

Ban urged on 'cruel' duck hunts

Richard Baker

The Victorian Government has been urged to ban recreational duck shooting because of concerns about cruelty.

The government's key animal welfare advisory committee met yesterday to review recent scientific studies on duck shooting and agreed to recommend that it be phased out. The recommendation is expected to go to the government soon.

Although the committee advises Agriculture Minister Bob Cameron on animal welfare, new Environment Minister John Thwaites will decide the future of duck shooting.

A spokeswoman for Mr Thwaites said the government would consider the committee's advice.

The recommendation was supported yesterday by Coalition Against Duck Shooting campaign director Laurie Levy. He said the Bracks Government should adopt the committee's position.

But Mr Levy said that even if the government balked at a permanent ban, next year's duck season should be closed because the drought had left few wetlands where birds could breed.

The South Australian Government this week cancelled the 2003 duck season because of the drought — the first such action in SA since 1983.

Mr Levy said: "I'm hoping that because the ALP controls both houses of parliament in Victoria it will ban it full stop, as they have done in New South Wales and Western Australia.

"But if they don't, I can't see any way the Bracks Government could justify the next season going ahead. There's a shortage of water and a shortage of birds."

RSPCA national president

Hugh Wirth, who is a member of the animal welfare committee, said the number applying for duck shooting permits was falling rapidly and that the government should have no problem banning the activity.

Dr Wirth said it would be foolish for the government to let next year's duck season proceed, given the few wetlands available for birds.

The only member of the advisory committee to disagree with the recommendation was the Victorian Farmers Federation representative.

Field and Game Australia executive officer Rod Drew dismissed the committee's recommendation as "standard policy from animal rights groups that infiltrate these animal welfare advisory committees".

There is no scientific reason why there shouldn't be a

season. SEBASTIAN ZICCONI, shooter

Mr Drew said the advisory committee was getting animal welfare confused with animal rights. He said a recent statewide waterfowl count by Field and Game Australia had found ducks to be in greater numbers than this time last year.

"There is no scientific reason why there shouldn't be a season in Victoria next year," he said.

Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Victorian president Sebastian Ziccone said there was no cruelty concern with duck shooting and that a permanent ban amounted to social engineering.

Mr Ziccone said that while there was an argument for a closed or limited season in the state's north, the south had ducks in "plague proportions".

THE AGE 20/12/02