

Herald Sun

Drought saves ducks

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SEVERE drought has forced the cancellation of next year's duck hunting season in Victoria.

Pro and anti-duck hunting campaigners yesterday backed the ban.

Environment Minister John Thwaites said the decision came after analysis of dry conditions, which had resulted in record-low bird numbers.

Research showed waterfowl levels were at their lowest in 24 years.

Hunting groups backed the move but rejected calls for a permanent ban.

Colin Wood, the Hunting and Conservation Manager for the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, said dry conditions had damaged wetlands and the state's birds were suffering.

"There may be the odd member who is disappointed with the decision, but the fact of the matter is that this is one of those times when birds should be left to their own devices," he said.

But Mr Wood said the rural community would feel the pinch as tourism from hunting stopped.

Greens MP Greg Barber said he hoped the cancellation of the 2007 duck hunting season would spell the end of duck hunting for good.

Three states in Australia have banned waterbirds hunting – Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

Mr Thwaites said he would continue to support recreational shooting, citing a recent \$200,000 pledge for a duck hunting education program as evidence of the Government's commitment.

Coalition Against Duck Shooting director Laurie Levy said the Government would face a fight to keep the shooting after the election of three Green MPs.

Pro-duck hunting activist Rita Bentley said she understood the need for a ban on duck hunting next year but would not support a long-term ban.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment will grant a one-year extension on duck hunting licences already paid.