

# Duck-hunting season extended

## Call for localised bird surveys

By **PETER KER**  
WATER AND ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

DUCK-SHOOTING season will be longer in Victoria next year than in 2009, thanks largely to a rise in bird numbers at a single location in South Australia.

The season will start on March 20 and run to May 30. And shooters will be allowed to kill more birds.

The State Government said expansion of the season was possible because of increased bird numbers, but stressed

that the season would still be shorter — and have lower bag limits — than seasons before the recent years of drought.

But the expert whose bird surveys helped inform the decision said it was unclear whether there had been any rise in bird numbers in Victoria during the past year.

Surveys are typically done across eastern Australia, meaning that bird populations in Victoria, Queensland, NSW and South Australia are combined into one survey.

Surveys led by University of NSW professor Richard Kingsford are widely accepted as the best guide to bird numbers, and one of his reports from October was used by the State Government to guide yesterday's decision.

Professor Kingsford said that although his survey found a slight increase in bird numbers in eastern Australia, that result was largely due to a single breeding event near the Coorong in South Australia.

"It's very unlikely bird numbers in Victoria have increased more than last year's numbers; they're more than likely on par with last year," he

said. "This is now a string of really dry years in Victoria, so the birds are unlikely to be breeding there."

He said combining survey information from across the states meant the localised picture could be overlooked.

"It hides the patchy nature of the numbers," he said.

Anti-duck-hunting campaigner Laurie Levy said surveys in the states were important, but Victoria needed to conduct more localised surveys.

"Victoria needs its own waterbird count," he said. "With climate change, native waterbirds are going to be

struggling in the years to come, so it seems amazing the Brumby Government is allowing the recreational shooting of birds just as a fun thing."

But Field and Game Australia chairman Russell Bate said the breeding in South Australia was "totally relevant" to bird abundance in Victoria.

"Most of Australia's game birds are not territorial; the prime game species migrate all around Australia," he said.

Mr Bate said the length and conditions announced for the season — shooters will be able to take eight birds each trip compared with last year's limit

of three — were a reasonable compromise and were getting back to a normal season, where bag limits were as high as 10.

The Government defended the season, saying some counting of waterfowl was conducted locally in November and more would occur in February before specific wetlands were deemed open for hunting.

"On balance, the Government is convinced hunting will not adversely affect populations of ducks at the levels allowed for the 2010 season," acting Environment Minister Tim Holding said.