

NEWS

## Calling for ceasefire on duck season

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*Duck hunting continues to divide northern Victoria. Picture: Ken Jenkins*

WILDLIFE campaigners are calling for ceasefire on this year's duck shooting season because of a drop in game-duck numbers.

The groups claim their support to stop the shooting was growing and now indigenous communities were supporting their cause to protect the native birds.

Final submissions have been made to the Game Management Authority which was expected to make recommendations to state environment and agriculture ministers within weeks.

Last year's shooting season ran for just 20 days, down from 38 days the year before and 64 in 2019. The 2021 bag limit was five bird per day per shooter.

Lobby group Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting said in its submission that previous governments had cancelled duck shooting in 2003, 2007 and 2008 in "less dire circumstances".

"In ever increasing numbers, the voices of multiple First Nations clans, businesses, unions, environment and wildlife groups, are shouting out in support of regional Victorians' plea for a ceasefire on the gunning down of native birds," the group's spokesperson, Sue Williams, said.

"Half page ads running in major papers show an alliance of more than 60 organisations, representing hundreds of thousands of Victorians, expecting elected members of parliament to heed their citizens and legislate an end to the annual recreational shooting of Australia's native waterbirds – many species unique to our country.

"Each year, the Victorian government allows thousands of normally peaceful public waterways to become what many call blood baths, for up to three months, due to what is essentially a hobby for a small minority and no longer acceptable to most.

"Known as duck hunting to some people, the practice is detrimental to others including those living nearby who call it by a different name – a living hell."

The group said many areas used for shooting were of significant cultural heritage.

"Recreational native waterbird shooting is not compatible to numerous First Nations clans' cultural aspirations. To some, duck species may be a sacred cultural totem.

The Game Management Authority's briefing paper said the annual Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey reported that 48 per cent of surveyed wetlands held no waterbirds and that game duck abundance fell by 58 per cent compared to last year.

A GMA spokeswoman said the authority was now considering five submissions from animal welfare and hunting organisations.

Shooters have conducted their own counts in the past and say they promote sustainable duck hunting.

An announcement on this year's season is expected in early February.