the normalizing of aggression through its acceptance, resulting in the development of normative beliefs about aggression. In other words, aggressive behaviour is reinforced in environments that accept it or promote the belief that it is culturally acceptable. Legalising aggression and cruelty promotes their social acceptance.

Environments that support aggression will have a larger number of aggressive people who will pass on that behaviour to the next generation through their actions and



attitudes. Legalized aggression is particularly perverse. In the forward to the World Health Organisation's 2002 report on violence and health ([http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/en/introduction.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/introduction.pdf)), the late Nelson Mandela stated that the 20th century leaves us with a legacy of violence inflicted on a scale never seen before in human history. "This suffering is a legacy that reproduces itself, as new generations learn from the violence of generations past, as victims learn from victimizers, and as the social conditions that nurture violence are allowed to continue." Cruelty and aggression leave little room for kindness and compassion. It follows that societies that sanction higher levels and degrees of animal cruelty will have lower general levels of empathy and compassion for all sentient beings, including humans.

Young people, whose attitudes are still undergoing processes of formation, are most at risk, particularly those who have a biological vulnerability toward aggression or who come from homes that have a higher tolerance for aggressive behaviours. Confusing messages are communicated when cruel and aggressive behaviours are described as "normal" and even as "recreational" or "fun". Research shows that the attitudes and behaviours of powerful role models (i.e. politicians, parents, teachers) have a strong influence on children's attitudes and behaviours. Family members are particularly influential.

Children who witness aggression, legal or illegal, such as domestic violence or animal cruelty (including hunting) or who are victims of abuse, are more likely to themselves become abusers of others less powerful than them. This can be other children or more often, animals. For a sub-group of more aggressive children (the early starters) whose antisocial behaviour will continue into adulthood (estimated to be as high as 10%), victims will be both humans and animals. Hence, there is strong research evidence to inform us that it is very bad policy to encourage children to hunt, as is currently legal in Victoria. Rather, it is strongly recommended that children be vigorously discouraged from even witnessing such behaviour.

In conclusion, given consensus between professionals and scientists, authoritative animal welfare organisations (e.g., RSPCA), and the general public that hunting is cruel

and that hunting of Australian waterbirds, in particular, cannot be considered a recreational activity on any grounds (including grounds of environmental sustainability), it is incumbent on any responsible government to ban the activity and declare it illegal once and for all.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> For example, see: 'Families of Rekihah O'Donnell and Kara Doyle call for tougher laws for abusive men who kill partners', Herald Sun, by Elissa Doherty and Matt Johnston, May 14, 2015, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/families-of-rekihah-odonnell-and-kara-doyle-call-for-tougher-laws-for-abusive-men-who-kill-partners/story-fni0fee2-1227355697118>
- <sup>3</sup> See also, The United Nations multi-country study on men and violence in Asia and the Pacific (2013), <http://www.partners4prevention.org/about-prevention/research/men-and-violence-study>
- <sup>4</sup> Recreational hunting is the main reason given for gun ownership in Victoria: see 'What's the geography of licensed firearms?', Crikey blog The Urbanist, by Dr Alan Davies, Pollard Davies Consultants, June 30, 2014, <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/theurbanist/2014/06/30/whats-the-geography-of-licensed-firearms/>. See also, Victoria Police, 'Our Services - Hunters', [http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document\\_ID=34497](http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=34497)
- <sup>5</sup> For example, see counter-terrorism expert Nick O'Brien, head of the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security, on Lateline, ABC TV, May 20, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2015/s4239477.htm>
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- <sup>7</sup> Preventing suicide: A global imperative, World Health Organisation 2014, [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/suicide-prevention/world\\_report\\_2014/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/world_report_2014/en/); see also, 'Guns & Suicide: The Hidden Toll', <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine-features/guns-and-suicide-the-hidden-toll/>
- <sup>8</sup> For example, see: Gun Safety & Public Health: Policy Recommendations for a More Secure America – Basic Facts about gun ownership in America, The National Physicians Alliance and the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence (2013), <http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-safety-public-health-policy-recommendations-for-a-more-secure-america/>
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- <sup>11</sup> Jointly published by WHO, the UN Development Programme, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *op. cit.*
- <sup>12</sup> For example, see: 'Police storm home to end siege', by Patrick Billings, The Examiner, February 11, 2015, <http://www.examiner.com.au/story/2878189/police-storm-home-to-end-siege/>
- <sup>13</sup> The Organised Crime in Australia 2015 report (released May 20) found an increase in gun thefts and that the 'grey market' was the main source of guns used in organised crime. See: <https://www.crimecommission.gov.au/publications/intelligence-products/organised-crime-australia/organised-crime-australia-2015>

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<sup>14</sup> Dr Andrew Leigh MP, 'Dear NRA: My country is proof that reducing guns reduces deaths', Time magazine, June 5, 2014, <http://time.com/author/andrew-leigh/>. Also Huffington Post, etc, syndicated opinion piece, June 10, 2014,

[http://www.andrewleigh.com/dear\\_nra\\_my\\_country\\_is\\_proof\\_that\\_reducing\\_guns\\_reduces\\_deaths](http://www.andrewleigh.com/dear_nra_my_country_is_proof_that_reducing_guns_reduces_deaths)

<sup>15</sup> The independent Game Management Authority, established in July 2014, was modelled on the NSW Game Council that was disbanded due to conflict of interest (under the Dunn Report). See: 'Game Council to be abolished', Sydney Morning Herald, by Sean Nicholls, July 4, 2013,

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/game-council-to-be-abolished-20130704-2pdte.html>

<sup>16</sup> The cases of animal cruelty reported in Victoria have also skyrocketed (RSPCA, December 2014). See: 'Drugged pet owners abusing or killing their animals in alarming numbers, says RSPCA', The Age, by Alana Schetzer, December 13, 2014, <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/drugged-pet-owners-abusing-or-killing-their-animals-in-alarming-numbers-says-rspca-20141212-1254vx.html>

<sup>17</sup> See also, The National Link Coalition, the US-based National Resource Center on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence, <http://nationallinkcoalition.org/>

<sup>18</sup> Berry Street caseworkers regard 'harming animals' as a 'high risk' indicator of family violence: see 'Berry Street case workers help women at risk of domestic violence plan their escape', Herald Sun, by Kathryn Powley, June 28, 2014, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/berry-street-case-workers-help-women-at-risk-of-domestic-violence-plan-their-escape/story-fni0fit3-1226969291989>

<sup>19</sup> The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria, 'Premier Announces Royal Commission Into Family Violence', Media Release, December 23, 2014,

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/premier-announces-royal-commission-into-family-violence>