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Honker Hunters would like the Game Management Authority and relevant ministers to evaluate and consider the following factors for the 2023 duck Hunting Season.

We open with the statement from DR Richard Kingsford of the NSW national parks and wildlife services.

On the question of the impact of shooting on wetlands ecology, he is more certain.

“Duck hunting is (NOT) a major conservation issue.

“It may impact a local area but overall, migration dilutes out any of these effects”

The recommendation process is debated every year.

Why is there set times and dates for a recommendation process when duck hunting has no impact according to Dr Kingsford.

Why do stake holders need to recommend a season alongside Game Management Authority when a season is defined and written in legislation.

The process should remain the same unless extreme circumstances prevail.

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SUMMARY

There is an abundance of waterfowl across private property in Victoria.

Private dams, Private farmland, adjacent rivers, and creeks running through private land.

Each and every year we believe beyond reasonable doubt populations and the abundance of waterfowl are missed during annual waterfowl counts and observations.

The Areas observed included wetlands, lakes, flooded farm paddocks, flooded private dams, low lying surface rainwater.

Major flooding and recent rainfall across Victoria has contributed and increased breeding activity.

Water levels across Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia are above average.

We have provided an observation and key factors.

FACTORS and CONSIDERATION

- The contradiction from the IHM and AHM report released is disputable and controversial. When conditions are far better and extremely different in the lead up to the observations the model has produced the same result from previous years with the proposal of 4 birds. We can only assume its result is an assumption and not fact.
- The Devastation the Wood duck and Mountain duck have on farmers crops in and out of a Waterfowl season.
- The two species are labelled a (pest) within the farming districts for the state of Victoria. Effective hunting can control the species during a season relieving local councils from permit allocations, time, and other resources. Therefore, an increase in the daily limit should be implemented.
- Climate models suggest La Nina will persist until late January to early February. La Nina events increase the chance of above average rainfall across much of northern and eastern Australia during summer.
- Official Bureau of meteorology figures showed rain and temperature records have been broken in Victoria this year. Every month has shown extraordinary results across all states and territories.
- Victoria received its highest ever spring rainfall since records began in 1900. For the state as a whole, rainfall was 95% above the 1961-1990 spring average.
- The current trend of waterfowl observations only includes a very small percentage of Wetlands rivers and creeks and do not include private dams or farmland in Victoria.

SAFETY AND RISK

The regulation States - Game hunters in Victoria face a range of regulations.

It is, therefore, important that the proposed Regulations impose the lowest possible burden on hunters. (1975Act)

Public safety laws are in place for a reason and the minister must agree too along with the Game Management Authority provide a safe environment for duck hunters to undertake their legal recreation under the (1975Act)

The final recommendation to the minister should highlight the importance to protect hunters from activists.

It should ensure the Game Management Authority is backed by the minister and has the resources to act in accordance with the regulations act.

At this time, it is our belief and high opinion enforcement is beyond lacking and is not being adhered to at all.

Activists need to be controlled or there needs to be another law implemented to control the risk. The current distance and time allocation needs to be altered to ensure safety to all hunters.

The confrontations from activists, harassment and hindering have heightened in such a way there is potential for an accident or incident.

This issue needs to be addressed immediately.

EXPLOITATION

The firearms regulations state “firearms fit for use are” - and should be used in accordance.

Activists are gaining a licence and passing a W.I.T test to break the law and harass and hinder hunters on wetlands. They are not acquiring a licence for a valid reason.

This blatant ignorance from activists has gone on for far too long and needs to be addressed immediately. Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012

OBSERVATION

Southern Victoria, Western Victoria, Northwest Victoria

The observation included private properties and general meetings with landowners to gain access for observation.

We travelled main roads, accessed private property, and detoured when possible to pinpoint private water over the region.

Starting point Geelong - Observation over consecutive Weekends – Saturday / Sunday

(2 Observers) on occasions 2 vehicles

TRAVEL AREA- Geelong, Modewarre, Winchelsea, Birregurra, Colac, Ondit, Beeac, Cressy, Berrybank, Lismore, Derrinallum, Bookaar, Camperdown.

TRAVEL AREA - Freshwater creek, Torquay, Breamlea, Ocean Grove, Mannerim, Swan Bay, Bellarine, Clifton Springs, Curlewis, Geelong – Corio Bay, Avalon, Point Wilson, Little River, Balliang

Note – high volume of Grey teal in Corio Bay.

TRAVEL AREA - Rokewood, Skipton, Tatyoon, Ararat, Stawell, Dadswell's bridge, Wonwoondah, Nurrabel, Toolondo

TRAVEL AREA - West Toolondo, South Toolondo, Telangatuk East, Kanagulk, Balmoral, Cavendish, Croxton east Mortlake, Terang

TRAVEL OBSERVATION.

In travel observations we determined there is an abundance of all 8 game species. Grey teal and pacific black duck were predominant across lakes and wetlands.

Pink ear duck were in big mobs across some lakes in the south travel.

Shoveler ducks were widespread across lakes in pairs and mobs of 5-8 in some cases. They became more predominant in and around lakes with increased habitat. Hard head ducks were spread through the major lakes and wetlands as well as large farm dams.

Wood ducks were extremely predominant on most farm dams. In some cases the dams were overcrowded with clutches of ducklings.

Mountain ducks congregated in massive mobs on wetlands and water within close proximity to farm crops but remained apparent on most wetlands while observing. The South west and north West region had a very high concentration.

KEY FACTORS

- The Season arrangements and announcement is delivered far too late and should be brought forward to accommodate retailers and hunters.
- The season should **not be altered** as per legislation unless there is proven evidence of extreme circumstances.
- The Australian (Blue-winged shoveler duck) should not be deemed protected as we found they were visible on every wetland visited. There should be no concern about the conservation status especially this year in 2022 when conditions and habitat have risen and rejuvenated the population beyond previous years. They have not been degraded in any way proving the (Blue-Wing shoveler) not to be under threat and should remain on the game list to be hunted.
- The latest indicators that form the decision model are contradicting.

In previous years indices were lower than the current conditions. At present the conditions are far better and water volume is at higher level. It has produced a lower point score. The final score has still resulted in 4 birds. It does not consider the dispersion of birds in the source data.

Richard Kingsford states in the (2022 EAWS 18Dec)

“There is no surprise that there is so much water that the waterbirds are literally thin on the water”

As Richards states they are thin because the water is spread far and wide. How can there be an accurate figure?

How can it be accurate when the total states water including wetlands, lakes, and private water observations are not covered?

The result is missing valuable data from lakes, rivers, dams, and creeks that are not observed.

- The (EAWS) Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey is a major misleading factor. The Game Management Authority should not rely heavily upon its findings. Unfortunately, from previous history there has been Missing statistics and flawed observations which has led to an incorrect conclusion when a waterfowl season is determined. Some observations only include a proportion (>50%) counted and is digitally audio recorded as an **“estimate”** You cannot correctly identify a bird species flying an aircraft that is flown at a height and an average speed of 167km within 150m off the shoreline.

Key Factors continued

- We are aware and conscious of wounding rates when hunting and do agree on hunter education. We agree Game Management Authority will be the most effective provider of information on education to all hunters.

However, until there is a clear indicator by using radiography (x-ray technology) on live caught ducks then we must assume there is not enough clear evidence to provide any results. At this time, we would like to high light the statistics to be incorrect as the results are only gauged from out in the field. In most cases the observation comes from anti-hunting groups and activist retrieving downed birds illegally or legally recovered.

- **The current waterfowl observations need to consider the possibility of the abundance of waterfowl being missed.** It fails to see the majority of waterfowl birds on the areas listed below.
- Dams- Water.viv.gov.au. Environment, land, water, and planning Victoria estimates there are approximately 450,000 dams across Victoria.
- Together Victoria's dams have an estimated total storage capacity of about 13,400,000 megalitres. The size of our dams range from major storage dams to privately owned farm dams. The smaller privately-owned dams are the most common type of dam in Victoria.
- Some consist of a small swimming pool size on farms or lifestyle properties but still hold major value to the economy and our way of life.
- Creeks There are approximately 85,000 kilometres of rivers, streams, and creeks in Victoria according to Travel Victoria. As well as providing for people and the lifeblood of the environment the possibility of habitat for waterfowl is extraordinary.
- Agricultural land area is about 50 per cent of the total land area in Victoria.
- Approximately 40 per cent (4.6 million hectares) is used for cropping, and 54per cent (6.2 million hectares) is used for grazing, with the remainder used for forestry and conservation purposes.

IMMEDIATE REVIEW

Season Announcement

The legislative season should be announced before (mid – December). The process and delay is unsatisfactory as late arrangements impact the Victorian economy.

Economy

The current trend is not providing enough time for retailers to order and receive stock in preparation for the following season. In addition, the late announcement impacts hunters as they too can not plan holidays or organize time off.

The economic contribution of recreational hunting in Victoria is outstanding before and during a season. The benefits to Victoria's economy needs to be addressed and highlighted to ensure the state recovers from the downturn of the covid-19 impact and moves the state forward into the future.

Delayed arrangements, reduction in season length and a low daily bird limit only deters hunters from participation. Duck hunting contributes the second largest contribution followed by deer hunting at an estimate of 65million.

Modifications

The minister should (**only**) alter or modify a season if the conditions are proven to be (extreme). The season should be as written in legislation – 10 birds, all 8 species with the season to start on the 3rd weekend in March unless proven beyond reasonable doubt it needs to be altered.

The season should not be altered unless these extreme conditions are proven. In previous years there has been alterations to a standard season. On more than one occasion data and relevant information has not been presented resulting in a modified season length and daily limit.

The current wet weather conditions and previous floods contributing to breeding events fall well above a standard year.

Therefor there should be no modifications to the legislative season.

The Adaptive Harvest Model or Interim Model

The IHM and or AHM is not legislation so until its proven it should not determine the season. As it stands the process is defective.

If the model were to be successful and accurate in these conditions of 2022/2023 the conclusion would result in more than 10 birds to be taken on a daily basis.

As per media release on Game management website -The full season was determined based on harvest modelling by 2 experts in waterfowl ecology and population dynamics Professors Klaassen and Kingsford.

How can the model be accurate when it relies on a flight survey that only fly's 10 survey bands with only 3 crossing of Victoria.

One transect only partially covers the coast down south while the other partially covers the north.

It misses and does (NOT) cover most major wetlands or high concentrated waterfowl areas. So why is this heavily relied upon to determine the season.

CONCLUSION

The 2023 waterfowl season for Victoria will be more than sustainable

The season should remain at what is written in legislation

10 birds - Including - 2 Blue-Wing shoveler

The current conditions are above average and there is no need for change as per legislation.

We observed Mountain Ducks feeding on established and harvested crops.

There were Extremely high volumes of Mountain duck in close proximity to crops.

We observed Mountain ducks moving from lakes and wetlands into farmland.

We observed an abundance of Mountain duck, Wood duck, Pacific Black duck, Grey teal on large dams within Private property.

Water levels and habitat on private property are above average.

Breeding is still active.

Wetlands observed were holding good numbers of species. Grey teal were predominant especially Corio Bay area Geelong.

We located all 8 game species.

We see merit in increasing the daily limit to include extra numbers of Mountain duck and Wood duck.

Farmers would like to highlight wood duck and Mountain duck are pests.

Farmers and private landowners are continually viewing the 2 species grazing on freshly sown crops during the general preparation periods in March and April. They continue to move in and out decimate the crop.

HONKER HUNTERS RECOMMEND

OPENING WEEKEND

Honker Hunters agree to help ease the pressure of the opening weekend by authorising a

Start **time 8.00am** for all of Victoria

However, hunters should not be punished due to lack of resources and challenges the Game Management face on an opening weekend.

The minister should aid and assist financial support for the weekend to help enforce compliance from anti-hunting groups and hunters.

Therefore: Daily limit for opening weekend of 10 birds

Including - 2 Blue wing shoveler

Opening to be Saturday – 3rd weekend as per legislation

THE REMAINDER OF THE SEASON

As per legislation –

A Full-length season of 12 weeks - all 8 game species to be hunted

Daily bag limit of 10 Birds

Including 2 – Blue Winged Shoveler

Opening to be on the 3rd Saturday in March as written in legislation.

Time zones to be re-introduced across Victoria.

To review and apply the bag limit to include an additional 2 birds. (Wood duck and or Mountain Duck)

The additional numbers included in the daily limit takes into consideration the concerns of farmers. Many farmers have labelled these 2 birds as pests over many districts.

We as hunters rely on the Game Management Authority to administer game management within Victoria.

The Game management Authority should not be considering arguments or recommendations from anti-hunting groups on a regulatory season that is written in legislation.

These groups should have no insight or value to determine a waterfowl season.

The decision for the 2023 waterfowl season should be based on facts and relevant data available. It should not be politically influenced.

The game Management Authority should **not** rely heavily on the Eastern Australian Water Bird survey. **The process is flawed and inaccurate and should not be used to determine a waterfowl season.**

Honker Hunters would like to thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully

Honker Hunters Australia

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