

Duck season angers all

BY ALLANAH SCIBERRAS

WILDLIFE advocates are angered at this year's extended duck shooting season, while hunters are disappointed over new rules around bag limits.

The 2022 season will begin at 8am on Wednesday, March 16 and will go until 30 minutes after sunset on Monday, June 13, with the bag limit for hunters restricted to four birds per day.

A Game Management Authority spokesperson said the new arrangements had been made after modelling of habitat and waterbird abundance surveys in eastern Australia, as well as other analysis and other data relating to game duck abundance, habitat distribution and climate.

Eaglehawk hunter Mark Little - who has been duck hunting for 50 seasons now - said the changes were very disappointing, and would have a huge impact on regional economies.

"Duck hunters are angry and we are disappointed," he said.

"To come out with a four bag limit is really an insult and doesn't pass the pub test, I don't understand it really."

Mr Little said the Wednesday opening was another disappointing change.

He said many hunters were losing the opportunity to experience their traditions and are unable to attend a mid-week opening.

"The mid-week opening

has been difficult, I am able to go but I mean my grandson can't take off school to come away with me and I think out of the nine members of our group, only two of us can get away," Mr Little said.

"That impacts on our traditions that have been going on since I was a young boy.

"If we had the choice between cancelling the duck season opening and cancelling Christmas, we would take cancelling Christmas anytime."

However, the changes have also angered animal activists.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting inc (RVOTDS) said the announcement was "pretty gutless".

A RVOTDS spokesperson said the state government were more concerned with "a minority group of bird shooters", than regional residents and businesses.

"This is a very disturbing decision made by our government during an age when we are better educated on the fragile status of our environment," they said.

"All our efforts and resources should be put toward protecting our native wildlife and their habitats.

"We are dumbfounded at the ignorant short sightedness and 'head in the sand' approach this government is taking.

"When our rural communities are crying out for opportunities to benefit from

the booming trend of nature-based tourism which is hampered by shooting, stuck in the fifties is where this government is leaving us.

"Victorians deserve better."

The full-length season settings for this year with a different bag limit was recommended based on harvest data modelling by two ecologists Marcel Klaassen and Richard Kingsford.

The pair advised reducing

the bag limit is a more effective way to reduce the overall harvest of game ducks rather than reducing season length.

RSPCA Victoria policy and advocacy manager Clare Brealey said the sport caused "inherent and unnecessary injury, pain, suffering, distress or death" to the animals involved.

"Duck hunting results in distress, fear, pain and suffering of tens of thousands of birds each year," she said.

"Using a shotgun results in a substantial number of ducks being wounded, with some individuals surviving,

while others will suffer before eventually dying."

A Field & Game Australia spokesperson said they were disappointed in the outcome of the decision-making process.

"The only positive we can pull from the duck season arrangements for Victoria 2022 is the return to the legislated season length with an added three days," the spokesperson said.

"It is still disappointing to see that Blue Winged Shoveler continue to be left off the hunting list and yet there's still no real commitment from anyone to do further scientific research to determine justification for such a move."

The GMA will continue to monitor conditions in the lead up to and during the season, with some wetlands possibly closed or regulated to protect rare or threatened species.

The six duck species which can be hunted throughout the season include the Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Australian Shelduck, Pink-eared Duck and Wood Duck.