

THE AGE 5/2/09



CAR SLUMP: New vehicle sales in the US fell 37 per cent in January to one of the lowest levels a century, and for the first time ever, more vehicles were sold in China last month than in the **BUSINESSDAY PAGE 2**

It's ready, aim, fire for duck shooters

Decision to approve season angers environmentalists

By **ADAM MORTON**
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

VICTORIA will have its first duck hunting season in three years after the State Government rejected departmental advice that bird numbers are too low.

Environment Minister Gavin Jennings said the "shortest, most restricted" duck season on record was justified, in part because aerial surveys showed numbers across eastern states were higher in 2008 than 2007.

Mr Jennings said the Department of Sustainability and Environment had recommended the season be cancelled for a third straight year, but contradictory advice came from the Government's Hunting Advisory Committee, which backed allowing a season with few restrictions.

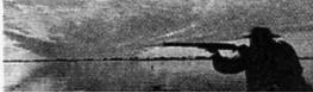
He suggested the Government had walked a line between the two, approving a 49-day season and restricting shooters to a five-duck bag limit.

"Following a waterfowl count later this month, a number of key wetlands are likely to be closed because they will provide refuges for breeding," he said. "These and other restrictions form part of the safeguards against over-harvesting of duck numbers."

Academics and bureaucrats joined conservationists in criticising the decision, saying it appeared to be motivated by an

DUCK HUNTING SEASON

- First duck hunt since 2006
- From March 21 to May 8
- Bag limit of five ducks per person
- At least three must be wood ducks
- Total ban on shooting blue-winged shoveler, pink-eared duck, hardhead duck
- Maximum fine of \$2685 for breaching conditions
- Minimum age 12



attempt to appease regional voters.

Environmental scientist Richard Kingsford, whose annual aerial survey is used to determine whether a season should go ahead, said he was concerned about its impact on bird populations.

While his game duck population index rose by 78 per cent across the east coast last year, it remained significantly lower than the long-term average — and "most of that increase is in wetlands far removed from Victoria," he said.

"If the Department of Sustainability and Environment using a whole lot of indices has recommended that there shouldn't be a season, then my reaction is that it is about time this thing stopped being a political decision and became a scientific decision."

A source within the Depart-

ment of Sustainability and Environment said the Government had used illogical reasons to justify allowing the season to go ahead. These included recent heavy rains in Queensland and NSW boosting the likelihood of waterbird breeding — but ducklings born in northern states would be too young to fly to Victoria for the season, which will run from March 21 to May 8.

"We've got a season purely for political reasons contrary to any conservation reasons," the source said.

Shooting clubs applauded the decision. Field and Game Australia chief executive Rod Drew said it struck a "reasonable balance", given there had been above average rainfall in northern states and Victoria remained dry. "I'm sure our members will be looking forward to having a roast wild duck meal," he said.

The approval reignited calls for duck shooting to be banned. It is legal in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania but outlawed in Queensland, NSW and WA.

Coalition Against Duck Shooting's Laurie Levy said a recent poll found three out of four Victorians want the activity banned. "Once again our rescue team is being mobilised and will return to the wetlands to defend our native waterbirds against this Government-sanctioned brutality," he said.



Licence to kill: After a two-year lull, Victo