

Wednesday, 4 February, 2009

## **MOST RESTRICTED VICTORIAN DUCK SEASON EVER**

The shortest, most restricted duck season ever will be declared for Victoria to ensure that duck numbers remain sustainable into the future.

Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings today said he had considered advice from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), which advised against a season and the Government's Hunting Advisory Committee, which had proposed a less restricted season.

Mr Jennings said a 49 day season would run from Saturday March 21 to Friday May 8.

The Minister will seek detailed advice from DSE regarding the implementation of restrictions which form part of his announcement today.

"Following a waterfowl count later this month, a number of key wetlands are likely to be closed because they will provide refuges for breeding. These and other restrictions form part of the safeguards against over-harvesting of duck numbers," Mr Jennings said.

To further ensure duck populations are not adversely affected, recreational shooters will be restricted to a maximum bag limit of five game ducks of which at least three must be Wood Duck, with a total ban on the taking of Blue Wing Shoveller, Pink Ear and Hard Head.

In addition, duck hunters will be subject to a range of strong penalties up to \$2685 for breaching any one of the conditions.

"Recent high rainfall events in Queensland and New South Wales had increased the likelihood of breeding events," Mr Jennings said.

"Aerial counting across the eastern states shows the Game Duck Index in 2008 has increased by more than 87 per cent from 2007 and the Wood Duck Index has increased by more than 84 per cent," Mr Jennings said.

"The specific bag limit for wood ducks is partially due to the fact that the species is subject to Authorities to Control Wildlife – permits available to landholders to protect crops and dams.

"Applications to the DSE from farmers to control wood ducks have increased significantly, almost doubling since 2005 and increasing by more than 20 per cent compared to the previous year.

"These factors seem to indicate a growing numbers of wood ducks in Victoria. There will be an extensive survey of wetlands across the State at the end of this month to determine which sites are unsuitable for inclusion in the season.

"Many of our wetlands are already dry and will not be available for hunting. Other areas will be identified through the summer waterfowl count as not being appropriate sites because they contain significant numbers of fragile species or are breeding refuges.

"DSE will review refuge sites across the region closer to the commencement of the season to determine which areas should be closed.

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“The timing of the review will ensure that the conditions of the chosen refuges are suitable for the protection of waterbirds. These changes are aimed at protecting waterfowl not only in Victoria, but across the whole of eastern Australia.

“Wood ducks feed on pasture and are therefore more likely to be found on farmland than in wetland systems and all duck hunters must ensure they seek the permission of land owners before entering private property.”