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Duck hunt protester shot in face

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Witnesses claim they saw the 14-year-old boy taunting the victim, St Kilda woman Julia Symons, minutes before she was peppered with shotgun pellets at Lake Buloke in the state's northwest.

But police described the shooting as an accident after taking the teenage hunter and his uncle to nearby Donald police station for questioning and seizing the firearm involved.

When the *Sunday Herald Sun* arrived on the scene less than two minutes later, Ms Symons was bleeding heavily from several wounds in her face and hands, and apparently in shock.

"I've been shot. I've been shot ... I've lost a tooth. Will I be all right?" she screamed.

Steel pellets had entered her temples, left cheek, chin, nose, hand and lip.

Andrea Maxted, who was wading next to Ms Symons when the incident happened, said she feared the worst when she heard her friend screaming.

The bloody start to this year's controversial extended duck hunting season continued as a 58-year-old hunter was flown to hospital from Cohuna after his gun exploded in his hand.

The man was hunting at Hird Swamp Wildlife Reserve, on Kerang-Leitchville Rd, when a cartridge exploded, causing a serious thumb injury.

He was operated on at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Ms Symons, 43, is recovering at Wimmera Base Hospital in Horsham after at least seven pellets lodged in her face and right hand.

The incidents have sparked rows over the future of duck shooting in Victoria and the availability of gun licences for children 12 and over, in the wake of the Lake Buloke wounding.

Of the hundreds of comments on the *Sunday Herald Sun* website, many blamed the victim for putting herself in harm's way, while others declared her a hero in the fight against animal cruelty.

Premier Ted Baillieu declined to comment on whether the legal age for holding firearms should be increased as a result of the incident.

A spokeswoman for Mr Baillieu, Emily Broadbent, also declined to say if the State Government would consider introducing tougher penalties for protesters in legal duck shooting areas.

"Premier Ted Baillieu said he would not speculate on the details of this unfortunate incident and would await the outcome of the police investigation," Ms Broadbent said.

The shooting happened at 9.10am yesterday as Ms Symons and about 150 other members of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting tried to disrupt the 1500-plus hunters on the lake for the opening of duck season.

"She had blood streaming down her face, so my first thought was to get her out of the water," Ms Maxted said.

While Ms Maxted said she did not see the incident, she did see the 14-year-old and an older man at the scene.

"I turned to the shooters and demanded their names. I said, 'She has been shot. What are your names?' And they just walked off," Ms Maxted said.