

DUCK SEASON SPECIFICATIONS - SOME THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

Since the introduction of "biologically-based" seasons, season regulations appear to have been based on the following assumptions :

1. That a daily bag-limit of 10 birds in average or better-than-average years is a "reasonable" limit - both from the biological and social viewpoints.
2. That during less-than-average years (in terms of wetland condition, duck numbers, or both) it is desirable to reduce the daily bag-limit in order to reduce (it is assumed) the number of ducks taken.
3. That during less-than-average years it may also be desirable to reduce the length of the season in order to reduce the number of ducks taken.
4. That during a "drought" year it is necessary to declare a closed season in order to prevent the taking of an unacceptably (biologically or socially?) large proportion of the duck population - an event which may be brought about by "over-concentration" of ducks and shooters.

Two of the above assumptions (1 and 4) appear eminently reasonable and also appear to have wide acceptance in both the shooter and non-shooter communities.

Decisions based on Assumption 3 (variations in length of the season) to not appear to cause concern amongst shooters and one must therefore question whether a shortening of the season does in fact result in a decrease in the number of ducks taken.

Decisions based on Assumption 2 have been strongly criticised by sections of the duck-shooting community and further consideration of this assumption would appear to be warranted. The limited data which exists (to be presented) suggests that a substantial decrease in the bag-limit is necessary to produce a significant decrease in the number of ducks taken on opening day. The effect of a lowered bag-limit on the number of ducks taken over a season is not known.

In conclusion, there would appear to be merit in regularizing duck-season specifications. Certainly there is insufficient biological data available to support the present level of "fiddling". Two possible alternative systems are presented.

DUCK SEASON REGULATIONS - STATES OTHER THAN W.A.

1. OPENING TIME

S.A. : "Early morning" - only legal to shoot between an hour before sunrise and an hour after sunset.

"Very little shooting prior to opening".

VIC. : Progressively changed from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. to 7 a.m., "in an endeavour to coincide with there being sufficient light for hunters to be able to distinguish between protected and game species".

Certain advantages for both late afternoon and early morning openings. "The bulk of hunters prefer a Saturday morning opening and we do not believe that this seriously disadvantages the long term conservation of the species".

TAS. : "One hour before sunrise" - set by a general regulation which prohibits shooting between 1 hour after sunset and 1 hour before sunrise.

Problems with shooters starting before opening time do occasionally occur. On opening day, people tend to abide by the rules.

N.S.W. : "One hour before sunrise".

"There are problems of people commencing shooting prior to opening time and opening date" - Ranger patrols are stepped up. "Early morning opening vis-a-vis late afternoon opening has been debated but as most people only turn out for the opening weekend, to place the opening time in the afternoon would deprive them of half a day's shooting".

QLD. : "Midnight on opening day" (Saturday).

Isolated cases of shooting prior to opening are reported each year.

2. OPENING DATE AND LENGTH OF SEASON

S.A. : Opening date third Saturday in February for many years. First Saturday in March in 1979 to permit common opening with N.S.W. and Vic. "The season is partly based on biological grounds in that the season does not occur during the breeding season".

VIC. : First Saturday in March in 1979 to permit common opening with N.S.W. and S.A. Opening day on third Saturday of March from 1975-78. Season has been 9-10 weeks for some 15-20 years. Shooting season closes prior to breeding season.

- TAS. : "Starting dates have generally been the first Saturday in March each year". Season closes at end of May. "Over the past decade, the season has remained virtually unaltered".
- N.S.W. : Starting date changed from mid-February to mid-March in 1975 as a result of CSIRO study into moult patterns. Changed to 3rd March in 1979. Season length virtually unchanged over the past decade.
- QLD. : Opening and closing dates vary from one zone to another, however unchanged from year to year.
 Southern Queensland : 2nd June to 25th August 1979.
 Northern Queensland : 30th June to 22nd September 1979.

3 DAILY BAG LIMIT

- S.A. : 12 birds (including opening day). Unaltered during the past decade. "It is not considered that a variation in the bag limit is important as few ducks are shot in dry years".
- VIC. : 20 birds on opening day (species bag of 10 per day). 10 birds every other day.
- TAS. : 10 birds, of which no more than 2 shall be Mountain Duck.
- N.S.W. : 20 birds on opening day. 10 birds every other day.
- QLD. : 12 birds per day. "Reasonably constant over the past decade".

4. DROUGHT YEARS

- S.A. : Have always had a duck season. Recognise that this may be undesirable in some years. "However it is considered that the most practical way of controlling the seasonal harvest is to have large areas where shooting is prohibited in all years".
- VIC. : Duck season declared every year for a number of decades. "In the opinion of the Division, the number of hunters taking the field and the number of ducks at risk both decrease in times of drought and to a large extent cancel each other out".
- TAS. : Duck season every year for the past decade. Droughts unlikely ever to be sufficiently severe or prolonged to necessitate total closure of a season.

N.S.W. : No season in 1968. Seasons every year for the past decade. "If ducks and numbers required it (a closed season) this would be done".

QLD. : Open season every year.

5. GAME SPECIES

	S.A.	VIC.	TAS.	N.S.W.	QLD.	W.A.
Black Duck	x	x	x	x	x	x
Grey Teal	x	x	x	x	x	x
Chestnut Teal	x	x	x	x		x
Hardhead	x	x		x	x	x
Mountain Duck	x	x	x	x		x
Wood Duck	x	x		x	x	x
Shoveller	x	x		x		x
Pink-eared Duck	x	x		x		
Whistling Tree Duck					x	x
Plumed Tree Duck					x	x