



PROTECTION FORCE: Anti-duck hunting activists patrol Moulting Lagoon near Coles Bay yesterday. The campaigners were trying to discourage ducks from flying over the hunters' hides at the official start of duck hunting season. Pictures: AMY BROWN

Duck hunt starts without a quack

By **NICK CLARK**

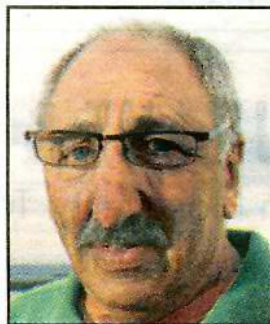
VETERAN duck rescuer Laurie Levy yesterday called on the State Government to cancel the remainder of the duck hunting season because of a lack of ducks.

Hunters and rescuers agreed it was the quietest opening day ever at the state's major public duck hunting area, Moulting Lagoon on the East Coast, but disagreed on what the apparent low duck numbers meant.

Officials confirmed that because of an "obvious boycott" there were fewer duck hunters than usual, between 80 and 100, and fewer ducks shot than previous years.

Mr Levy called on Primary Industries Minister David Llewellyn to cancel the rest of the season.

"He has said he would look at closing the season early if there weren't many birds or too many were being shot," he said. "I think on this morning's situation the minister should immediately close the season down."



WANTS DUCK STATS: Activist Laurie Levy.

He also called on Mr Llewellyn to release the results of the February survey of duck numbers.

"It is bad news for the birds that they are not there in the first place and it's even worse news that the government allows shooters to blast whatever may be out there," he said.

"This is the quietest year in 22 years of the campaign in terms of duck and duck hunter numbers."

But Field and Game Australia chief executive officer Rod Drew said the lack of ducks



KILLS: Ranger Glenn Atkinson checks two ducks shot by hunters.

was caused by a lack of wind.

Mr Drew rejected Mr Levy's call for the season to be ended.

"If the hunters aren't taking any ducks, how is that impacting on the ducks," he said.

He said recent figures from the Game Management Unit had shown numbers were quite healthy.

A spokesman for Mr Llewellyn said there was no evidence of long-term decline in duck numbers. Mr Llewellyn said he would look at closing the season if there was evidence of a decline in numbers.

The season is scheduled to close on June 9.

Mr Levy came to Tasmania in 1995 and has had three other campaigns since.

"In the 1990s this was an action-packed wetland with a lot of shooters. This was one of their favourite wetlands and of course there were more birds in those days," he said.

"With climate change, water-bird numbers have declined across eastern Australia by 82 per cent."

At Moulting Lagoon yesterday, there were more rescuers than hunters. About 30 interstate people and 25 locals arrived before sunrise.

Wearing bright clothing and waving flags to scare ducks out of reach of hunters' shotguns, they spread around the shore or took to canoes.

Duck hunters have about 100 licensed duck hides on the lagoon. It was believed that by Friday 62 interstate hunters had bought licences because of the lack of a season in Victoria and South Australia.