

Scrutiny on duck hunters one year after illegal shootings (ABC AM Pg)

Simon Lauder reported this story on [Saturday, March 15, 2014](#) 08:25:00

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ELIZABETH JACKSON: Conservationists have criticised the Victorian Government for allowing duck hunting to go ahead this year while many birds are using Victorian wetlands as a refuge from drought.

This year's duck season comes after a mass shooting of protected birds, including some threatened species, last year.

No shooters have been held to account for that particular incident.

As Simon Lauder reports from Melbourne, duck season begins this morning and there are new penalties for protesters who get in the way.

SIMON LAUDER: The 2014 duck season opens this morning. Colin Wood from the Sporting Shooters Association is heading out for some hunting.

COLIN WOOD: Yes I am.

SIMON LAUDER: How do you feel about the start of the season?

COLIN WOOD: No different to the way that it normally is, except we'll have to be a little bit more diligent than normal in terms of looking out for freckled duck. There are a lot of them around, a lot more around. For a rare, endangered species, quite a lot of them around as a matter of fact.

SIMON LAUDER: Laurie Levy from the Coalition Against Duck Shooting is also heading to the wetlands - to stop the shooters.

LAURIE LEVY: The team is just driving out to the wetlands now, and I guess the battle will start shortly.

SIMON LAUDER: What do you intend?

LAURIE LEVY: We see our role basically as the Red Cross: we go into a warzone to help the innocent victims.

SIMON LAUDER: Last year on the opening day of the season, more than 900 birds, including rare protected species, were left in the water to die.

In December the government announced an investigation had failed to find enough evidence to charge any of the 100 or so shooters who were there.

Laurie Levy says the government report on that incident should be released.

LAURIE LEVY: Well I believe it's in the public's interest. It would put a lot of pressure on other duck shooters to behave when they're out there and do the right thing.

SIMON LAUDER: The conservation group Birdlife Australia believes protected birds are particularly vulnerable this year.

Conservation manager at BirdLife Australia, Dr Jenny Lau, says Victoria has become a refuge for waterbirds because of the drought in the northern states.

JENNY LAU: We do believe that it should be cancelled. We believe that the concentration of ducks on the remaining wetlands increases the chances of longer term adverse impacts, particularly on threatened species.

SIMON LAUDER: Victoria's Agriculture Minister, Peter Walsh, rejects the claim that it's inappropriate to hold a duck hunt this year.

PETER WALSH: Well the experts have had a look and they believe there should be a duck season. As I've said, that's the advice I've received as the Minister, and that's the advice I've acted on.

SIMON LAUDER: Now last year at the opening of the season, there was a very large scale shooting of protected species at Box Flat. The department said that there were more than 100 shooters involved in that incident. Presumably, they'll all be out there shooting today?

PETER WALSH: They may be out there shooting for duck opening.

It was very, very disappointing what happened last year, and it brings everyone into a sense of disrepute. So I think there'll be a lot of peer pressure on people this year, apart from what the department and the Victorian Police do to make sure that people do the right thing.

SIMON LAUDER: Since last year's duck season the Government has introduced new laws banning protesters from coming close to the water's edge while the hunt is on. The Minister says protesters risk being fined many thousands of dollars.

PETER WALSH: As I've said, it's about keeping everyone safe and to make sure there is a significant buffer between protesters and hunters.

SIMON LAUDER: Is it also about stopping protesters?

PETER WALSH: No, it's not about stopping protesters. People can still protest, but they need to be 25 metres away from the water.

SIMON LAUDER: Duck season ends in June.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Simon Lauder with that report.

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