

Is sound environmental policy a dead duck?

The Age editorial

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A duck and a boy improbably took centre stage in the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony. It was an artistically daring celebration of Age cartoonist Michael Leunig's love of the duck as a symbol of hope for a kinder, better world. Imagine the horror had someone used a shotgun to blast the innocent bird, but that is exactly what will be done to wild ducks across Victoria from tomorrow.

Others states banned duck hunting years ago. Waterbird expert Richard Kingsford, who has advised the Government on seasonal conditions for 23 years, says this season should have been called off, as it was in 2003. Duck numbers in eastern Australia were about the same in both years, he said. Drought has reduced the area of wetlands to the second smallest on record. The concentration of ducks in remaining wetlands in southern NSW and north-west Victoria makes them more vulnerable to hunting.

In December, a spokesman for Environment Minister John Thwaites said a decision would be "based on climatic conditions, drought and wildlife numbers". So, given Dr Kingsford's advice, what was decided? There will be a full 12-week season, with a daily bag limit of seven birds, up from five last year and two the year before.

Many Victorians think the demonstrably cruel hunting of ducks should have been banned long ago. Even if it is to be allowed in years that are deemed suitable, that does not appear to be the case this year. But this is an election year and the Bracks Government has already begun avoiding or deferring decisions that might risk shedding any seats from its huge majority. In fact, with duck hunters in a tiny minority, it is debatable whether a ban would cost Labor any seats. Sadly, while the Games

opening boldly celebrated the duck, the Government lacks the courage and integrity to make Victoria the place to be for a duck.