

IN her article "Aiming for Sustainability" (*Mercury*, January 10), Samara McPhedran fails to understand that, due to climate change, the recreational shooting of native water birds has become unsustainable.

She ignores the scientific evidence that water bird numbers across eastern Australia have decreased by 82 per cent over the past 24 years. Native water birds are in serious trouble already.

Duck shooters try to trivialise the issue by claiming only animal rights groups want duck shooting banned, yet she ignores that three states — Western Australia (1990), New South Wales ('95) and Queensland (2005) — have banned it.

Why are there such bitter disputes over duck seasons?

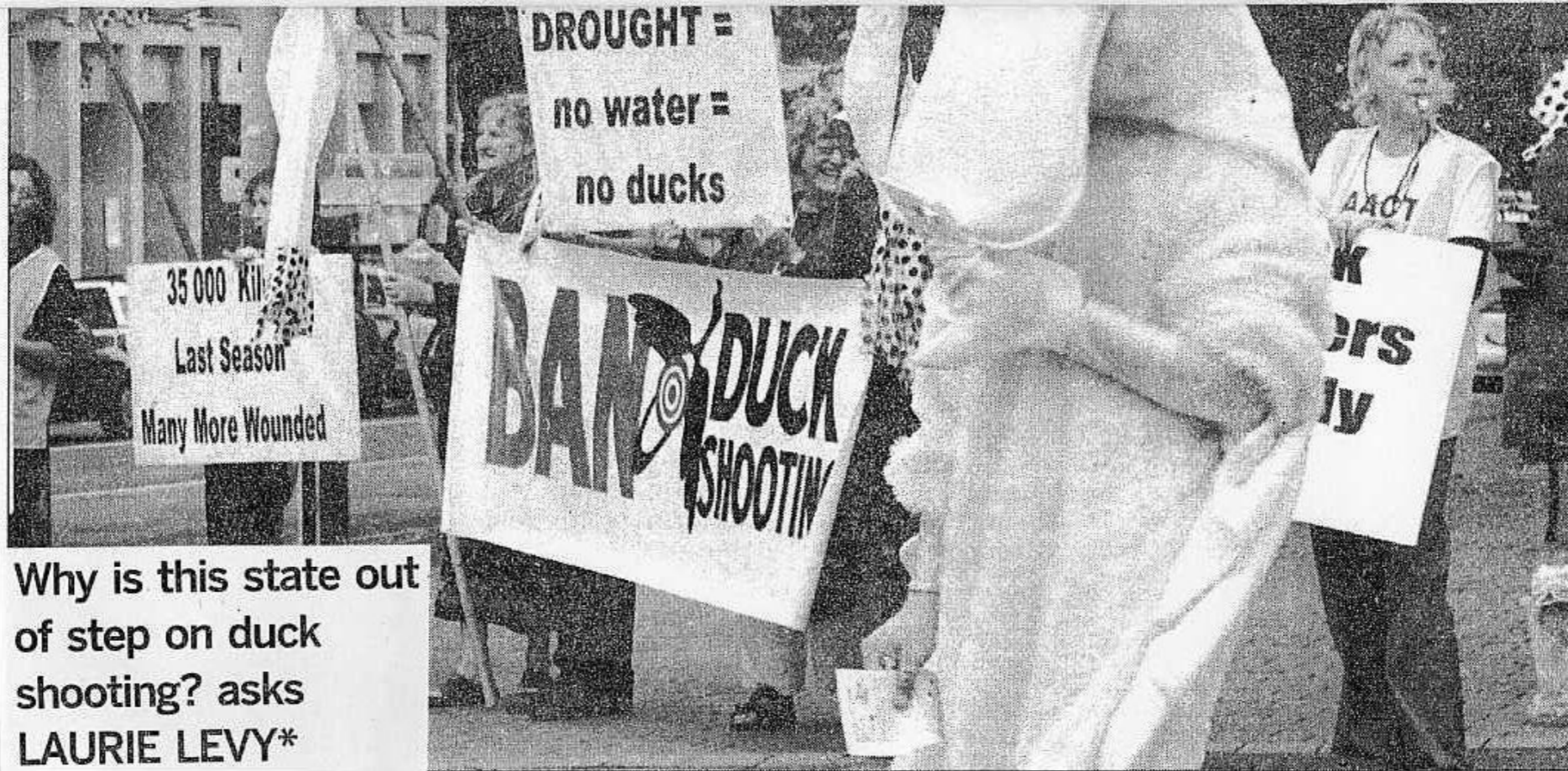
The answer is simple. Most Australians want this activity to come to an end. This is a justice issue for Australia's native water birds.

A recent Morgan research poll in Victoria showed a staggering 75 per cent of Victorians want duck shooting banned. This was across the political spectrum, with 74 per cent of Labor voters interviewed supporting the ban, along with 74 per cent of Liberal-National voters; so did the majority of country people.

Field and Game Australia Board chairman Russ Bate, in the organisation's magazine *Feathers and Fur* (October 2007), says duck hunters are seen as cruel, anti-social and potentially dangerous and that hunters must be prepared to "out themselves" to overcome this image. Yet Peter Darke, president of Field and Game Tasmania, wants Victorian shooters to stay away this year, stating "bad behaviour" last year in Tasmania as the reason.

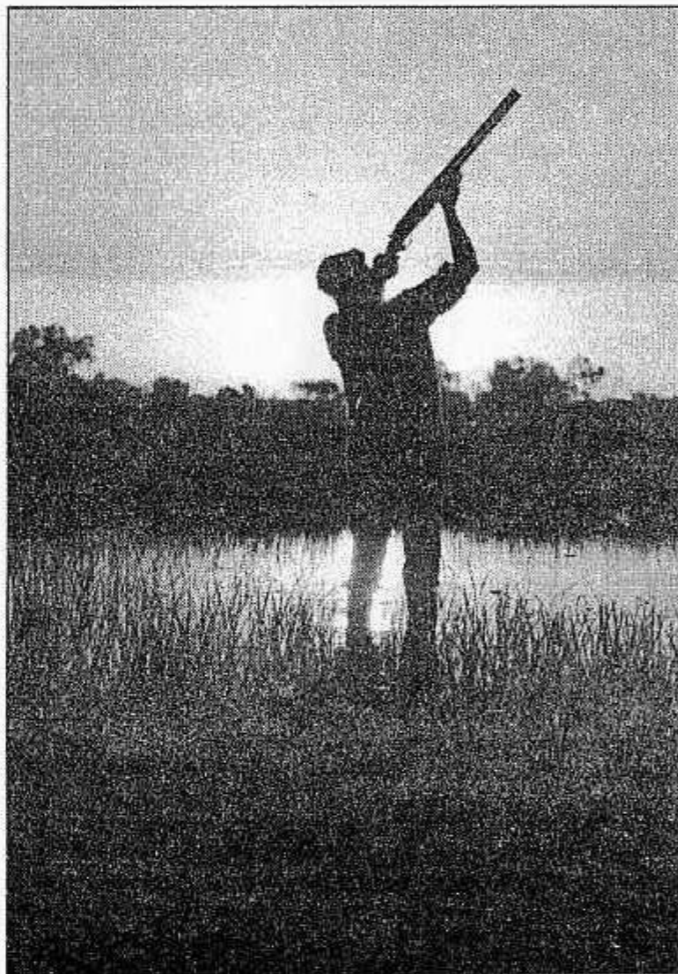
McPhedran (a paid employee of the Sporting Shooters Association) says accurate shooting is paramount for duck shooters, yet Victoria finds the wounding rate unacceptable, with one in four birds shot flying away wounded.

This figure did not come from anti-hunting groups. It came from US ballistics expert and duck shooter Tom Roster, who has told American duck shooters that unless they can reduce wounding rates, duck shooting will go the



Why is this state out of step on duck shooting? asks LAURIE LEVY*

same way in the US as it has in Australia (referring to the states which have banned the activity already).



HOW ACCURATE?: A hunter takes aim.

Until the recreational shooting of native water birds is banned in Tasmania, an Olympic standard accuracy test must be introduced immediately before hunters are allowed on to the wetlands. If duck shooters are such good shots, they will have nothing to fear from such a test.

In Victoria, the Field and Game and Sporting Shooting organisations pushed hard for a duck season to go ahead this year, citing floods in Gippsland as the main reason. However, unlike his Tasmanian counterpart, Victorian Environment Minister Gavin Jennings recognised Gippsland was acting as a refuge for water birds attempting to escape the long drought; he recognised also that water birds can't be looked at in isolation and that numbers across

the whole of eastern Australia must be taken into account.

In his media release, Jennings said: "As this is one of the few places in Victoria providing suitable habitat for ducks, ducks need this area as a breeding ground to allow populations to recover as conditions improve.

"Any hunting in the Gippsland

“An Olympic standard accuracy test must be introduced immediately before hunters are allowed on to the wetlands”

area could result in damage to core breeding stock, further threatening duck populations ... More than anywhere else in Victoria, this area should be protected from hunting pressure.”

CONCERN IGNORED: Opponents of duck shooting protest last year outside the offices of Primary Industries and Water Minister David Llewellyn.

In Tasmania, however, Primary Industries and Water Minister David Llewellyn ignored the recommendations by scientists within his own department, who called for a moratorium, and instead took advice from the Game Management Liaison Committee (comprising representatives of hunting organisations).

Llewellyn's statement to the media that water bird numbers in Tasmania this year are equal to those seen through most of the 1980s and '90s is ridiculous. He should be awarded the Basil Fawly award for silly media statements.

Water bird numbers have decreased by 82 per cent since 1983 — and does he really believe Tasmania is protected from climate change?

Duck shooters have all but lost the battle on the mainland, with the fight moving to the wetlands of Tasmania. This will be their swan song as they desperately try to hold off changing public awareness.

Blowing away native water birds for recreation in the 21st century is no longer acceptable.

*** Laurie Levy is campaign director for the Coalition Against Duck Shooting**