

EDITORIAL 19 MARCH 05

THE AGE

250 Spencer Street, Melbourne, 3000 Established 1854

Victoria's cruel slaughter resumes

FROM today, and for the next three months, a few thousand active hunters will be free to blast ducks out of the sky while many more Victorians wonder why this state tolerates such cruelty and environmental vandalism. It is 15 years since Western Australia banned duck shooting and NSW did the same 10 years ago. In Victoria, the public, the RSPCA and conservation groups are against it. No one would endorse turning a shotgun on domestic chickens or ducks, nor should they. Two years ago, the state's animal welfare advisory committee recommended duck shooting be phased out.

The Government cancelled that season, citing evidence of a need to protect duck numbers in a time of drought. It's different this year, but the scientific evidence for the cruelty and environmental cost of duck shooting haven't changed.

Other hunting can serve a sporting and public purpose by humanely culling feral species such as deer, goats, foxes and rabbits with a clean shot. Duck hunters rely on dispersed shotgun fire to hit flying targets. Protected species inevitably get shot. Even if this weren't the case, there is a substantial body of research to show the cruelty of duck hunting is at odds with

contemporary public and legal standards on the humane treatment of animals. One duck is wounded but manages to fly off for every one retrieved. Many take days or weeks to die. Studies of tens of thousands of waterfowl found up to one in six had shot lodged in their bodies (the proportion varies with species size).

So what has the Government done? Increased the daily bag limit from two to five, thus increasing the scope for cruelty and the risk of shooting protected species in error. One day we will look back and wonder how our Government permitted such cruel slaughter to go on for so long.