

Summary of stakeholder consultation: Non-indigenous bird management in Victoria

Introduction

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) is developing a new risk-based approach to the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria, in line with DEPI's broader principles for managing biosecurity risks. The new approach aims to:

- Reduce the risks associated with non-indigenous birds that have the potential to become invasive species in Victoria
- Provide a framework which allows the Victorian Government to identify and manage threats to Victoria from non-indigenous birds
- Ensure there will be no impediment to the current keeping of non-indigenous birds in Victoria.

A discussion paper was prepared to raise awareness of the Victorian Government's proposed policy and seek stakeholder comments on the new approach. Consultation commenced in May 2013 for a period of 6 weeks. A total of 72 individuals representing 69 different organisations were invited to participate in the consultation. Twenty-five individuals representing 23 different organisations participated via a briefing session or webinar and a total of 17 submissions were received on the discussion paper.

This summary reports on the submissions received from stakeholders on the discussion paper. The next stage of the consultation process is the publication of the Department's response to the comments raised during consultation on the Department's website.

Overview of stakeholders' responses

All stakeholders were very positive about the engagement and consultation process. They appreciated that they had been engaged early in the process and that they had been contacted individually. Submissions were generally supportive and constructive, although there was discrepancy between respondents and elements of the discussion paper.

All stakeholders recognise the need to have policy to manage threats from non-indigenous birds. Some stakeholders believe that the proposed approach would not be strong enough to reduce risks from non-indigenous birds. Other stakeholders believe that some elements may be too prescriptive. Even so, there are several areas where there is significant agreement across all stakeholders. There was also general agreement on the importance of preventing high threat potential species from entering the State, that DEPI has a key role in managing high threat potential species in the wild and that there are opportunities to link into existing bird watching networks to detect non-indigenous birds.

Areas where stakeholder views varied widely are detailed in the sections below. It is also important to note that a strong message from all stakeholders was the desire to continue to be involved in development and implementation of the policy.

Problem definition

Stakeholders agree with the need for a policy. There is broad acceptance that non-indigenous birds require management to reduce the threat that they pose to the environment. However, some stakeholders suggest that further evidence is needed to support the claim that non-indigenous birds currently kept in private collections in Victoria pose a real threat.

Scope of the proposed approach

Stakeholders agree that the scope of the policy should include all non-indigenous birds and that DEPI and the community each have roles in their control in the wild. There is general support for the prevention of species with an extreme or serious threat potential from entering the State. Some stakeholders expressed a concern about relying too heavily on awareness raising and promoting responsible ownership as a means of effective management of those species that are currently kept in Victoria. There is also concern amongst many stakeholders about the exclusion of game species, since this appears to contradict the scope of the policy and the risk management approach.

Some stakeholders feel that the proposed approach of allowing the importation, breeding and keeping of known high threat potential non-indigenous bird species currently kept in private collections, so as

not to impose any additional regulatory burden, contradicts the risk-based approach proposed by DEPI.

Developing a new approach to non-indigenous birds

Component 1: Certain non-indigenous bird species of significant concern to Victoria that are not known to be in Australia should not be brought into, kept or sold in Victoria.

There is broad support for this component of the proposed approach across all stakeholders. Generally stakeholders felt that preventing species that are not known to be in Australia from establishing in Victoria was a logical and prudent approach.

Component 2: Certain non-indigenous bird species that are known to be in Australia and have high pest potential and/or complex husbandry should be limited to zoological institutions.

There is broad agreement amongst stakeholders that non-indigenous birds with complex husbandry should be limited to zoological institutions. There are differing views on whether birds with high threat potential should also be limited to zoological institutions. Aviculturists are concerned that this may require the removal of some species currently held in private collections, which could also create an incentive for their release. In contrast, some other stakeholders feel that any species deemed high threat potential, should not be kept, regardless of the facility.

Component 3: Non-indigenous bird species that are known to be in Victoria in private collections should NOT be subject to a permit system or other type of increase in regulatory burden.

Some stakeholders do not agree with this component. Their view is that the objectives of the proposed approach cannot be achieved without regulation. The aviculture community support the attempt to avoid regulatory burden, however they do concede that a stronger approach, such as a record keeping system, may be required.

Component 3a: For those species determined to pose a sufficiently high threat of establishment in the wild in Victoria, the feral or wild populations of those species should be managed by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries as appropriate.

There is general support amongst stakeholders for DEPI taking responsibility for the management of high threat non-indigenous bird species that are detected in the wild and are deemed to be eradicable. Some stakeholders noted that it will be critical for DEPI to establish specific systems or protocols, as well as ensure adequate resources and expertise are available to fulfil this role. This includes ensuring humane methods are used to manage these populations. There is also interest amongst stakeholders to work in partnership with DEPI to build on current monitoring by bird watchers, and develop a process for notification of non-indigenous bird sightings.

Component 3b: Those species determined not to pose a high threat of establishment in the wild in Victoria should be exempt from invasive species legislation in Victoria.

A number of stakeholders disagree with the approach outlined in Component 3b. Their main concerns are that this approach relies very heavily on the risk assessment process and they have concerns about the accuracy of previous risk assessment processes. Stakeholders also want further information on how DEPI will support community-led action.

Component 4: Non-indigenous quail, pheasants, and partridges should continue to be managed as Game species in Victoria.

There is opposition to this component from many stakeholders. The exclusion of game species appears to be inconsistent with both the scope of the policy (all non-indigenous birds) and taking a risk-based approach. Some stakeholders suggested that some game species could be among the highest risk species.

Component 5: Non-indigenous bird species that are widely established in Victoria should be exempt from legislation in Victoria.

There are differing views on this component. Some stakeholders recognise that it is not reasonable to impose a legal responsibility to control these birds on landowners, while others felt there were situations where landowners should carry some responsibilities. Some stakeholders were concerned that exempting widespread species from legislation could impede the ability to manage them.

Risk assessment process

Stakeholders want to ensure that the risk-assessment process demonstrates best practice and that terminology used is unambiguous. The current proposal does not clarify the specific risk assessment process that will be used, and particularly whether it will include input from stakeholders.

Coordination with other policy and legislation

Stakeholders support the coordination of the proposed approach in Victoria with policy and legislation at the national level and in other jurisdictions.

Flexibility of the proposed approach

Stakeholders had mixed views on whether the proposed approach offers enough flexibility to respond to possible future changes (political, biophysical, social, economic). However, they did suggest that these concerns could be managed through effective partnerships with key stakeholders.

Impact of the proposed approach on stakeholder organisations/sectors

The avicultural community noted that the impacts of the proposed approach as it currently stands are limited. However, the impacts will not be fully understood until the outcomes of the risk assessments are known. The animal welfare sector noted that the proposed approach might increase the incidence of cruelty to animals if community-led action is not carefully managed.

Further stakeholder engagement

There was a high level of interest among most stakeholders for further consultation and involvement in the development of the policy and its ongoing implementation. The consultation process used to date was well received by stakeholders, but it is important to consider that expectations of future consultation may now be high. There is some interest amongst stakeholders in a more formal advisory committee to assist with progressing the policy. Topics that could form the basis for further engagement include:

- Ensuring that the risk assessment process utilises 'best practice'
- Communicating the outcomes of the risk assessment process (e.g. permitted list)
- Improving record keeping of private collections
- Improving notification and response for non-indigenous birds detected in the wild.