

Media release

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Reminder to act responsibly for the start of the 2017 duck season

As the start of the 2017 duck season nears, the Game Management Authority is providing a timely reminder to all involved to act responsibly and legally.

The Game Management Authority (GMA) Chief Executive Officer Greg Hyams encourages hunters to act responsibly, observe all relevant laws and take the time to educate new and junior hunters.

“Victoria has a long tradition of duck hunting and hunters generate significant economic activity in Victorian rural towns and regional centres”, Mr Hyams said.

“Improved wetland conditions across Victoria will see a large proportion of the state’s 26,000 duck hunters active over the opening weekend.”

“Hunters are reminded they must be licensed, use non-toxic shot, adhere to bag limits and hunting times, respect private property and use firearms safely.

“It is a serious offence to discharge a firearm on or across private property without the land owner’s consent. Hunters are also reminded that the Blue-winged Shoveler cannot be hunted this season.”

Mr Hyams said Government staff recently conducted an annual waterbird count to check for the presence of rare or threatened species at wetlands across the state.

Three wetlands have been closed to hunting and another has been partially closed to protect threatened species. Full closures apply to Lake Natimuk and Natimuk Creek Reserve (north west of the township of Natimuk), Lake Muirhead State Game Reserve (35 km south west of Ararat) and Big Reedy Lagoon State Game Reserve (8km north west of Yarrowonga). Tower Hill State Game Reserve (13km north west of Warrnambool) has been partially closed, with the west lake being closed to hunting, while the east lake remains open. Full details can be found on the GMA’s website www.gma.vic.gov.au

The GMA will continue to monitor wetlands throughout the season. Closed wetlands may be re-opened or further wetlands closed throughout the season. Hunters are advised to check the GMA website for updates prior to hunting.

With the presence of both Freckled Ducks and Blue-billed Ducks at some wetlands, hunters are strongly advised to refresh their waterbird identification skills by watching the educational video Duck WISE and reading the new *Game Hunting in Victoria* hunting manual. Hunters can also challenge themselves by taking the online waterfowl identification practice test. All of these resources can be found on the GMA’s website.

The shooting of a threatened species can incur a fine of more than \$37,000, up to two years imprisonment or both.

Following a wet winter and a hot, dry summer, hunters should be vigilant with respect to a number of environmental hazards, including blue-green algae, mosquito-borne disease and avian botulism.

Blue-green algae can be harmful to both humans and dogs, mosquitos can cause several debilitating viral diseases in humans and botulism can cause mass die-offs of waterbirds and could pose a risk to dogs and humans. Information on these hazards can be found the GMA website www.gma.vic.gov.au

Mr Hyams said authorised officers and Victoria Police will be active throughout the state to ensure hunters and protestors act in a safe and responsible manner.

“While those who oppose duck hunting have a right to protest, they must do so safely and legally. There are significant penalties should protestors unlawfully enter in, or remain on a specified hunting area during prohibited times, or interfere with or harass hunters,” Mr Hyams said.

“Offenders who unlawfully enter in, or remain on a specified hunting area during prohibited times can receive a penalty of up to approximately \$9,330 and be issued with a banning notice. Magistrates can further impose exclusion orders and penalties for not complying range from up to approximately \$9,330 for a first offence to approximately \$18,655 for a second or subsequent offence.

“Public safety laws are in place to protect the broader community, hunters, authorised officers and protestors themselves.”

A full bag of ten ducks is permitted during the season, however, Blue-winged Shoveler cannot be hunted during 2017. The maximum penalty for illegally shooting Blue-winged Shoveler is approximately \$3,885.

The 2017 duck hunting season will open on Saturday 18 March at 7.10am in the eastern zone, 7.20am in the central zone and 7.30am in the western zone, and close half an hour after sunset on Monday 12 June.

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