

Gearing up for season

BY ALEX DALZIEL

WIMMERA'S lakes and wetlands are set to see an influx of shooters in the coming months, as Victoria's duck hunting season kicks off - however, not all are welcoming the activity.

The Victorian Game Management Authority released 2022's duck hunting season arrangements, which will begin on March 16 and end on June 13.

Changes from 2021's season include an additional three days of hunting and an increased bag limit of four game ducks per day.

The electorate of Lowan has 1074 licensed duck shooters, or 2.48 per cent of voters, representing a high proportion compared with the rest of the state.

Hunting group Wimmera Duck Pluckers member Tom said shooters were happy with 2022's rules and would like to see an additional bag limit increase.

"Very happy on the season we have been given this

year compared to last year's season, this year allowing us three extra additional days to hunt on top of a full-length season," they said.

"Although we are confused on the hunter's daily bag limit, considering the amount of rain central and eastern Victoria; which has caused a large breeding boom in the last 12 months."

Two species excluded from this year's hunt were the blue-winged shoveler and the hardhead, which were both listed as protected species due to population decline.

In 2021, the duck hunting season was moved into a partial hiatus due to the state's COVID-19 restrictions.

Victorian Game Management Authority said the full-length season was recommended based on modeling from two experts in waterfowl ecology and population dynamics.

The experts advised that reducing the bag limit was a more effective way to reduce the overall harvest of game

ducks rather than reducing season length.

Increasing concern

In 2022, the duck hunting season has been met with vocal opposition from a variety of animal rights and ecology groups.

An open letter advertised in newspapers across the state saw almost 70 community groups and organisations call for an end to the practice

Story continues, P5.

Hunting debate continues

BY ALEX DALZIEL

FROM, P1.

The group behind the letter, Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc. argued hunters have become a small minority and the activity was longer deemed to be acceptable to most in the community.

A spokesperson for the group said the letter, which received support from a wide range of community voices, represented an unheard majority wanting to end duck hunting.

"You have 70 organisations, and there was a mix of first nations clans, environmental groups, business groups and unions representing hundreds of thousands of Victorian voters that are all wanting duck

shooting stopped in this state for different reasons," the spokesperson said.

"Unfortunately, they are all feeling ignored.

"It is a bit of a mystery why, in 2022, the Victorian government is still allowing this minority recreation."

The spokesperson said duck hunting, conducted on lakes, rivers, wetlands and reserves across the region would drive-off much-needed tourist traffic to the Wimmera's natural landmarks.

"A lot of these waterways are not signposted as shooting areas, nor are they monitored. The implications safety-wise of unknowing tourists going into these areas is significant," the spokesperson said.

"There are one in four Victorians that now live in

regional areas. Quite often they are near these public waterways where shooting is allowed to start from before sunrise and go all day every day for 90 days.

"It is horrific, and unless you live with it a lot of people don't realise what it is like - to have gunfire all day near your home."

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting has also brought attention to new findings from Tourism Research Australia about the economic contribution of birdwatching tourism.

According to the Tourism Research Australia report, there were 1.4 million tourists who birdwatched in Australia and spent \$2.88 billion for the year ending in December 2019.