

The Age

'Coked-up shooter': Police seize guns, drugs on day one of duck season



By [Erin Pearson](#)

May 20, 2020

Police have seized guns and drugs from a recreational duck hunter from Melbourne and suspended his game shooting licence after finding him with illicit drugs during the opening weekend of the hunting season.

Footage taken on Saturday near a lake at St Helens Plains, south-east of Horsham, shows police descending on the area before conducting a body search of one of the men and questioning him over an item found inside his ute.

Play Video





Play video

1:02

Duck shooter questioned over drugs





Watch as police search a man who had allegedly consumed drugs on the opening day of the duck shooting season. Video courtesy of animal welfare investigators.

Matt, a witness who asked for his surname to be withheld, said he was in the area to monitor the opening day of the restricted season when he saw two men snorting white powder before they shot at birdlife at Lake Taylor on Saturday morning.

He said he called police and filmed as they arrived.

Advertisement

"I was there with the Coalition Against Duck Shooting to quietly monitor the hunters to make sure they were following rules and very quickly observed two men snorting white powder off a small picnic table. They then continued to hunt and be in control of firearms," Matt said.

"We called the police who intercepted them as they left and pulled a bag of white powder from the front passenger areas of the car.

"The police later told us it was cocaine."

A police spokeswoman confirmed police were called to St Helens Plains and spoke to two hunters off Fischers Road about 8.30am on Saturday.

"A 21-year-old Hillside man received a diversion for possessing a drug of dependence and had his guns seized and gun licence suspended," they said.

"The second man was released without charge."



Police searching a duck hunter and questioning him over the alleged discovery of white powder in his car near Horsham on Saturday morning.

Animal welfare advocates are calling for an immediate suspension to the duck hunting season, labelling the incident, and other alleged breaches in the state's wetlands, a serious "disregard for law".

They said other footage captured over the weekend near Ballarat and Bendigo showed duck shooters stacking into boats, gathering in groups of more than 10, using public barbecues and camping – all of which are against COVID-19 restrictions.

Animal Justice Party member Andy Meddick said shooters were also captured failing to kill injured ducks, with one even throwing a live bird into a boat to be set upon by two dogs.

"This evidence shows it's not just our native waterbirds at risk of duck shooters, it's the safety of all Victorians at risk of crossing paths with coked-up shooters on our public wetlands and on our public roads," Mr Meddick said.

"It's clear that the drug-taking shooters had two options: breach camping restrictions for an overnight stay or get in their cars and drive home. Both put the community at risk, both are illegal.



Duck hunters on wetlands at Laanecoorie, near Bendigo, at the weekend.
“Daniel Andrews has no other choice... he must cancel the 2020 duck shooting season.”

The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia’s Rob Griffith said that while the incident was particularly concerning, the vast majority of hunters obeyed the law.

He said the association had been fielding calls from hunters with questions over what they could and couldn’t do during COVID-19 restrictions. He reminded shooters that camping on public or private property was not allowed.



Police arrive at Fishers Road, Mount Helens Plains.

"The rules and regulations around hunting are very clear and hunters need to obey those regarding social distancing measures and the correct use and safe handling of firearms," Mr Griffith said.

The state government approved a 2020 duck hunting season in February amid increasing pressure to cancel this year's season due to drought decimating wildlife numbers and reducing habitat.

The move followed the release of a damning internal review of the Game Management Authority's ability to regulate duck shooting and enforce the law. This prompted a \$6 million funding boost from the state government last year to help with compliance and sustainability.



CREDIT: CRAIG SILLITOE

Then, in November, an MP-led motion at the Victorian Labor conference called for a review into wildlife hunting after it was revealed bushfires had wreaked havoc on wildlife numbers.

The 2020 season was subsequently reduced to five weeks with smaller bag limits of three birds per day. COVID-19 health restrictions again reduced the season to just three weeks and five days.

The blue-winged shoveler is also prohibited throughout the season, which ends on June 8.

A state government spokesperson said the Game Management Authority would assess the footage and determine whether any additional action was required, including whether a formal investigation was warranted.

"The GMA takes compliance with hunting laws and animal welfare regulations seriously," they said.

"Illegal hunting and irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated. Hunters who break the law face on-the-spot fines, may be prosecuted through the courts, have their equipment confiscated and lose their Game and Firearms licences."

People are urged to report illegal hunting and breaches of public safety laws to the GMA through its website, the Customer Contact Centre on 136 186 or via Victoria Police.