



Barrel of fun: Andrew Kyriacou returns from his morning duck shoot at McDonald's Swamp in Kerang on the opening of the duck season

Picture: David Crosling

'Endangered' shooters braced for a ban

James Madden

IF this was the final time that long-term duck shooters Andrew Kyriacou and Savvas Nicoladu were allowed to blast birds from the Victorian sky, they certainly left their mark.

Proudly displaying their trophies, both Mr Kyriacou and Mr Nicoladu were sporting three grey teal ducks on their belts.

The Cypriot immigrants said the nine members of their hunting party had pulled 35 ducks from McDonald's Swamp in Kerang, 330km northwest of Melbourne.

The pair, who have been shooting for more than 30 years, made the trek to Kerang with seven other family members and friends at the weekend for the opening days of the state's duck-hunting season.

"It's not bad," Mr Kyriacou, 60, said of the group's haul.

But for the almost 20,000 registered duck shooters in Victoria, there is a general feeling that their sport is endangered.

Shooters' numbers are down, public anger is growing and there is increasing pressure on the Bracks Government to ban the sport before the state comes under the

international spotlight in March next year during the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Coalition Against Duck Shooting director Laurie Levy said the pursuit had "outgrown" itself, and even residents of the towns where hunting was allowed had distanced themselves from it.

The sport, which was banned in Western Australia in 1990 and in NSW in 1995, would embarrass Victoria next year if it were allowed to continue, Mr Levy said.

Some believe the sport has not been banned because it would hurt the Bracks Gov-

ernment in several marginal rural seats. Asked if the Victorian ALP would lose his vote if duck hunting was banned, Mr Kyriacou replied: "Absolutely."

But with dwindling numbers, there is a real possibility that Mr Kyriacou and his friends have downed their last ducks.

About 80 duck shooters spent the weekend on the Kerang wetlands, a far cry from the 15,000 who attended the opening weekend of the Victorian duck-hunting season in 1989.

There were at least as many protestors at McDonald's

Swamp, who rose early to scare the birds away from the wetlands using horns and whistles.

Yesterday, there were accusations of unprovoked violence and verbal assaults between shooters and anti-hunting protestors.

One protestor, Vanessa McKay, claimed a hunter had deliberately fired a shot near a fellow protestor's ear, while Mr Nicoladu, 49, said he had been subjected to swearing and threats from the anti-duck-hunting group.

"I don't know why they come here," Mr Nicoladu said. "This is just a sport. We are not hurting anyone."