

NO EXEMPTIONS

Duck hunting to remain at Cairn Curran Reservoir despite advocacy by local groups

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Victoria's contentious annual duck hunting season will resume from tomorrow in wetlands across the state, including at a popular local recreational spot — the Cairn Curran Reservoir.

This has left animal welfare groups, advocating for the reservoir's exemption from native bird shooting, "appalled".

From April 10 onwards, around 500 duck hunting license holders within the Ripon electorate will be able to participate in the activity for the next eight weeks, until June 5.

Compared to last year, this season will run longer by about three weeks with an increase in bag limit as well.

It is also distinct from previous seasons in another significant way — it was given the green light by the State Government despite

its own parliamentary inquiry recommending the practice be banned from 2024 onwards.

Following the government's decision to reject that advice, local organisations banded together to push for the Cairn Curran Reservoir to be excluded from duck hunting.

On March 11, a letter emphasising "urgent assistance" in achieving this goal was sent to Member for Ripon Martha Haylett, Premier Jacinta Allan and Member for Bendigo West Maree Edwards.

It was co-signed by the Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting (RVODS), Maryborough Field Naturalists Club, BirdLife Australia Castlemaine District, Friends of the Box Ironbark Forests and the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club.

Continued on Page 3

Increased bag limit and season length

Continued from Front Page

Citing the outcome from a petition held by RVODS in 2021, the letter said "those in the area wanting bird shooting banned, was 23 times higher than those wanting it to stay".

The succeeding text lists out the reasons argued by constituents for issuing an exemption for Cairn Curran and surrounding wetlands, which include:

- Safety concerns — "we note that other wetlands, such as two in Mildura in 2019, were closed to shooting for public safety concerns".
- Lack of any public consultation or risk assessment.
- Negligible economic impact of the activity in the Central Goldfields and Mount Alexander shires.
- Missed tourism — "ongoing polls show most visitors avoid areas where there is shooting".
- Protection of threatened species that are sighted in Cairn Curran.

"We ask that you represent regional constituents who want a safer, more peaceful, enjoyable amenity," the letter concluded.

As of Thursday, April 4, with three business days left until the start of

the season, the groups hadn't received a response from the recipients.

On Friday afternoon, *The Advertiser* reached out to Ms Haylett's office with a series of questions to follow-up on the matter.

It is understood that this inquiry by the paper prompted Ms Haylett to forward the request to Minister for Outdoor Recreation Steve Dimopoulos.

A subsequent response was also sent to RVOODS' Kerrie Allen, who expressed her disappointment at the delayed reply.

"[It] appears Ms Haylett has only acted now as a result of an inquiry from journalists," she said.

"We have sent correspondence to her several times over many months on this matter, yet never received a response."

Ms Edwards and Ms Allan still hadn't responded by 1 pm on April 8.

Topics pertaining to safety assurances for duck hunting in the reservoir and the activity's benefits to the wider community formed part of the questions sent by *The Advertiser* to Ms Haylett.

These were, however, unanswered.

Instead, Ms Haylett reiterated that she had raised the matter for further consideration and highlighted her stance on the activity.

"I have written to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation on behalf of locals regarding hunting arrangements at Cairn Curran Reservoir and surrounding wetlands," she said.

"Site locations and bag limits are a matter for the Victorian Game Management Authority (GMA).

"I understand there are varying views on this subject, but I support country Victorians' right to recreationally hunt — I always have and always will."

In light of building concerns around threatened species and

breeding waterbirds, GMA has released a dynamic list of wetlands closed to hunting for 2024.

This list, which is expected to be updated as required, does not mention the Cairn Curran Reservoir as of print deadline on Monday.

Ms Allen said although the move to place certain sites under protection was welcomed, it was disheartening to see the same wasn't extended to other areas.

"We are appalled the government is not heeding community feedback, nor taking public health and safety more seriously," she said.

"Closing a number of waterways to shooting would go a long way towards ensuring the regulator can actually perform its job and monitor the shooting, that nearby residents and landowners' rights are protected, and that tourism could thrive in regional areas where it's needed most."

The 2024 duck season will start at 8 am on April 10 and end 30 minutes after sunset on June 5.

The daily bag limit is six ducks per day, compared to four in 2023.

Blue-winged Shoveler and Hardhead cannot be hunted for the 2024 season due to their threatened status.

GMA is also reminding all hunters that they must pass a Waterfowl Identification Test before hunting ducks in Victoria and must also have a valid Game and Firearms Licence when hunting.

For more information on game hunting in Victoria, visit gma.vic.gov.au.