

Duck hunting season extended, bag limits increased

BY ELLIE CLARINGBOLD

RECREATIONAL duck hunters will enjoy an extended shooting season this year, as well as an increased daily bag limit when the season begins next week, in a move that has drawn mixed responses from the local community.

The duck hunting season will begin on March 19 and run until June 9, an increase of 27 days on last year's season, with start times set for 8am for the first five days of the season, and 30 minutes before sunrise for its remainder.

Like last year, the blue-winged shoveler cannot be hunted due to its threatened status, however the hardhead has re-joined the approved hunting list for the first time in three years.

Daily bag limits have been set at nine, up from six last year, and the use of lead shot for quail hunting remains banned.

In a statement, the Victorian government reiterated its position that recreational duck and quail hunting is a "legitimate activity", cemented after it rejected the recommendation of a Labor-led parliamentary inquiry in 2023 to ban the sport.

Minister for Outdoor Recreation Steve Dimopoulos said duck hunting matters to thousands of Victorians who love the great outdoors.

"We're making sure it can continue sustainably and responsibly – backed by science," he said.

"Our wounding reduction action plan will improve animal welfare and is a significant step to make sure recreational hunting can continue sustainably in Victoria."

As part of this wounding reduction action plan, all new hunters seeking a licence this year will be required to complete mandatory online knowledge and Aboriginal cultural awareness training, while those renewing their licence from 2026 will also have to complete the training.

The Connewarre-based Field & Game Australia celebrated the announcement of this year's hunting season conditions as "progress" and applauded the state government's decision to lock in season dates for the next three years.

"Hunters have long called for a return to consistency, transparency and evidence-based decision-making – and

this announcement delivers on that expectation," the organisation said in a statement.

"This commitment must not be a temporary concession, but a lasting precedent for all future governments to follow."

But Birdlife Australia said it remained "deeply disappointed" in the Victorian government's decision to continue duck hunting across the state and launched a petition urging for a halt to the "outdated and ecologically harmful practice".

Meanwhile, Geelong Duck Rescue has labelled the season's return as a "disgusting betrayal of our native birds and the Victoria people".

Regional Victorian Opposed to Duck Shooting has taken a similar position, calling the sport a "financial disaster" that drives away tourists and threatens the wellbeing of communities impacted by the noise and shock associated with the activity.

More information about this year's duck hunting season, including wetland closures, head to gma.vic.gov.au