

Victoria gives green light to duck hunt

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By Xavier La Cann

|Victoria's first duck hunt for several years has been approved by the state government.

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Victorian Premier John Brumby has been compared to moose hunter Sarah Palin after his government ignored environmental advice to give the go-ahead for duck hunting for the first time in three years.

A 49-day season will run in the state from March 21 to May 8, with heavy restrictions, after duck hunting had been banned in 2007 and 2008.

Environment Minister Gavin Jennings said while the Department of Sustainability and the Environment (DSE) had advised that the season not go ahead, the government's Hunting Advisory Committee disagreed.

"Recent high rainfall events in Queensland and New South Wales had increased the likelihood of breeding events," Mr Jennings said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Aerial counting across the eastern states shows the Game Duck Index in 2008 has increased by more than 87 per cent from 2007 and the Wood Duck Index has increased by more than 84 per cent."

But animal rights campaigner Laurie Levy slammed the move and likened Mr Brumby to Palin, the US vice-presidential candidate from Alaska known for her fondness for moose hunting.

"Premier John Brumby today became Victoria's equivalent of America's rootin', tootin' and shootin' Sarah Palin," Mr Levy said.

He said the Coalition Against Duck Shooting would be out in force to protest.

"I am absolutely shocked, amazed. With the weather the way it is I just can't believe this is happening," Mr Levy said.

"As we understand, this is not coming from the environment minister, it is coming all the way from the top, from John Brumby.

"It is just staggering that in light of water bird numbers being down by over 80 per cent right across eastern Australia, they could even contemplate having a season."

Mr Levy said Victoria was experiencing low rainfall, excessive heat and fires and Mr Brumby had ignored scientific evidence to appease duck hunters.

RSPCA president Hugh Wirth said the decision to allow the hunt was a disgrace.

"The irony of the minister announcing the decision during an unprecedented hot spell displays the ongoing lack of interest for the welfare of animals this government continues to show," Dr Wirth said in a statement.

Other environmental groups also condemned the hunt.

A joint statement from Birds Australia and Bird Observation and Conservation Australia (BOCA) said the decision was irresponsible.

"We call on the premier to show some leadership and courage and to reverse the decision," the statement said.

Mr Jennings said this year would be the shortest and most restricted season ever.

Recreational shooters will be limited to a limit of five game ducks, of which at least three must be Wood Duck.

There will be total ban on taking Blue Wing Shoveller, Pink Ear and Hard Head ducks.

A breach could cost a \$2,685 fine.