

FAUNA PROTECTION COUNCIL

By C. L. LAUER.

As lovers of Australian Fauna have realised for a considerable time, our Australian fauna has been, and is being, ruthlessly exploited as a result of the activities of large-scale professional trappers and others.

To attempt a concerted move to influence the Commonwealth and States Governments to stamp out the trapping and trade in Australia of native fauna, and the export of such fauna, which is being carried out, 17 organisations, including Bird Observers' Club, Combined Animal Welfare Organisations of Victoria (comprising eight major societies), Gould League of Birdlovers of Victoria, International Committee for Bird Preservation, Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, The Country Women's Association of Victoria, The Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association, and other interested bodies, have formed a Fauna Protection Council.

An outline of the Council's proposals, with a request for appropriate action to achieve their objectives—has been forwarded to the Prime Minister of Australia and also the Minister for Customs.

Following on requests by this body the Government Fauna Protection Departments in the different States of the Commonwealth and of Port Moresby (New Guinea) have supplied details of their protected birds and mammals and also details of the numbers of each species for which permits were issued for trade and/or export from 1st July 1957 to 30th June 1958. The Customs Department have also advised that during the period from June 1957 to September 1958 export permits were issued for approximately 41,000 parrots and finches, 400 other bird species, and 500 native Australian animals.

In connection therewith it is estimated that, of the original number trapped, 75 per

cent. die before the dealers receive them from the trappers, and at least 400,000 birds were trapped between 1st July 1957 and 30th June 1958 to satisfy the export and Australian internal trade. One writer has declared:

"No bird population can withstand this encroachment; it is only a matter of time before a lot of our native birds become extinct."

Section 92 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth has presented many difficulties in connection with the desires of State Authorities to restrict the interstate trade which is carried on in Australian fauna. The suggestion has been made to The Parliament of the Commonwealth Constitution Review Committee that Section 92 of the Constitution be amended by adding a paragraph reading:

"Nothing in this Section shall affect the operation of any law of the Commonwealth or any State for the protection of fauna and flora."

If this suggested amendment becomes Federal law it will enable the State Parliaments to carry out policies of protection of fauna; at present, fauna are often trapped in one State and sold in another.

In these circumstances, although the fauna may be protected in both the States in question, such fauna becomes the subject of interstate trade, and it would appear that Section 92 prevents successful legal action being taken by either State. It would also appear that the Section is being purposely used to this effect.

Recently a conference was held in Canberra between representatives of the States and of the Commonwealth in connection with the trapping and trade in Australian fauna.

The decisions of the conference are awaited with anxiety by all lovers of Australian fauna.