

DEW-F0019984

Briefing Type: Project or program advice

TO: MINISTER FOR CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER**RE: 2026 DUCK AND QUAIL OPEN SEASONS**

THROUGH: A/CHIEF EXECUTIVE [REDACTED] 5/1/2026
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NATIONAL PARKS & PUBLIC LANDS

Critical Date for Minister to Action: 7/01/2026 - Other obligation – to allow for a notice in The Advertiser and the SA Government Gazette to be published in January 2026.**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That you:

1. Note the 2025 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 2026 duck open season and sign the 2026 duck open season Gazette notice (Attachment 3), to apply to the following species only:

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

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

4. Note that the following species are recommended to be excluded from the 2026 open season:

- a) Australasian (blue winged) shoveler (*Anas rhynchos*)
- b) Pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*)
- c) Hardhead (*Aythya australis*),

NOTED

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5. Subject to approval of Recommendation 3, approve the dates for the 2026 duck open season to be opening Saturday 21 March 2026 and closing Sunday 28 June 2026.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

6. Subject to approval of Recommendation 3, approve one of the following two bag limits for any day for the 2026 duck open season:

- a) 10 ducks of the permitted species per hunter per day and on any day of the open season (recommended).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

- b) 8 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 Recommendation 3, approve the hours of the day during which animals may be taken for the 2026 duck open season to be between sunrise and sunset on any given day of the open season.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

8. Approve a 2026 quail open season for stubble quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) with a 15 bird bag limit and sign the quail open season Gazette notice (Attachment 4).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

9. Subject to approval of Recommendation 8, approve for the 2026 quail open season to opening Saturday 25 April 2026 and close on Sunday 2 August 2026.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

10. Subject to approval of Recommendation 8, approve the hours of the day during which animals may be taken for the 2026 quail open season to be between sunrise and sunset on any given day of the open season.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

11. Note that there would be strong grounds to immediately vary or revoke the hunting seasons should H5 Avian Influenza (bird flu) be detected.

NOTED

12. Approve, subject to your decisions above, the 2026 open season newspaper notice (Attachment 5), noting that the chosen parameters of Recommendation 6 and any variation from the department's recommendations will be updated by the department in the notice prior to submission for publication.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

OFFICIAL

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

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

14. Note that subject to approval of Recommendation 13, expiation notices will be issued following the 2026 season for non-compliance with the requirement to complete and lodge a hunter survey, following the issuance of warning letters for non-compliance after the 2025 open season for both duck and quail open season permits.

NOTED

15. Approve, subject to your decisions above, the proposed form as the Hunting Survey for the purpose of regulation 9 of the National Parks and Wildlife (Hunting) Regulations 2011 (Attachment 6).

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

16. Note that, subject to declaration of a duck hunting open season, a *Gazette* notice relating to duck hunting on unalienated Crown lands will be signed by the Executive Director, National Parks and Public Lands. DEW updates and publishes a list of unalienated Crown land parcels on which hunting is prohibited each year.

NOTED

17. Note that 8 of the 10 game reserves in South Australia will be open at specified times during the 2026 hunting season, with Bool Lagoon and Moorook closed due to environmental and construction considerations. It should also be noted that a number of restrictions on access to other specific game reserves will also apply.

NOTED

18. Note the increase of permit fees for 2026 open season. Duck and quail permits are \$137.50 each, and concession or junior permits are \$68.75 each, as published in the South Australian Government Gazette 15 May 2025.

NOTED

19. 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

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BACKGROUND

Pursuant to section 52 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (the Act), the Minister responsible for the Act may declare an open season for protected species, up to 8 species of duck and for stubble quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*), and can make conditions applicable to the season. Conditions include species that can be hunted, numbers to be hunted (bag limit), locations where hunting can take place (including on public lands), timing and length of season.

Although not legislated, in the last 20 years, the South Australian open season previously:

- 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)
- has included up to seven of the eight species of 'game' ducks (excluding Australasian (blue winged) shoveler).

Open season declarations vary each year depending on seasonal data such as wetland and habitat conditions, climatic forecasts and bird data, to ensure declared species are hunted sustainably. Animal welfare considerations associated with open seasons do not typically vary from year-to-year. Open season hunting permits require compliance with the *Code of practice for the humane destruction of birds by shooting in South Australia*. As part of the recommendations from the Select Committee inquiry into hunting native birds, this Code of Practice (CoP) has been reviewed internally, and a separate briefing will be provided to you seeking approval to undertake targeted consultation on this updated CoP with a view of having the updated version in place ready for the 2026 open season.

In January 2025, a duck open season was declared from 22 March 2025 to 29 June 2025 with a bag limit of 6 ducks per day of 5 permitted species. A quail open season was also declared from 26 April 2025 to 27 July 2025 with a bag limit of 15 stubble quail per day.

In 2025, 784 duck and 106 quail hunters held permits in South Australia. Historically around one third of South Australian duck permits are held by interstate hunters. In 2025, 72 duck and six quail permits were held by interstate hunters. For context, Victoria in general has over 20,000 duck hunters and 25,000 quail hunters holding permits.

In response to another of the Select Committee's recommendations, in 2024 it was made mandatory for duck and quail hunters to provide a hunting survey pursuant to Regulation 9 of the National Parks and Wildlife (Hunting) Regulations 2011 (the Regulations). In previous years the hunter survey was voluntary and was managed by the Conservation and Hunting Alliance of South Australia (CHASA) who would prepare annual estimates of hunter activity and take, in collaboration with the Department for Environment and Water (DEW). The requirement to provide a hunter survey resulted in a greater response rate and has given more clarity on hunter activity and take. Hunter surveys received in 2025 indicate that:

- 8,931 ducks were taken during the 2025 open season over 2,120 reported hunter days.

- Hunters took an average of around 4 ducks per hunting day with an averaged seasonal harvest of 16 ducks per hunter.
- Black duck (39%), grey teal (39%), and maned (wood) duck (13%) were the species predominantly taken, with chestnut teal (5%) and mountain duck (4%).
- Opening weekend saw the most intense hunter effort, representing 26% of all effort in 2025. This is consistent with previous years.
- Hunting effort in 2025 was focussed in the South East (31%), Riverland (26%) and Murraylands (10%) regions.
- 545 stubble quail were taken during the 2025 open season over 81 reported hunter days.
- Hunters took on average 7 quail per hunting day, with an averaged seasonal harvest of 20 quail per hunter.
- 52% of quail hunting was conducted from opening weekend of April 27 – May 2025 with 54% in the South East region.
- 26% of duck, and 73% of quail hunters state they did not hunt during the season.

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 2025 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.

2025 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report – full details and data are provided in Attachment 1

Ninety-one wetlands were surveyed for the annual SA Wetland and Waterfowl Surveys in 2025. These surveys covered more than 56,000 hectares of wetlands, based on 125 survey visits with approximately 132 hours of survey effort by volunteers and DEW staff. Of the 91 wetlands surveyed, 76% of wetlands were partially full to full.

The 2025 South Australian ground surveys found that game duck numbers were higher than in 2024. Numbers in 2025 were the fifth highest since surveys began in 2003. This survey found the abundances of the five game duck species recommended to be included in a 2026 open season were above average (and median) at the South Australian scale. Conversely, the abundance of Australasian (blue winged) shoveler, pink-eared duck and hardhead, all recommended to be excluded from the open season, were well below average.

Results from the 43rd annual Eastern Australia Waterbird Survey (EAWS), undertaken by the University of New South Wales, covering Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South

Australia, indicate total waterbird (i.e. game ducks and all other non-game species) abundance increased significantly from 2024 to slightly above the long-term average. This was the 12th highest total in 43 years.

The EAWS found that Pacific black duck were well above their long-term average abundance, and hardhead and grey teal were close to their long-term averages. The other five of the eight game duck species were below long-term average abundance. When compared to the long-term median abundances, the abundances recorded in 2025 for grey teal, chestnut teal and Pacific black duck were well above median; while Australian shelduck (mountain duck) was at median and maned (wood) duck slightly below. Notably, grey teal and Pacific black duck are the species that typically make up the majority of species hunted, as reported through hunter surveys.

Wetland area index (334,324 ha) increased considerably from 2024, well above the long-term average. Waterbird indices across river basins responded to widespread flooding (February – April 2025) with increases in wetland area. Wetland areas increased in the Lake Eyre, Cooper Creek Basin, and in the Murray-Darling Basin compared to 2024.

In relation to quail, land condition, as described by remotely sensed land ‘greenness,’ soil moisture availability and pasture biomass, showed a general increase relative to 2024. This is a result of late spring rainfall in 2025. The Plant Growth Index is an indicator that has been applied to the open season setting process since 2022. For the ‘agricultural zone’ of South Australia, the plant growth index for January – September 2025 was below average. Notably, the pasture biomass in November 2025 in areas relevant for quail hunting was average to well above average (Yorke Peninsula, Mid-North and Limestone Coast regions). Within the agricultural zone, it was primarily only the upper Murray-Darling Basin region where pasture biomass was notably below average.

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) were provided with the 2025 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report with a template document to provide their group’s feedback. These documents have been collated (Attachment 2) for your consideration. The advice in this briefing considers the feedback from the Panel, along with other relevant material. Below are the main points from each stakeholder group.

Birds SA

- Opposes the hunting of native birds, 22,507 South Australians signed petition delivered to Parliament on 13 November 2025 calling for an end to duck shooting.
- Based on abundance data provided, Australasian (blue-winged) shoveler, hardhead, pink-eared duck not to be hunted.
- Hunting should not be permitted in areas frequented by migratory waders, restricted to game reserves and wetlands where DEW can guarantee an adequate level of policing of compliance.

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- Season should not exceed 12 weeks, commencing no earlier than the end of March and closing no later than end of September.
- Daily start and closure time of sunrise to sunset.
- Hunting at Tolderol Game Reserve should permanently cease.
- If an open season declared, daily bag limit of six birds.
- No open season for the hunting of quail as there are no verifiable data available for stubble quail abundance using a formal scientific process.
- Questions the ability to adequately undertake compliance with the regulations with significant resources required to ensure compliance.

Conservation Council of SA (CCSA)

- CCSA firmly stand on its long-standing position that duck hunting should be banned in SA.
- Due to extreme weather predictions, known decline of native birds, lack of social license for duck hunting in SA including the over 22,000 petition signatures that were delivered to Parliament.
- No species should be hunted. Low numbers for many species listed, looking at data over time and the cumulative impacts on species to continue to be hunted is not humane.
- Restrictions should cover key high value areas such as feeding and roosting grounds.
- If a season is open support Birds SA advice and not exceed 12 weeks.
- Daily start and closure time of sunrise to sunset.
- Support expanded areas for exclusion described for Tolderol Game Reserve.
- Daily bag limit of 0 birds based on predicted summer forecast and into 2026, based on the state's unwillingness to listen to the public and ban duck hunting, position is to not exceed and preferably reduced from level set for 2025 season.
- No open season should be declared for quail hunting.
- Vegetarian and Vegan Society (VegSA) Inc (member of CCSA) provided feedback:
 - No open season declared for either duck or quail hunting.
 - Birds handled in ways contrary to regulations and contravention of the SA Animal Welfare legislation.
 - Overall bird numbers are above average, 5/8 game birds below average, 4/8 species in long term decline, none increasing.
 - Maximum and minimum temperatures are predicted to be above average for SA and could contribute to further decline in numbers.

Conservation Hunting Alliance of SA (CHASA)

- Recommends an open season for duck hunting in 2026, acknowledges the significant amount of work to produce information, long term nature of datasets provided demonstrate commitment to science-based sustainable game bird management.
- Long term datasets demonstrate that annual waterfowl harvest has no impact on the ability of the post-harvest population to far exceed the previous year's population when breeding habitat exists.
- Notes the report shows comparable improvement in all parameters in 2025 compared to 2024.

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- Recommend 7 game species may be hunted, excluding blue-winged (Australasian) shoveler.
- No restrictions throughout SA, sufficient areas of public and private wetlands that are currently holding water and will hold waterfowl throughout the hunting season, each region has a mix of hunted and non-hunted wetlands.
- Opening date of 14 February 2026 and closing 28 June 2026.
- Separate opening dates from Victorian opening day as per tradition. Will increase permit uptake in SA helping inject money into regional SA. In line with the Premier's initiative to support local business affected by the algal bloom Victorian hunters should be encouraged to visit coastal communities particularly in the South East.
- Season length has limited effect due to hunters having a fixed seasonal effort. Shorter season lengths will concentrate hunting across a shorter timeframe.
- CHASA will not accept anything other than a civil twilight opening and closing time (daily start of 30 minutes prior to sunrise and close 30 minutes after sunset (duck and quail)). Not a game management tool.
- Several recommendations in relation to game reserves (included in Attachment 2).
- Daily bag limit of 12 birds with no individual bag limits of species (blue-winged shoveler to be excluded from hunting).
- No restrictions to quail open season.
- Opening date of 14 February 2026, closing 31 August 2026.
- Daily bag limit of 25 stubble quail.

Wetlands and Wildlife

- Endorse the sustainable uses of this natural resource, note the improved statistics in the report.
- Recommend 7 game species may be hunted, excluding blue-winged (Australasian) shoveler.
- No restrictions applied throughout SA.
- Opening date of 14 February 2026, closing 28 June 2026, 20-week season considering increased cost of permits, benefits of spreading hunting effort across longer timeframe.
- Do not endorse aligning SA with Victorian opening date, view this as a disadvantage to regional areas which benefit due to increased visitor numbers.
- Daily start of 30 minutes prior to sunrise and close 30 minutes after sunset (duck and quail).
- Endorse the comments provided by CHASA in relation to game reserves.
- Daily bag limit of 12 birds, no individual bag limits of species.
- No restrictions to quail open season.
- Opening date of 14 February 2026, closing 31 August 2026.
- Daily bag limit of 25 stubble quail.

H5 Avian Influenza (bird flu)

H5 Avian Influenza (H5 bird flu) has spread globally causing severe widespread outbreaks. H5 bird flu impacts poultry, wild birds and mammals. It is not known to have spread to Australia, except for its recent detection on Heard Island, an Australian territory, located over 4000 km

south-west of Perth. This recent finding is not considered to substantially increase the risk to Australia. However, there is an ongoing risk that this strain could arrive in Australia. If this was to occur, it would require an emergency response to limit its spread, and further government advice would be forthcoming.

Wild birds, such as ducks, are the primary natural reservoir for avian influenza viruses and birds can be infected with some forms of avian influenza without notable symptoms. Ducks and quails are susceptible to H5 bird flu and impacts of this virus on duck and quail hunting should be considered.

Research continues to confirm the risk to humans is low, however in the event H5 bird flu arrives in Australia, a range of personal protective clothing and sanitary practices should be recommended to hunters, and education provided on the signs and symptoms to monitor. If detected in a particular site, to minimise the risk of avian influenza in humans, it is suggested that hunting in that site is closed for a period of time due to the risk of contamination of that waterway.

Attachment 7 provides further information from the Communicable Disease Control Branch of the Department of Health and Wellbeing. Advice has also been provided by PIRSA by the A/Chief Veterinary Officer on the potential impacts of H5 bird flu in relation to duck and quail hunting for the potential 2026 South Australian open seasons. The advice provided last year by PIRSA remains unchanged, being that while H5 bird flu has not been detected in Australia there is no specific animal biosecurity rationale to change the current duck or quail hunting advice.

DEW advice on 2026 open seasons

Based on the analysis of climate, wetland, landscape and waterfowl data, and consultation with and information from the Panel, a duck open season and quail open season are recommended for 2026.

Duck

Waterfowl, environmental and climate data and forecasts indicate that a full duck open season can be declared in 2026. The department recommends the Australasian (blue-winged) shoveler, hardhead and pink-eared duck species be excluded from a 2026 open season. These three species continue to be found in low numbers in the South Australian ground surveys and comprised only <1% of the total 2025 duck species counted.

It is recommended that an open season for the taking of protected duck is declared for 2026. The following conditions are recommended (see Attachment 3 for specific detail):

- a. 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 rhynchos*), pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), and hardhead (*Aythya australis*).
- b. Open season date and times: sunrise on Saturday 21 March 2026 to sunset on Sunday

28 June 2026, 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: 10 ducks of the permitted species per hunter per day, and on any day of the open season.
- e. Area of the state open season applies: all of the state¹.
- f. Open season in game reserves: Bool Lagoon GR and Moorook GR will be closed. All other 8 game reserves are partially or fully open throughout the open season (see Attachment 3 for specific detail).

The Act empowers the Minister responsible for it to decide if an open season is declared, and the conditions relevant to it. As such, you may adopt the department's recommendations or choose otherwise.

In providing this advice on included species, bag limits, and season opening date and length, the department aims to ensure that for those species, to which the open season applies, are hunted sustainably. That is, the quantity likely to be taken (based on likely numbers of permit holders and hunter behaviour) during an open season aligned to the department's recommendations does not induce or contribute to a trajectory of long-term population decline.

For the potential 2026 open season, the department's recommendations for somewhat restricted conditions (compared to previous South Australian open seasons), primarily by the inclusion of only five species and allowing a daily bag limit of 10 ducks per hunter per day, reflects:

- the abundances recorded in South Australian surveys of the 5 species proposed for inclusion being well above average
- that the total waterbird abundance recorded by the EAWS for 2025 increased significantly compared to 2024, but there is a continuing trend of abundance decline at the eastern continental-scale for some game duck species
- the EAWS Breeding Index increased by an order of magnitude compared to 2024 but is well below the long-term average
- much of South Australia is in the recovery stages from drought.

If you consider it desirable, based for example on the climatic forecasts or long-term eastern continental scale trends in abundance of some game duck species, to declare a more restricted duck season, setting the bag limit to 8 ducks per hunter per day would be the most effective means to limit take. This recommendation to modify the bag limit reflects evidence that hunters typically hunt for a set number of days each season or aim to take a specific number of birds, making restriction of daily bag limit the more effective means to restrict take

¹ Note that this excludes NPW Act sanctuaries and 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.

than altering the season length.

Sunrise and sunset has been used for the start and finish time of a hunting day open season in 2020, 2024 and 2025. Non-hunting Panel groups have 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 applying 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.

Quail

CHASA and Conservation & Wildlife Research Trust (CWRT) conducted a citizen science project to collect data on quail flushed from crops during harvest. As of 11 December 2025, there were no responses to this survey. In 2024 CHASA and the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA) did not provide any information on stubble quail surveys in 2024 due to extremely low survey input.

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.

For context, population estimates for Stubble Quail in Victoria (Scroggie and Ramsey 2025) found the statewide estimate of abundance was 2.3 million, over 50% lower than that obtained in 2024. The 2024 Victorian stubble quail surveys resulted in a state-wide population estimate of 5.4 million. The model indicated that spatial variation in abundance during 2025 was largely driven by rainfall during the preceding 12 months (with highest abundances at intermediate rainfall) and woody vegetation (with highest abundances where cover of woody vegetation was lowest).

It is recommended that an open season for the taking of stubble quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) is declared for 2026. 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 25 April 2026 to sunset on Sunday 2 August 2026, 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.

Game Reserves (GR)

If an open season is declared, a number of access restrictions to game reserves may also be applied. It is proposed that 8 of the 10 game reserves in South Australia be open at specified times. It is recommended that Bool Lagoon GR be closed for hunting in 2026 due to ongoing environmental conditions and management considerations specific to this reserve. Moorook GR will be closed for public access including hunting in 2026, due to construction works for environmental benefits. Riverland game reserves would be open for up to 9 weekends in 2026 to spread hunting effort and prevent shooting on South Australian long weekends and school holidays when these game reserves are popular with non-hunter visitors. Opening dates for Loch Luna GR and Chowilla GR would be adjusted as necessary to reflect the open season period chosen in Recommendation 5 of this briefing. Chowilla GR will be partially closed, east of Lock 6 Road, from 11 January - 30 June 2026, due to construction works not permitting any public access. Tolderol GR would be open for the duration of the season, with an area of hunting exclusion as described in Attachment 3.

Open Season Hunting on Unalienated Crown Land

Open season hunting is generally permitted on unalienated Crown land across the state if an open season is declared. Each year, DEW updates and publishes a list of unalienated Crown land parcels on which hunting is prohibited for management reasons. Subject to an open season declaration, DEW will prepare a gazettal notice, pursuant to section 56A of the *Crown Land Management Act 2009* (CLM Act), to be signed by the Executive Director, National Parks and Public Lands in early 2026. Compliance with the CLM Act Gazette notice would become a condition of a 2026 duck open season hunting permit.

Notable areas of unalienated Crown Land to be excluded for 2026 include areas on Pike Floodplain, as in 2023, 2024 and 2025 due to ongoing environmental, cultural and management considerations. Lake Hawdon North will be excluded for restoration purposes as part of the Healthy Coorong Healthy Basin project.

Hunter Surveys

Data gathered through hunter surveys contributes to wildlife management decisions, especially to setting any open season restrictions. The data typically illustrates the role that restricted bag limits and season duration has on managing hunting impacts on duck and quail populations. Prior to 2024, hunter surveys were voluntary and based on a 'citizen science' model. Surveys were coordinated by CHASA with support from DEW, and achieved a varied return rate from 5-20% since 2015.

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

In 2024 the Minister approved applying Regulation 9 of the Regulations³, increasing response rates to 85% and 66% for duck and quail hunting permit holders. In 2025 a total of 96% of duck (754 returns) and 93% quail (99 returns) open season permit holders responded to the hunter survey, after compliance action was undertaken.

DEW recommends applying Regulation 9 again for the 2026 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). Formal warnings were issued to 69 duck and quail permit holders who had failed to lodge a hunting survey. Permit holders who failed to lodge a hunting survey in both 2024 and 2025 were subsequently issued with expiations (24 in total).

The Regulations also enable the Minister to approve the form of the survey. DEW proposes to use an online "snap form", or the paper and PDF form as the 'hunting survey' for 2026 (Attachment 6). In addition, written notification from permit holders who do not partake in hunting for the duration of the open season will be accepted.

Permit fees

In November 2024, in response to the recommendations from the Select Committee inquiry on hunting native birds, Government determined that permit fees should be adjusted to better reflect the costs incurred for open season administration and management. Cabinet approved for permit fees to incrementally rise until they reach a cost of \$250 (full fee), and \$125 (concession and junior fee) by 2029. DEW continues to receive correspondence from hunting groups opposing the increases to the permit fees.

Other considerations

Section 52 of the 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).

The recommendations for the 2026 duck and quail open seasons are based on 2025 data and forecasts for early 2026. Should climate or habitat conditions deteriorate, or if any significant or unexpected changes occur between signing this briefing and the start of the open seasons, the Minister can change or vary any of the parameters or revoke any open season declarations.

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.

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.

Next Steps

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 not later than 20 January 2026 for publication on 22 January 2026 (Attachments 3 and 4). DEW will amend these notices to reflect your decisions, if necessary, prior to them being submitted for publication.
- a notice (the statutory instrument of open season declaration) to be published in *The Advertiser* (Attachment 5). The notice in Attachment 5 states that open seasons for duck and quail have been declared and includes the restrictions recommended in this briefing. DEW will amend this draft reflecting your decisions, if necessary, with the aim that it is published in *The Advertiser* on Saturday 24 January 2026.
- The Gazette notice granting consent to hunt on selected areas of unalienated Crown land will be prepared for approval by the Executive Director, National Parks and Public Lands in early 2026.
- The Department will prepare communication material outlining the conditions of the open seasons and publish this on the DEW website.

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>).

CONSULTATION

DEW District Rangers were consulted regarding their knowledge and local conditions.

PIRSA's A/Chief Veterinary Officer and the Department of Health and Wellbeing were consulted on the potential impacts of avian influenza virus to duck and quail hunting. Advice provided was consistent across both organisations.

The Panel were sent the report for review on 12 December 2025 and provided their advice (Attachment 2). The Panel comprises the following stakeholders:

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

FINANCIAL/HR IMPLICATIONS

Are there financial or HR implications?

No

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Contact: [REDACTED]
Date: 15/12/2025

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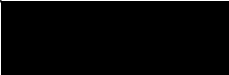
Has a Communications and Engagement Plan been developed?

No

The Department will prepare communication material outlining the conditions of the open seasons and publish this on the DEW website.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – 2025 Waterfowl, Environment and Climate Conditions and Forecasts Report
- Attachment 2 – Feedback forms from the Duck and Quail Open Season Stakeholder Reference Panel
- Attachment 3 – 2026 duck open season Gazette notice
- Attachment 4 – 2026 quail open season Gazette notice
- Attachment 5 – 2026 duck and quail open season Advertiser notices
- Attachment 6 – 2026 open season permit holder hunting survey form
- Attachment 7 – A6323023 Avian influenza virus and potential impacts to duck and quail hunting season from Communicable Disease Control Branch of Department of Health and Wellbeing


A/Executive Director Biodiversity and Nature Economy
Department for Environment and Water
5/01/2026