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NEWS | 5

+ PAGE 5

Hunt plea for tourists

VICTORIA could boost its shrinking regional economy by drawing tourists to visit its world-renowned wetlands instead of allowing hunters to shoot the exquisite native waterbirds that inhabit them.

Coalition Against Duck Shooting campaign director Laurie Levy said Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews should be marking World Wetlands Day by protecting waterways recognised internationally under the Ramsar Convention and securing the financial future of country towns.

"Premier Andrews and his Cabinet could ensure the protection of Ramsar wetlands as well as the future of regional Victorians by developing a nature-based wetlands tourism industry that will prosper and flourish for generations to come," he said.

Mr Levy criticised the current government for "falsely claiming" that duck shooting was vital to the rural economy.

"Country towns like Kerang, Boort, Donald and others are presently being duped by the Labor government's claim that duck shooters – who make up only 0.4 per cent of Victoria's population – financially benefit them," Mr Levy said.

"If that were the case, these towns with long and proud histories would not be struggling financially as they currently are," he said.

"According to SGS Economics and Planning, the economy of regional Victoria shrank for the fourth consecutive year, slipping another one per cent, mainly in

response to a sharp decline in manufacturing. Victoria is the only state that saw its regional economy go backwards in 2015-16. Victorian country towns are continuing to bleed as jobs disappear forcing young people to move away.

"Yet Phillip Island, with its popular penguin parade is awash with tourist dollars as the town plays host to some 650,000 visitors, including 150,000 Chinese tourists each year," he said.

"Phillip Island now generates some \$655 million as visitors flock to the nightly penguin parade. Yet how many of these tourists go on to travel to other regional towns in Victoria?

"Premier Daniel Andrews has acknowledged the significance of Victoria's tourism partnership between the Chengdu pandas and Phillip Island's penguins, yet he continues to allow hunters to shoot the State's other native waterbirds, which deprives regional Victorians of a wetlands tourism industry" Mr Levy said.

"Duck shooting is incompatible with tourism as it destroys the very assets that would attract tourists to the wetlands.

"It's time regional Victorians demand the Andrews government puts their interests ahead of those of a small number of duck shooters and replaces this cruel and destructive activity with one that will revitalise country towns and protect the financial future of regional Victorians, their children and grandchildren."

PAGE 10 – Healthy wetlands benefit