

Big dry prompts ban on duck-hunting season

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THE Bracks Government has bowed to pressure and banned next year's duck hunting season with reports showing bird numbers are drastically low and the effects of the drought are biting hard.

It comes after *The Age* revealed a report by waterbird expert Richard Kingsford showed conditions were worse than last year with wetland areas the lowest ever recorded in Victoria and waterbird numbers falling below 200,000.

Dr Kingsford's aerial survey of waterbird numbers and wetland areas has been used by the Government for 24 years in determining if a duck hunting season should go ahead.

"What you don't want in critical periods ... is another mortality factor which you can control," he said last week.

Environment Minister John Thwaites yesterday said continuing dry conditions had prompted a ban on the 2007 season, the first time a season has been banned since 2003.

It means waterbirds cannot be hunted anywhere in Victoria, including public and private land.

"Overall, environmental conditions for waterfowl have declined and are some of the most severe we have experienced in recent times," he said.

"The cancellation of the 2007 season will help ensure the long-term conservation of game species and provide an opportunity for the population to recover more quickly when conditions improve."

Laurie Levy, campaign director of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting, welcomed the decision and called on the Government to outlaw the "barbaric practice".

Greens MP Greg Barber said: "We hope there will never be another duck season in Victoria. It's cruel, it's unnecessary and other states have already banned it permanently."

Field and Game Australia chief executive Rod Drew said hunters had suggested a ban on the 2007 season.

"While it is disappointing that we won't be out hunting, we actually recommended this outcome because of the reality of the drought."