

# Extended duck season draws ire of activists

DUCK hunters will have a longer season and a bigger bag limit this year.

Last Friday's State Government announcement had been applauded by hunters but condemned by activists opposed to the duck shooting.

The season will start on March 19 and hundreds of shooters are expected to again be on northern Loddon wetlands in what the shire council has said is an annual economic boost for the region.

The start time is 8:00am for the first five days of the season, after which hunting can start 30 minutes before sunrise until June 9.

The 2025 daily bag limit is nine ducks, and seven duck game species can be hunted. The blue-winged shoveler cannot be hunted this season, and the use of lead shot for quail hunting is also banned.

This year is the first time the Adaptive Harvest Management model has been used to guide the daily bag limit in Victoria, with the modelling tailored to the state's conditions, habitats and species, according to the government.

New hunters must complete online knowledge training and testing – including Aboriginal cultural awareness training – as part of the Waterfowl Wounding Reduction Action Plan. All hunters renewing their licence from 2026 will also be required to complete this training.

Minister for Outdoor Recreation Steve Dimopoulos said: "Duck hunting is a legitimate activity that matters to thousands of Victorians and we're making sure it can continue sustainably and responsibly – backed by science."

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

Victorian Duck Hunters' Association's Danny Ryan said that with good seasonal conditions hunters could take to the field "with confidence, continuing long held traditions, enhance familial bonds, harvest free range game and importantly contribute to regional economies".

"The world class leading science devel-

oped by the Victorian Game Management Authority and Arthur Rylah Institute using Australian data and experience in a highly technical scientific approach to season settings and bag limits all while maintaining a safe, sustainable and responsible harvest is applauded," he said.

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting, a group that has protested around Boort during duck seasons and last year made claims about damage to Aboriginal scar trees that were assessed and rejected by the Game Management Authority, has again criticised the Government.

"With the imminent threat of the deadly H5N1 bird flu, which has already killed hundreds of millions of birds and other wildlife on every other continent, and the H7N8 strain now detected on two poultry farms in northern Victoria, the Premier's call is totally irresponsible," said Laurie Levy.

"These viruses could be present in native waterbirds on any Victorian wetland and disturbance by shooters would only spread them further afield.

"Allowing shooters onto the wetlands means that our volunteer rescuers and veterinarians must be present to help wounded birds. The danger for rescuers is that shot birds can display similar symptoms to H5N1 contaminated birds," Mr Levy said.

Joining Mr Levy in criticism of the announcement was Regional Victorian Opposed to Duck Shooting.

"Residents of the regions continue to be completely ignored by the Allan government" said Elizabeth McCann.

"Despite ongoing pleas for an end to duck and quail shooting in Victoria or at the very least closure of specified wetlands, this government thumbs its nose at the Victorian public.

"This unwanted activity happens in our communities. The needs and living standards of Australians have changed since the 1950s. There is a reasonable public expectation that our laws be updated to reflect these standards and shooting our native birds for pleasure is just not on in 2025."

"Less than half of one percent of the

population shoot birds for recreation. But the carnage caused to others is significant," Ms McCann said.