

State backs new-look recreational hunting

By Peter Bannan

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THE Victorian Government has announced a raft of new changes to recreational hunting while doubling down on its support of a "legitimate recreational activity".

The government said the "sensible" changes would ensure the activity remained "safe, sustainable and responsible".

Outdoor Recreation Minister Steve Dimopoulos said the new Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2024 would take effect tomorrow.

"In announcing these new regulations, the Labor government reaffirms its support of game hunting as a legitimate recreational activity that contributes positively to our regional economies," Mr Dimopoulos said.

The support comes despite a parliamentary inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements, which urged the government to discontinue the activity on all public and private land from 2024.

"The committee's rationale is driven by the considerable environmental evidence of long-term decline in native bird populations and a worsening outlook as our climate continues to change," Legislative Council Select Committee chair and Labor MP Ryan Batchelor said last year.

Mr Dimopoulos said the government had consulted with peak hunting groups, animal welfare advocates and traditional owners to ensure that the right protections were in place for both the environment and the public.

"The changes include important updates to improve public safety, such

as taking a commonsense approach to hunting start times for duck hunting seasons and further measures to help tackle illegal spotlighting of deer," he said.

"To support these new regulations, the government is investing in better compliance with more officers in the field to make sure the rules are followed.

"The government is also upholding its commitment to ban lead shot for quail hunting from 2025 while confirming that lead-based ammunition will continue to be permitted for deer hunting."

Other changes include improving animal welfare by requiring hunters to make all reasonable efforts to immediately dispatch struck deer and allowing the use of handheld thermal imaging devices for hunting deer during daytime.

These reforms are supported by a \$10.1 million investment over four years.

This is in addition to \$11.6 million announced in the Victorian Budget 2024-25 to bolster compliance and enforcement in recreational hunting.

Mr Dimopoulos said the new regulations also addressed the need for fairness and transparency in hunting licence fees, ensuring all hunters continued to contribute to the sustainable management of Victoria's wildlife while enjoying their time outdoors.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting spokesperson Kerrie Allen welcomed the ban of lead

ammunition and electronic callers for quail hunting.

"It's disappointing the government has backflipped on the proposed ban of toxic lead in all game hunting," Ms Allen said.

"There is permanent damage being done to our environment, our fragile ecosystems and our own health.

"It's extremely disappointing there's been no reduction in the length of shooting season or vast expanse of public land permitted for native bird hunting.

"Less than half of 1 per cent of the population participate in recreational native bird shooting.

"Why must they be permitted to do so for a quarter of the year in so many thousands of public areas - a seventh of the state - (that) authorities can't estimate their number, let alone monitor them?"

"Most would agree this is completely irresponsible and shows no regard for residents, landowners or other recreational users."

Ms Allen said voters were "wising up". "The spin that hunting is safe, sustainable or contributes positively to the regions is false," she said.

"Someone in the Victorian Government appears clearly wedded to hunting at the expense of community health and safety, the public purse and our struggling ecosystems."

The government is yet to announce arrangements for the 2025 duck hunt season.

Field and Game Australia was Scontacted for comment.