

DEW-D0029293

Briefing Type: Project or program advice

TO: MINISTER FOR CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

RE: 2025 DUCK AND QUAIL OPEN SEASONS

THROUGH: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

7/12/2024

Critical Date for Minister to Action: Ideally by 10 January but not later than 17 January 2025, to allow for a notice in The Advertiser and the SA Government Gazette to be published in January 2025 and to allow adequate preparation time for the Department prior to the season commencing, should one be declared.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That you:

1. Note the 2024 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report (Attachment 1).

NOTED

2. Note the feedback received from the Duck and Quail Open Season Stakeholder Reference Panel (Attachment 2).

NOTED

3. Approve a 2025 duck open season and sign the 2025 duck open season Gazette notice (Attachment 3), to apply to the following species only:

- Grey teal (*Anas gracilis*)
- Chestnut teal (*Anas castanea*)
- Pacific black duck (*Anas superciliosa*)
- Australian shelduck (mountain duck) (*Tadorna tadornoides*)
- Maned (wood) duck (*Chenonetta jubata*).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

4. Note that the following species have been excluded from the 2025 open season:

- Australiasian (blue winged) shoveler (*Anas gracilis*)
- Pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*)
- Hardyhead (*Anas rhynchos*)

NOTED

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5. Subject to approval of Recommendation 3, approve for the 2025 duck open season to open on Saturday 22 March 2025 and close on Sunday 29 June 2025.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

6. Subject to approval of Recommendation 3, approve one of the following two bag limits for the 2025 duck open season:

a. 8 ducks of the permitted species per hunter per day and on any day of the open season (recommended).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

b. 6 ducks of the permitted species per hunter per day and on any day of the open season (precautionary).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

7. Subject to approval of Recommendations 3 and 6, restrict the maximum daily take of the Australia shelduck (mountain duck) (*Tadorna tadornoides*) to 2 ducks per hunter per day.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

8. Subject to approval of Recommendation 3, approve the hours of the day during which animals may be taken for the 2025 duck open season to be between sunrise and sunset on any given day of the open season.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

9. Approve a 2025 quail open season with a 15 bird bag limit and sign the quail open season Gazette notice (Attachment 4).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

10. Subject to approval of Recommendation 7, approve for the 2025 quail open season to open on Saturday 26 April 2025 and close on Sunday 27 July 2025.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

11. Note that there would be strong grounds to immediately vary or revoke the hunting season should the H5 strain of bird flu be detected.

NOTED

12. Approve, subject to your decisions above, the 2025 open season newspaper notice (Attachment 5), noting that the chosen parameters of Recommendation 6 will be updated by the department in the notice prior to submission for publication.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

13. Approve, subject to your decisions above, applying regulation 9 of the National Parks and Wildlife (Hunting) Regulations 2011 (the Regulations) requiring open season hunting permit holders to complete and lodge a hunting survey.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

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14. Note that subject to approval of Recommendation 3, infringement notices will be issued following the 2025 season for non-compliance with the requirement to complete and submit a hunter survey, following the issuance of warning notices for non-compliance after the 2024 open season.

NOTED

15. Approve, subject to your decisions above, the proposed form as the Hunting Survey for the purpose of regulation 9 of the Regulations (Attachment 6).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

16. Approve, subject to declaration of a duck hunting open season, a *Gazette* notice relating to duck hunting on unalienated Crown lands (Attachment 11).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

17. Note that the Department will develop a communications and engagement plan regarding the approved increases in open season hunting permit fees.

NOTED

18. Note that 8 of the 10 game reserves in South Australia will be open at specified times during the 2025 hunting season, with Bool Lagoon and Tolderol closed due to environmental and construction related considerations respectively. It should also be noted that a number of restrictions on access to specific game reserves will also apply.

NOTED

19. Note that DEW updates and publishes a list of unalienated Crown land parcels on which hunting is prohibited each year, which in 2025 will also include Lake Hawdon North due to the construction of environmental infrastructure.

NOTED

20. Note the Department for Environment and Water intends to proactively disclose this briefing, as endorsed by the Chief Executive and approved by the Minister given the public interest in duck and quail hunting.

NOTED

Comments	<p>-----</p> <p>HON SUSAN CLOSE MP</p> <p>Minister for Climate, Environment and Water</p> <p>/ / 2025</p>
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BACKGROUND

Pursuant to section 52 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (the NPW Act), the Minister responsible for the NPW Act may declare an open season for protected species, which in recent years has included up to seven species of duck and stubble quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*), and can make conditions applicable to the season. Conditions include species that can be hunted, daily quantity of ducks or quail to be hunted (bag limit), locations where hunting can take place (including on public lands), opening and closing dates and times of each season.

Traditionally, although not legislated, the South Australian open season:

- has bag limits of up to 12 duck and 25 stubble quail per hunter per day (noting that separate permits are required for duck and quail open seasons);
- commences as early as mid-February and finishes as late as June (duck) or late August (quail); and
- includes or excludes game reserves and unalienated Crown lands open or closed depending on operational needs, risks and local conditions.

Open season declarations vary from year-to-year depending on seasonal circumstances (e.g. wetland and habitat conditions, climatic forecasts, bird data, etc.) to ensure declared species are hunted sustainably. Conversely, animal welfare considerations associated with open seasons do not typically vary from year-to-year. Consequently, open season hunting permits require compliance with the *Code of practice for the humane destruction of birds by shooting in South Australia*, to address animal welfare matters associated with the act of hunting.

In January 2024, a duck open season was declared from 16 March 2024 to 30 June 2024 with a bag limit of 10 ducks, of 7 permitted species, per day during the declared open season. A quail open season was also declared from 27 April 2024 to 28 July 2024 with a bag limit of 15 stubble quail per day.

In 2024, 1,405 duck and 240 quail hunters held permits in South Australia. Approximately one third of South Australian duck permits are typically held by interstate hunters. For context, Victoria generally has over 20,000 duck hunters and 25,000 quail hunters holding permits.

In response to one of the recommendations in the *Report of the Select Committee on Hunting Native Birds*, in 2024 duck and quail hunters were required to provide a hunting survey pursuant to Regulation 9 of the National Parks and Wildlife (Hunting) Regulations. In previous, recent years the hunter survey was voluntary and was managed by the Conservation and Hunting Alliance of South Australia (CHASA), which would prepare annual estimates of hunter activity and take, in collaboration with the Department for Environment and Water (DEW). The mandatory requirement to provide a hunter survey resulted in a far greater response rate and therefore gave more clarity on hunter activity and take. Hunter surveys received in 2024 indicate that:

- an estimated 25,800 duck were taken during the 2024 open season over approximately 4,500 hunter days.
- Hunters took an average of around 6 duck per hunting day, with an averaged seasonal harvest of 18 ducks per hunter.

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- Black duck (29%), grey teal (45%), chestnut teal (11%), and maned (wood) duck (10%) were the species predominantly taken.
- Opening weekend saw the most intense hunter effort, representing nearly 31% of all effort in 2024. This is generally consistent with previous years.
- Hunting effort in 2024 was focussed in the South East (43%), Lower Lakes (26%) and Riverland (21%) regions.
- Hunters who responded to the survey reported achieving a full 10-bird bag on 21% of hunting days.
- Hunters reported taking no duck on approximately 6% of hunting days.
- Thirteen percent of duck hunters stated they did not hunt at all during the season.
- For quail, hunters typically hunted 2 days during the season.
- Hunters took just over 5 quail per hunting day on average, with an averaged seasonal harvest of around 11 quail per hunter.
- An estimated 2,700 stubble quail were taken by hunters in 2024.
- Most quail hunting was spread evenly throughout the season, and focussed in the South East (45%) and Lower Lakes (18%) regions.
- Sixty percent of quail hunters stated they did not hunt during the season.
- Around 85% of duck and 66% of quail open season permit holders responded to the hunter survey in 2024.

DISCUSSION

DEW provides recommendations in relation to open season duck and quail setting based on analysis of data that are collated or collected annually in October/November. A summary is provided (Attachment 1) and includes 2024 data collected and collated from:

- volunteer and DEW on-ground wetland and waterfowl surveys in the Fleurieu, Murraylands (including Riverland), Coorong and South East regions;
- University of New South Wales aerial surveys in the Riverland, Coorong and South East regions conducted on behalf of DEW;
- the University of New South Wales Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey; and
- River Murray flows and forecasts, Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) data and other remotely sensed climate and habitat condition data.

Antecedent conditions and forecast summary – full details and data are provided in Attachment 1

Eighty-eight wetlands were surveyed for the annual SA Wetland and Waterfowl Surveys in 2024. These surveys covered more than 96,000 hectares of wetland and were based on 107 survey visits and approximately 130 hours of survey effort by volunteers and DEW staff. Of the 88 wetlands surveyed, 84% of wetlands were partially-full to full.

The 2024 ground surveys found that game duck numbers were higher than in 2023. Numbers in 2024 were the 6th highest since surveys began in 2003. The abundance of game duck varied between regions, with the Coorong and Murraylands above the long-term averages, while lower than average abundance rates were recorded in the South East and Fleurieu. Species composition recorded in 2024 had four times the abundance of nomadic species compared to resident species. Aerial surveys of the Riverland and South East regions undertaken for the department recorded the third highest abundance since 2011. This pattern is consistent with post-flooding population trends as occurred after 2016.

Results from the 42nd annual Eastern Australia Waterbird Survey (EAWS), undertaken by the University of New South Wales, show that waterbird abundance decreased markedly from 2023. The collective abundance of the 8 game duck species was below their long-term average. The wetland area index decreased considerably from 2023 to remain well below the long-term average. While 4-5 of the 8 game duck species continued to show significant long-term trends of abundance decline (depending on the analytical date range), the abundances of 4 of the 8 game duck species were close to their long-term averages. This contrasts with 6 of the 8 game duck species abundance that exceeded the long-term average abundance in 2023. The decrease in duck populations likely reflects the reduced habitat conditions for breeding from drier conditions over much of south-eastern and south-western Australia after record breaking rainfalls and flooding during 2020-2022 La Niña events.

Climatic conditions relevant to the consideration of duck and quail opens seasons, particularly rainfall, increased in 2024 relative to 2023, but this was much lower than previous higher rainfall years 2021-2022. At the 12 month-scale, most of Australia experienced above average rainfall, with the exception of western parts of WA, south-eastern SA and south-western Vic, which experienced below average to very much below average rainfall. On a monthly basis, February, April, May and August rainfalls were mostly below average across most of southern Australia, but rainfall was average or above average for January, March and November. The current BOM climate forecasts hot conditions, with a medium likelihood of exceeding median rainfall across South Australia during summer. El Niño-Southern Oscillation is currently neutral and is forecast remain neutral into 2025. The Indian Ocean Dipole has been negative for the last few months and is forecast to return to neutral levels in early 2025. The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) is currently neutral and trending towards 'positive' for the next few weeks, which may bring rain to eastern Australia.

In relation to quail, land condition, as described by remotely sensed land 'greenness', soil moisture availability and pasture biomass, shows general deterioration relative to 2023, reflecting the below average rainfall over parts of South Australia in 2024. The Plant Growth Index, a recent indicator applied to the open season setting process since 2022, shows highly divergent growth across much of the 'arid zone' of South Australia ranging from over 50% below average to over 50% above average growth for October 2023 to September 2024. For the 'agricultural zone' of South Australia, the plant growth index generally showed average to below average plant growth across the region, with the exception of parts of the Southern Mallee and Upper South East which had patches of above average plant growth for January to October 2024.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Representatives from hunting and non-hunting groups with an interest in the duck and quail open seasons who participate on the Duck and Quail Open Season Stakeholder Reference Panel (the Panel) did not meet as they have in previous years. Instead, they were provided a draft 2024 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report with a template document to provide their group's advice. These documents have been collated for your consideration (Attachment 2). The advice in this briefing considers the advice from the Panel, along with other departmentally collected material. Below are some brief points from each stakeholder group.

Birds SA has advised to have no quail season and a duck open season with:

- an 8 bird bag excluding Australian shelduck, hardhead, pink-eared duck and blue-winged shoveler;
- restricted to game reserves to ensure compliance resources available;
- the same opening and closing dates as Victoria, sunrise to sunset; and
- if H5 bird flu is detected in Australia, open season should be terminated immediately.

The Conservation Council of SA (CCSA) advice was for no duck or quail open seasons to be declared in 2025. Further, their advice mentioned concern about H5 bird flu.

Conservation Hunting Alliance of SA (CHASA) recommend a duck and quail open seasons with:

- an 8 bird bag based on a model developed by a CHASA affiliate for calculating bag limits;
- blue-winged shoveler excluded;
- hunting should occur throughout the state;
- opening Saturday 22 February 2025 and closing Sunday 29 June 2025;
- start and closure times 30 minutes prior to sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset (civil twilight);
- no changes from 2024 restrictions on Game Reserves and unalienated Crown Land except for allowing hunting at Tanyaca Creek Oxbow on the Pike River floodplain;
- DEW should encourage hunters to be observant of H5 bird flu signs in birds and to report concerns. H5 bird flu should not restrict an open season at this time; and
- open quail season with 20 bird bag from 1 February to 31 July 2025 throughout the state.

Wetlands and Wildlife recommend a duck and quail open season with the same advice as CHASA except for:

- opening Saturday 15 February 2025 and closing Sunday 29 June 2025;
- Tolderol Game Reserve and Lake Hawdon North should not be excluded; and
- open quail season with a 15 bird bag from 15 March 2025 to 27 July 2025 throughout the state.

Other considerations

H5 avian influenza (bird flu), specifically the High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b, is a serious and highly contagious strain that has moved quickly around the world. Australia is currently the only continent free from this strain of H5 bird flu. Migratory wild birds can carry bird flu long distances and are the most likely pathway for H5 bird flu to enter Australia. H5 bird flu is a deadly threat to our wildlife and would significantly impact the poultry sector.

Wild, farmed and pet birds can catch bird flu. Overseas, other animals have become infected by this strain of H5 bird flu. These were mainly marine mammals and bird-eating scavengers noting cases were detected in other mammals including dairy cattle and cats.

A few mild human infections of the H5 bird flu strain of concern have been reported overseas. Most infected people had close contact with infected animals and contaminated environments. The likelihood of humans becoming infected is very low as current strains of bird flu do not appear to transmit easily to or between humans.

An expert assessment finalised in 2023 showed the risk of H5 bird flu to Australia associated with wild birds has increased, likely posing more severe impacts on Australia's wildlife and poultry industries than past bird flu outbreaks in Australia. Other strains of bird flu are present in Australia. For example, recent H7 HPAI bird flu outbreaks in Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory are on track to be eradicated and importantly did not cause any human health issues.

The department has requested advice on this matter from the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) and the Department for Health and Wellbeing.

PIRSA correspondence (Attachment 12) states that there is no animal biosecurity rationale to change current duck or quail hunting advice prior to the arrival of H5 bird flu. Further, PIRSA recognise that surveillance is a key element in early detection and in South Australia, duck hunters provide an opportunity for bird flu surveillance by annually providing fresh samples for surveillance testing. The PIRSA correspondence states that it is challenging to provide definitive advice on what action would be required should H5 bird flu be detected in Australia, including South Australia. However, were it detected in Australia and/or South Australia (but not at known hunting sites) strict biosecurity measures would be recommended when hunting to reduce the risk of movement of virus out of the area. These include:

- practicing thorough hygiene protocols,
- not entering poultry farms or having close contact with poultry and other live birds for 48 hours after handling hunted birds, and
- not allow hunting dogs to retrieve or have contact with birds that appear sick or are found dead.

PIRSA advise that were H5 bird detected at hunting site, then it would be expected such sites would be closed to people and their pets, including hunters.

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Advice from the Department for Health and Wellbeing (Attachment 12) explains that the risk of transmission of avian influenza to hunters is low in Australia. Detection of H5 bird flu in Australia would not significantly increase the risk of transmission of avian influenza to humans, but explains a range of guidance that would minimise the risk of transmission to hunters and their families. Advice is also provided on actions that would decrease the consequence of avian influenza, if it were 'caught' by a person. Department for Health and Wellbeing advice similarly suggests closure of a hunting site should H5 bird flu be detected at a particular site.

The department will monitor the H5 bird flu situation, in collaboration with PIRSA and the Department for Health and Wellbeing, and provide you with advice should the current H5 bird flu situation change, as well as develop or update communications materials as appropriate. Note that once declared, an open season may be varied or revoked by the Minister by a subsequent notice published in a newspaper circulating generally throughout the state.

DEW advice on 2025 open seasons

Based on the analysis of climate, wetland, landscape and waterfowl data, and consultation with and information from the Panel, and with consideration to the potential impacts of H5 bird flu, a duck open season and a stubble quail open season are recommended for 2025.

Duck

Waterfowl, environmental and climate data and forecasts indicate that a conservative duck open season can be declared in 2025. The department recommends the Australasian (blue-winged) shoveler, hardhead and pink-eared duck species be excluded from a 2025 open season. These 3 species continue to be recorded in low numbers in the South Australian ground surveys and comprised only 1% of the total 2024 duck species counted. The department also proposes consideration be given to restrict Australian shelduck (mountain duck) to 2 per day as it is in decline and comprised under 4% of the 2024 duck counted in 2024.

It is recommended that a conservative open season for the taking of protected duck is declared for 2025. The following conditions are recommended (see Attachment 3 for specific detail):

- a. Specific species permitted: grey teal (*Anas gracilis*), chestnut teal (*Anas castanea*), Pacific black duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Australian shelduck (mountain duck) (*Tadorna tadornoides*), and maned (wood) duck (*Chenonetta jubata*).
 - Closed season for: Australasian (blue-winged) shoveler (*Anas rhynchotis*), pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), and hardhead (*Aythya australis*).
- b. Open season date and times: sunrise on Saturday 22 March 2025 to sunset on Sunday 29 June 2025, and duck are only to be taken in the period between sunrise and sunset on any given day of the open season.
- c. Taking eggs prohibited.
- d. Bag limit: 8 ducks of the permitted species per hunter per day, and on any day of the open season.

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- Species specific restrictions for: Australian shelduck (mountain duck) (*Tadorna tadornoides*) to be 2 per hunter/per day.
- e. Area of the state open season applies: all of the state¹.
- f. Open season in game reserves: Bool Lagoon Game Reserve and Tolderol Game Reserve closed. All other 8 game reserves open partially or fully throughout the open season (see Attachment 3 for specific detail).

In all years, apart from two (2020 & 2024) civil twilight has been used for the start and finish time of a hunting day (i.e. 15 or 30 minutes prior to sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset). Non-hunting Panel groups have, in recent years, called for hunting to occur only between sunrise and sunset to aid in having better light to ensure accurate species identification. Hunters advocate for the application of civil twilight, noting that hunters should only take a shot if they are confident of their identification of a game bird. It is proposed to continue last year's precautionary approach and apply the sunrise to sunset timing to ensure that the light is more likely to be adequate for species identification and aid in safely undertaking compliance activities. This approach has been adopted for the quail open season as well for consistency.

Note that Victoria (apart from the first few days of the season when hunting commences at 8 am) typically allows duck hunting from 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset, while Tasmania allows duck hunting from 60 minutes before sunrise until 60 minutes after sunset.

While the department has confidence in its current processes and recommendations, you may wish to consider a more precautionary bag limit for a 2025 duck open season of a 6 bird bag. A 6 bird bag may be considered on the basis that:

- while there was generally an increase in game duck numbers in SA for 2024, there is a continuing long-term trend of abundance decline at the eastern continental-scale for 4-5 of the game duck species with a very low breeding index.
- at the time of writing the *2024 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report*, the climate drivers (e.g. El Niño) indicated for warm conditions throughout the summer which will likely reduce the area of wetland habitat over the next year.

¹ Note that this excludes NPW Act reserves aside from game reserves, reserves proclaimed subject to the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992* (WP Act) and all sanctuary zones within any marine park established under the *Marine Parks Act 2007* (MP Act). Some areas of unalienated Crown land are also excluded by a separate notice in the South Australian Government Gazette (see below).

Quail

CHASA and the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA) did not provide any information on stubble quail surveys in 2024. In 2023 state-wide density was estimated to be an average of 3.4 quail per hectare having no statistical difference in stubble quail densities in SA from 2021 to 2022 indicating a stable population. Extrapolated estimated abundance in the agricultural regions of South Australia was approximately 12 million stubble quail in 2021. Based on typical hunter effort when stubble quail open seasons have been declared in South Australia, CHASA and SSAA estimate that hunter take would represent <1% of the estimated population.

Landscape condition data and climate records and forecasts are used to inform quail open season setting decision making. Hunter survey data has previously been available as an index of quail abundance and distribution in years when quail open seasons have been declared.

It is recommended that an open season for the taking of stubble quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) is declared for 2025. The quail open season commencement and duration is proposed to generally align with scientific recommendations for avoiding breeding disruption. The bag limit reflects recent and forecast climate and habitat indices. The following conditions are recommended (see Attachment 4 for specific detail):

- a. Open season date and times: sunrise on Saturday 26 April 2025 to sunset on Sunday 27 July 2025, and stubble quail are only to be taken in the period between sunrise and sunset on any given day of the open season.
- b. Taking eggs prohibited.
- c. Bag limit: 15 Stubble Quail per hunter per day.
- d. Area of the state open season applies: all of the state².

These recommendations for the 2025 duck and quail open seasons are based on 2024 data and forecasts for early 2025. Should climate or habitat conditions deteriorate or circumstances change, you may revoke or vary any open season declarations.

Game Reserves

It is proposed that 8 of the 10 game reserves in South Australia be open at specified times if a 2025 duck open season is declared. It is recommended that Bool Lagoon Game Reserve be closed for hunting in 2025 because of ongoing environmental conditions and management considerations specific to this reserve. All of Tolderol Game Reserve will also be closed for hunting in 2025 due to construction works not permitting any public access during construction. A number of other routine restrictions to game reserve access would also apply if a duck open season is declared. Three game reserves in the Riverland – Chowilla, Moorook and Loch Luna – would, if the DEW recommended season commencement and duration are declared, open only during some weekends of the season in 2025 to spread hunting effort,

² Note that this excludes all reserves proclaimed subject to NPW Act, reserves proclaimed subject to the WP Act and all sanctuary zones within any marine park established under the MP Act.

manage operational requirements and prevent shooting on South Australian long weekends and during South Australian school holidays when these game reserves are popular with non-hunter visitors. Chowilla would be open for up to 10 weekends and Moorook and Loch Luna Game Reserves would be open for up to 11 weekends. Two extraordinary areas, Werta Wert wetland and Coombool Swamp, within Chowilla Game Reserve are proposed for exclusion should a 2025 open season be declared due to operational considerations associated with environmental watering. Opening dates for Moorook GR, Loch Luna GR and Chowilla GR would be adjusted as necessary to reflect the open season period chosen in Recommendation 4 of this briefing.

Open Season Hunting On Unalienated Crown Land

Open season duck hunting is generally permitted on unalienated Crown land across the state if an open season is declared. For management reasons, DEW updates and publishes a list of unalienated Crown land parcels on which hunting is prohibited each year (i.e. an excluded list). These excluded parcels are listed annually in a notice published in the Government Gazette (and on the DEW website) prior to the start of the open season. The department has prepared a draft gazettal notice (Attachment 11), pursuant to section 56A of the *Crown Land Management Act 2009* (CLM Act), to be approved subject to an open season declaration. Compliance with the CLM Act gazette notice would become a condition of a 2025 duck open season hunting permit.

Notable areas of unalienated Crown Land to be excluded for 2025 include areas on Pike Floodplain as has occurred in recent years for ongoing environmental and management considerations. Lake Hawdon North would also be excluded due to infrastructure installation for the Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin project.

Hunter Surveys

Data gathered through hunter surveys contributes to wildlife management decisions, especially in regard to setting any open season restrictions. The data typically illustrates the role that restricted bag limits and season duration can have on managing hunting impacts on duck and quail populations. Before this year, hunter surveys were voluntary and based on a 'citizen science' model. It was coordinated by CHASA with support from DEW and achieved a varied return rate from 5-20% since 2015.

In 2024 the Minister approved applying Regulation 9 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Hunting) Regulations 2011* (the Regulations)³. This increased response rates to 85% and 66% for duck and quail hunting permit holders respectively.

DEW recommends applying Regulation 9 again for a 2025 season. Regulation 9(1) enables the Minister to require an 'open season hunting permit holder to complete and lodge (a) hunting survey'. Failure to lodge a survey could result in a magistrate imposed fine of \$1,250 or an expiation fee of \$160 (plus Victims of Crime Levy).

³ The South Australian Select Committee Inquiry into the Hunting of Native Birds recommended that DEW 'should develop a system for hunters to report on the number of birds shot and recovered' – Recommendation 8.

The Regulations also enable the Minister to approve the form of the survey. DEW proposes to use the paper and PDF form as the 'hunting survey' for 2025 (Attachment 6) in addition to an online form.

Next Steps

Please note that, aside from not including endangered species (i.e. listed in Schedule 7 of the NPW Act) and preventing open season hunting in some areas, s 52 of the NPW Act allows the Minister responsible for that Act to declare an open season with conditions as they see fit (and does not require declaration of an open season at all). As such, you may choose to provide a direction on open season arrangements different from those described in this briefing. Any alternate arrangement that you approve would be updated in the *Government Gazette* and *Advertiser* notices.

Pending your decision on the declaration of duck and quail seasons, the following would be undertaken:

- two Gazettal notices (one for duck open season, one for quail open season) to be sent to the Government Gazette by the department ideally on 13 January but not later than 20 January 2025 for publication no later than on 23 January 2025 (Attachments 3 and 4). DEW will amend these notices to reflect your decisions prior to them being submitted for publication.
- a notice (the statutory instrument of open season declaration) published in *The Advertiser* (Attachment 5). Attachment 5 includes a draft newspaper notice stating that open season for duck and quail have been declared and includes the restrictions recommended in this briefing. DEW will amend this draft to submit a notice reflecting your selected declaration, to *The Advertiser*, ideally for publication no later than on 25 January 2025.
- A Gazettal notice granting consent to hunt on selected areas of unalienated Crown land to be sent to the Government Gazette by the department ideally not later than 20 January 2025 for publication on 23 January 2025 (Attachment 11).
- Subject to the declaration of an open season in 2025, the department would update the open season hunting permit fees to reflect the recent Cabinet decision (cf. DEW-D0028844/CAB2400119). This update will be made via a revised 2024-25 Ministerial (Fees) Notices in the Gazette. Ideally, this will occur not later than early-February 2025 to allow adequate time to socialise this change and ensure the department's permit system is prepared to issue open season hunting permits as soon as possible once the season is declared. A communications and engagement plan will be developed regarding the changes to permit fees.

Briefing disclosure

Given the level of public interest in bird hunting, the department intends to proactively disclose this briefing on the DEW Proactive Disclosure website (<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/about-us/freedom-of-information/proactive-disclosure/departments-proactive-disclosure>).

Current Victorian context

A Parliamentary Committee undertook an inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements in 2024. Despite the recommendation to cease native bird hunting, the Victorian Government decided to continue native bird hunting and has implemented adaptive harvest management (AHM) as a more transparent and rigorous method for regulating the recreational harvest of game ducks in Victoria.

The board of the Victorian Game Management Authority provides advice to the Ministers responsible for declaration of Victorian open seasons. AHM is being introduced in Victoria for the 2025 duck season. AHM is an evidence-based process for setting game duck season arrangements. It involves using information to select the best approach to achieving a management objective, implementing management actions, measuring the response, adjusting the approach as required, and then repeating the process. A key component of AHM is the development of mathematical population models that are used to learn about and predict how wildlife populations respond to changing environmental conditions and harvest regulations. The performance of different models can then be evaluated over time, by comparing model predictions to real data from wildlife monitoring programs.

Victoria also has regulated duck and quail open season start and end dates. It is likely that a Victorian open season for duck would commence on the third Wednesday in March, based on recent years' convention to open on the Wednesday prior to the prescribed Saturday and conclude on the second Monday of June. Victorian open season for quail is regulated to commence on the first Saturday in April and close on the last day of June.

While blue-winged shoveler are listed as a species of 'game birds' in Victoria, it is subject to a year-round closed season, and consequently cannot be hunted in Victoria.

The Victorian stubble quail open season is legislated to commence on the first Saturday in April and conclude at the end of June, with a maximum daily bag limit of 20 birds. The 2024 Victorian stubble quail surveys resulted in state-wide population estimate of 5.4 million.

Discussions with Victorian government agencies have also been underway to ensure communications with hunters regarding H5 bird flu are aligned and as consistent as possible given many hunters hunt in both SA and Victoria during the respective open seasons.

CONSULTATION

Relevant DEW District Rangers were consulted regarding their local knowledge of their districts and recommendations in relation to duck and quail open season setting.

The Panel were sent the draft report on 13 December 2024 to review the hunter, waterfowl, quail, environmental and climate data and develop their advice (Attachment 2). The Panel comprises the following stakeholders:

- Conservation Council of SA (CCSA)
- Conservation and Hunting Alliance of South Australia (CHASA)
- Wetlands and Wildlife (W&W)

- Birds SA

FINANCIAL/HR IMPLICATIONS

Are there financial or HR implications? No

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Has a Communications and Engagement Plan been developed? No

A specific communications and engagement plan will be developed following your decisions relating to the declaration of an open season and the announcement of changes to permit fees.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – 2024 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report
- Attachment 2 – Advice forms from the Duck and Quail Open Season Stakeholder Reference Panel
- Attachment 3 – 2025 duck open season Gazette notice
- Attachment 4 – 2025 quail open season Gazette notice
- Attachment 5 – 2025 duck and quail open season Advertiser notices
- Attachment 6 – 2025 open season permit holder hunting survey form
- Attachment 7 – Draft Crown Land Management Act 2009 Gazette notice
- Attachment 8 – Department of Primary Industries and Regions H5 bird flu and Department of Health and Wellbeing open season hunting advice.

[Redacted signature area]

Executive Director National Parks and Wildlife Service
Department for Environment and Water
20/12/2024