



NSW DPI Native Game Bird Management Program

2019-20 hunter information update

Game Licensing Unit - Wildlife Management Team

Background

The NSW Native Game Bird Management Program (the Program) reflects the legislative requirements for native game bird hunting in NSW, as set out in the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002* (the Act) and the *Game and Feral Animal Control Regulations 2012* (the Regulation). The Program, administered by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) – Game Licensing Unit (GLU), assists landholders to sustainably manage native game birds that are impacting on their agricultural land with the assistance of volunteer licensed hunters who hold a current NSW Game Hunting Licence and have passed the Waterfowl Identification Test (WIT).

2018-19 post season snapshot

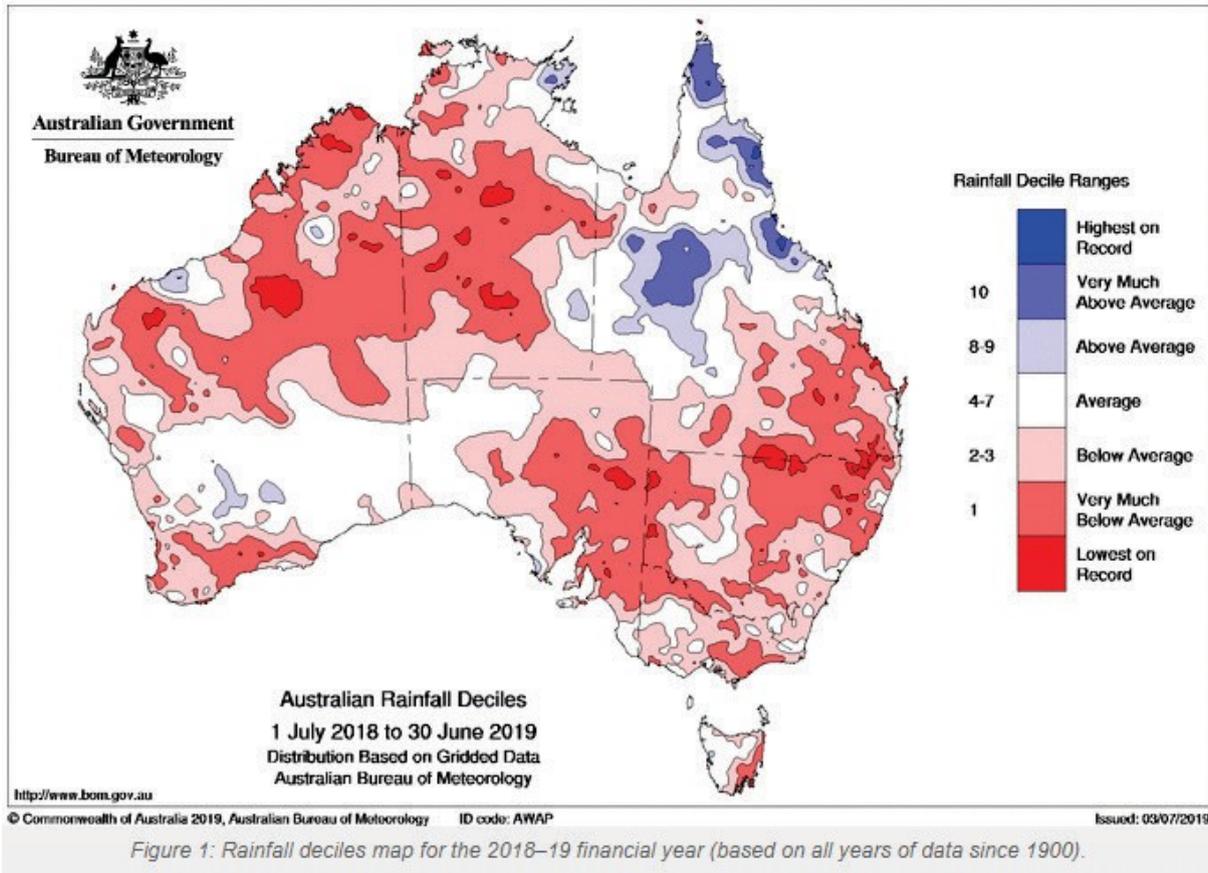
A total of 1,554 native game birds were harvested across NSW during the 2018-19 harvest period. Of the 1,554 native game birds harvested, 96% comprised of Black Duck, Wood Duck and Grey Teal respectively. A total of 82 landholders held active licences with property duck allocations during 2018-19. Approximately 96 growers harvested 54,771 tonnes of rice in the 2018-19 financial year.

Climate summary

The 2018–19 financial year (July 2018 to June 2019) was drier than average over much of Australia, leading to an intensification of drought conditions over many parts of the country, especially in the northern half of the Murray-Darling Basin. Australia's total rainfall during the 2018–19 financial year was 351.4 mm, 24% below average. It was the driest year since 1969–70 and the fifth-driest on record.

The period began very dry for NSW and eastern parts of WA. NSW had an especially dry July, with rainfall the fifth-lowest on record and the driest since the severe El Niño drought of 2002. NSW saw a continuation of dry July to September periods, with 2018 the third-driest such period on record for the State, behind 2017, which was the second-driest.

Source – Bureau of Meteorology



Sustainable harvest quotas for NSW

For the 2018-19 quota, the DPI refined their methodology based on the 2017 survey. Given the frequent occupancy of smaller farm dams by waterfowl, especially the three most common species (Australian Wood Duck, Grey Teal and Pacific Black Duck), a total of 1618 smaller farms dams were surveyed across the Riverina region from a helicopter.

In addition, the presence of water was assessed in larger dams, wastewater treatment ponds and lakes across the Riverina region. A sub-sampled proportion of these were also surveyed using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's). The observed numbers of waterfowl collected from this sub-sample of waterbodies was then extrapolated to the entire Riverina region to establish an estimate of abundance for each species.

Table 1 - 2018-19 native game bird quotas and harvest information

Native game birds	Estimated Riverina abundance February 2018	Quota for 2018-19 (assuming 10% harvest rate)	2018/19 harvest	2018/19 % of harvest against the approved quotas
Mountain Duck	1,925	192	10	5%
Wood Duck	185,943	18,594	433	3%
Black Duck	34,395	3,439	695	21%
Blue-winged Shoveler	33	3	0	0%
Chestnut Teal	163	16	0	0%
Grey Teal	175,916	17,592	396	2%

Native game birds	Estimated Riverina abundance February 2018	Quota for 2018-19 (assuming 10% harvest rate)	2018/19 harvest	2018/19 % of harvest against the approved quotas
Hardhead	1,037	104	18	17%
Pink-eared Duck	5,243	524	0	0%
Water Whistling Duck	0	0	0	0%
Grass Whistling Duck	5,820	582	2	<1%
Total	410,475	41,046	1,554	3.7%

Summary of water allocations for 2019

Table 2 - NSW General Security water allocations

Water Availability	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Murray Valley	61%	23%	100%	51%	0%
Murrumbidgee	53%	37%	100%	45%	6%
Coleambally	53%	37%	100%	45%	6%

Murray Valley (as of 31 July 2019)

Lake Dartmouth is 62 per cent full – falling – holding 2,407,000ML.

Hume Dam is 34 per cent full – rising – holding 1,024,000 ML.

Lake Victoria is 55 per cent full – rising – holding 375,000 ML.

Murrumbidgee Valley (as of 31 July 2019)

Blowering Dam is 46 per cent full – steady – holding 767,000 ML.

Burrinjuck Dam is 31 per cent full – steady – holding 323,000 ML.

The Murrumbidgee Valley and Murray regulated river water source is in Stage 2 drought criticality, meaning drought operational planning has commenced in preparation for extreme dry conditions that may continue through 2019-20.

Landholder and hunter program participation

Table 3 - Landholder summary data

Landholder statistics	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
No. of rice growers	700	349	773	633	96
Rice harvest (tonnes)	690,272	244,184	801,714	623,002	54,771
NGBM licences	215	313	506	555	582
NGBM licensed properties	536	721	1,078	1,171	1,317
% increase NGBMLs	-	+35%	+50%	+9%	+4.6%
Active NGBMLs	215	220	432	376	82

Active NGBML properties	536	500	887	809	145
Ricegrower participation	31%	63%	56%	60%	85%
Landholder Register	15	10	40	37	0

Table 4 - Hunter summary data

Hunter statistics	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
No. of WIT endorsed NSW Game Hunting Licence holders	2,000	2,683	3,418	3,633	3,030
% increase/decrease of WIT endorsed NSW Game Hunting Licence holders	-	+34%	+27%	+6%	-16%
No. of harvested native game birds	22,278	6,511	49,750	11,511	1,554
No. of harvest returns submitted	822	85	1,327	430	69
No. of NGB Licences game birds harvested on	92	35	147	104	21
No. of properties game birds harvested on	159	53	255	159	31
No. of active game bird hunters	349	60	460	225	37
% of active native game bird hunters	17%	2%	13%	6%	1.2%

During 2018-19, there was a slight increase in new landholders applying for a native game bird management (owner/occupier) licence, whilst hunter participation decreased. There was an increase of 27 (+4.6%) in the overall amount of landholders participating in the program which stands at 582. Of the 582 licences, 82 (14%) held active native game bird allocations for 2018-19. A decrease of 603 game bird hunters (-16%) was observed during the 2018-19 harvest period.

Table 5 - Native game bird harvest totals

Native game birds	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Mountain Duck	101	30	146	2	10
Wood Duck	6,638	1,623	9,412	3,692	433
Black Duck	8,709	2,454	11,700	3,986	695
Blue-winged Shoveler	8	0	65	7	0
Chestnut Teal	175	14	54	0	0
Grey Teal	5,715	1,677	25,028	3,580	396
Hardhead	437	223	1,121	86	18
Pink-eared Duck	109	297	882	63	0
Water Whistling Duck	9	0	0	0	0
Grass Whistling Duck	377	193	1,342	95	2
Total	22,278	6,511	49,750	11,511	1,554

A total of 1,554 native game birds were harvest during the 2018-19 harvest period. Black Duck (44%) was most commonly harvested, followed by Wood Duck (27%) and Grey Teal

(25%). Altogether 96% of the total harvest comprised of these three species. Blue-winged Shoveler, Chestnut Teal and Pink-eared Duck were not harvested during 2018-19 harvest period.

2018-19 program summary

Some of the factors that may have contributed to the harvest totals include:

- **General security water allocation entitlements:** The Murray Valley irrigation region did not receive a general security allocation for 2018-19. Murrumbidgee and Coleambally irrigation regions received an allocation of just 6%.
- **Temporary water market.** Temporary water reached high prices during 2018-19. Current prices are around \$500 per mega litre.
- **Persistent drought conditions across NSW:** During 2018-19, New South Wales experienced above average mean temperatures and below average rainfall. This may have resulted in a lack of habitat availability for native game birds in the Riverina.
- **A small rice crop for 2018:** Due to a lack of inflow into catchments and very low water allocations, a rice crop of 54,771 (5,000 hectares) was harvested Riverina rice growers. This is one of the smallest rice crops since the millennium drought and significantly smaller than the 2017 rice crop harvest of 623,002 tonnes.
- **Drill sown rice:** Growers are continuing to reduce water usage and drill sowing their rice crop. Drill sown crops are periodically flushed with water until Christmas time each year, where permanent water is applied until harvest in May. There are a number of benefits of growing rice this way, including reduced water usage and reducing the amount of damage caused by ducks.
- **Landholder register:** No landholders opted to utilise the landholder register systems for 2018-19. These registers allow hunters to communicate with landholders when they are able to assist.

2019-20 program outlook

- **Climate outlook:** A drier than average August to October is likely for large parts of the country, including much of eastern and northern Australia and parts of southwest WA and southern SA. The month of August is likely to be drier over the tropical north and extending down eastern QLD and NSW into northern VIC. (BOM 2019).
- **NSW Riverina Water Allocations:** There is currently a 0% General Security Allocation for the NSW Murray or Murrumbidgee irrigation networks. Based on an assessment of the same period last year, it is likely that very low allocations will be offered during the 2019-20 irrigation season, unless significant spring inflows are received. Further information regarding water allocation can be found here: <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability>
- **Carryover water:** Carry over water entitlements from the previous season may allow irrigators to commit to a summer crop growing program. However, it is anticipated that irrigators may use this water to finish off any winter cereal crops they may have.
- **2019 rice crop:** SunRice are predicting a rice crop of 1000ha for 2019. This is significantly lower than 2018 where 5,000 hectares of rice was harvested.

General information

Hunter and Landholder register systems

The Hunter register is an online register where hunters can list their preferred hunting regions and availability throughout the week so that landholders can initiate contact when they require assistance.

Landholders can authorise us to display their contact details on the Native Game Bird Landholder register if they want to be contacted by licensed hunters for assistance in managing native game birds on their property/s.

How to get involved

- Complete the nationally recognised Waterfowl Identification Test.
- Hold a current NSW Game Hunting Licence that is endorsed for native game bird hunting.
- The conditions have been dry for the last two native game bird seasons however hunters are encouraged to keep their licences and skill levels up to date for when landholders will once again require their assistance when water allocations and rice planting regimes return to normal levels.

Compliance and enforcement

The DPI Game Licensing Unit undertakes regular compliance monitoring and enforcement operations as part of the Native Game Bird Management Program. Make sure you have a NSW Game Hunting Licence endorsed for native game birds and that you know and follow the rules.

More information

Game Licensing Unit – Wildlife Management Support Team

620 Macauley Street, Albury, NSW 2640

Phone (02) 6051 7772

Email gamelicensing.southern@dpi.nsw.gov.au

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