



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
13th Assembly

Petition

Registration No.	17
Title	SAVE OUR SEASON – MAGPIE GEESE HUNTING
Presented on	23 November 2017
Presented by	Mrs Lia Finocchiaro MLA, Member for Spillett
Referred to	Minister for Tourism and Culture
Date referred	23 November 2017
Response due	8 May 2018
Response received	13 February 2018
Response presented	13 March 2018

Petition

The 2017 NT Waterfowl Hunting season has been reduced from 17 weeks to just eight weeks duration and the bag limit for Magpie Geese from previously 10 geese to only three per person per day. The science has not taken into account where over a million geese have gone to since 2013.

Hunters are being made to make a huge concession to help the recovery of the population in the Northern Territory while little is being done to improve breeding habitat, reduce the commercial limits and the indigenous harvest of geese and eggs.

We therefore ask the Legislative Assembly to:

Immediately do a Dry season count of the magpie goose population and if it shows the numbers have increased to over 1 million instigate a five goose bag limit this hunting season. From 2018 return to an Adaptive Management System of 17-week hunting seasons and a 10-geese bag limit for a minimum of five consecutive years to assess the harvest rate, sustainability of hunting and resilience of the magpie goose population in the Northern Territory.

Response

Waterfowl Hunting Season

- On 1 September 2017, I, the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources declared the waterfowl hunting season for 2017 to be open from 27 October 2017 to 23 December 2017, with a daily bag limit of three magpie geese and 10 ducks per person.

- The significant reduction in season length and bag limit for geese in 2017 followed advice from scientists in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, who undertake systematic annual surveys of the Northern Territory's magpie goose population and recommend hunting season conditions that will help ensure long-term sustainability of the magpie goose harvest.
- The aerial survey in May 2017 estimated the 2017 magpie goose population to be 725 000. This is the lowest on record and only one quarter of the estimated population in 2012
- In 2011 to 2013, the total magpie goose population was between 2.4 and 2.9 million. After an extremely poor Wet season in 2012-3, the population plummeted to 1.3 million and has continued to decline since, with the very poor Wet in 2015.6 again having a major negative impact.
- The reduction in the hunting season represents a balanced approach that maintains some recreational hunting while adjusting responsibly to promote the recovery of the NT magpie goose population.
- Pest mitigation permits, which allow farmers to cull magpie geese that are damaging crops, were also restricted to protect the magpie goose population.
- Annual estimates for the NT magpie goose population are based on "Wet season" aerial surveys undertaken in March-May, which allows both goose numbers and the amount of nesting to be accurately estimated. A long history of such systematic surveys since 1983 allows current population estimates to be considered in the context of longer term trends.
- Dry season surveys provide a less accurate estimate of total population numbers and add no additional understanding of population trends to that obtained through the annual Wet season surveys. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources did not undertake a Dry season survey in 2017 and does not plan to undertake such surveys in future.
- A systematic aerial survey for magpie geese across the full extent of Top End floodplains will be undertaken in April 2018, and the population and nesting data from that survey will provide information about appropriate conditions for the 2018 waterfowl hunting season. I will announce the 2018 season conditions in July.
- The NT Government is committed to an evidence-based approach to managing the annual waterfowl hunting season. Adjusting annual season length, bag limit and pest mitigation permits in response to observed population trends represents best practice adaptive wildlife management.
- The NT Government has provided a grant to NT Field and Game for incentives to waterfowl hunters to provide permit returns, which will help improve the data that informs decisions about hunting season length and bag limits.
- The NT Government also continues to support land owners to manage threats to magpie goose habitat, including through the Aboriginal Ranger Grants program. In 2018, this program will provide capital equipment and project funds for ranger groups to manage weeds and feral animals in the Daly, Finniss, Moyle, Reynolds, Murgensella, Arafura, Tiwi and Eastern Arnhem wetlands