

Duck hunting season will go ahead despite fresh legal bid

Duck hunters have been accused of “blatantly” flouting the law by shooting more birds than allowed, with a threatened species also being killed.

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This year's duck-shooting season will run for 90 days until June 13. Picture: Peter Ristevski

Animal rescuers claim duck shooters are blatantly flouting the law by killing and dumping more ducks than permitted.

One activist told the Herald Sun he stumbled across a pit of 23 slaughtered native birds which had been illegally dumped at Kerang on Saturday.

Under the current duck shooting season, which began this week, shooters are only allowed to hunt four birds per day.

But activists say that is being “blatantly” disregarded. Several threatened species of birds have also been shot by hunters.

“It worries me that these people own guns and can just slaughter native water birds for nothing but fun, and the only reason it comes to light is because rescuers are out there,” one rescuer said.

The Blue-winged Shoveler and Hardhead are banned from being hunted after recently being deemed threatened species.

Animal Justice Party MP Andy Meddick slammed the actions of the shooters.

“This is illegal. We’re four days into the season and there has been a litany of law breaking from shooters,” he said.

A Game Management Authority spokesman confirmed they were aware of an incident involving a threatened bird being shot.

“The GMA has identified a person who is alleged to have shot a threatened species. Inquiries regarding the matter are ongoing,” he said.

“Illegal hunting and irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated.”



Decision to allow duck hunting in 2022 ignores science and public opinion. Picture: Con Boekel

It comes after a fresh legal bid to halt duck shooting ahead of the season's opening weekend has failed.

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting applied for an urgent injunction at the Federal Court on Friday afternoon, citing the widespread illegal hunting of protected species.

Jo Soren from the anti-hunting organisation said the group had uncovered evidence of illegal "massacres" in previous years and called for this season to be cancelled or restricted.

"It (injunction) is very urgent for this weekend because it's the traditional opening ... where there's the most shooting," she said.

"The problem is they (hunters) don't distinguish ... it's indiscriminate."

She argued bird populations needed more time to breed and recover.

"There were seasons in 2007 and 2008, at the height of the Millennium drought, that were cancelled when birds (populations) weren't as desperately low as they are now," she said.

But Justice Helen Rofe dismissed Ms Soren's application against the Game Management Authority, stating the evidence put forward didn't meet the standards of an urgent injunction.

It comes just days after an earlier application was dismissed on similar grounds.

On Thursday, Premier Daniel Andrews compared duck shooting to playing golf and going to the footy in a move that outraged animal activists.

"It's not something that I do myself but as the leader of the government, it's allowed, so the answer to the question is obviously yes," he said.

The hunting season kicked off on Wednesday and will run until 13 June — the longest since 2018.



Activists say duck shooters are ‘blatantly’ flouting the law.

Earlier this week the Herald Sun revealed a “growing internal dissent” from within Andrews’ party about the controversial practice, with several Labor MPs furious over the government’s decision to approve another season.

“I know this is not everyone’s cup of tea. Some of us play golf, like me, some people go shooting. That’s a choice they’re free to make,” Mr Andrews said.

“That’s about finding a balance and I’m not about telling people what should constitute their recreational activities.

“There’ll be a whole range of different views on these things but the Game Management Authority has provided their advice and the government has accepted it.”

In the first two days of the 2022 season, at least four birds deemed threatened species – the Australasian blue-winged shoveler and the hardhead – have been killed by shooters.

Mr Andrews said rogue hunters caught breaching bag limits or shooting protected birds should expect to be hit with penalties.

“Anybody who is breaking those rules, it’s not a smart thing to do, it’s wrong and it’s stupid because you will feel the full force of the law, and I’m confident about that,” he said, acknowledging that it’s “very difficult” to action every single incident.

“While I’m not a sporting shooter, I’m sure the vast, vast majority of people doing the right thing would be very annoyed to think that some among their number are doing the wrong thing.”



The comments come despite the Andrews government pushing ahead with a plan to protect the feelings of animals under proposed changes to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986.

Campaign director of the Coalition against Duck Shooting, Laurie Levy, said he was “shocked” by the Premier’s comparison.

“I feel shocked that he doesn’t have any empathy for the terrible suffering that native water birds have to endure every duck shooting season,” he said.

“I would’ve thought the Premier, of all people, would have had some understanding of the suffering. After all, the Labor Party recognises animals as sentient beings.

“I just don’t understand it but after all we have constantly heard that Daniel Andrews is the one making all the decisions.”

Mr Levy said activists often dedicated months to rescuing birds during the shooting seasons.

“When shooters bring down a bird they often cheer. They don’t have any empathy. Our rescuers are out there risking their lives to protect these birds, only to watch them get shot out of the sky. They don’t deserve to die. Picking up the broken bodies and seeing the suffering those birds go through takes a huge toll on human volunteers,” he said.

Australian sports star Sharni Norder, who has played at the top level in netball and Aussie rules, said she was “disappointed” by the Premier’s comments.

“I can tell you now, as an elite athlete, that killing animals in the name of fun isn’t sport,” she told the Herald Sun.

“Not all ducks are killed immediately, and are left to suffer. There is no even playing field. As a duck if you fly, you die. How is that fair? And who wins? I’m disappointed in Dan Andrews comments. I know a lot of other athlete’s are with me in saying enough is enough. As we have for a long time.

“There are other alternatives, like clay shooting and there is no need to continue the suffering of these animals.

“With endangered species being killed, who are we to say who lives and who dies. It is not sport, it will never be sport and it needs to end now.”

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Unlikely election issue dividing government

The state government’s decision to call a 2022 [duck-shooting season](#) has enraged MPs within the party.

Several Labor MPs, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there was “great disappointment” from within, after hopes the hunt would be outlawed were dashed last month.

“It’s fair to say the disappointment runs broad across the caucus,” one said. “There is fairly widespread support in the party to ban it for good.”

There is a “growing feel” inside Labor that the practice could be nearing an end in this state. Duck shooting is only permitted in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Some MPs believe it was too risky for the government to ban it in an election year.

“The last two years were the best opportunity to get rid of it – we’ve had bushfires, Covid, drought and low bird numbers. It would have been done and dusted by now and it wouldn’t be an election issue,” one MP said.

Another said approving a full season this year – 70 days longer than the last – had contributed to “growing internal dissent” within the party.

“There was a fair bit of hope it would end this year, so there’s definitely anger,” they said.

Other Labor figures predicted a ban in coming years.

“It feels like we’re getting close. I do think that we actually will get there,” one politician said.

Another added: “I’m sensing at some point there will be a phasing out of it, and I dare say that would be because of public opinion. We don’t want to see birds blown out of the sky”.



Laurie Levy from the Coalition Against Duck Shooting protesting against the sport in 2018.

Senior minister Martin Foley this week rejected claims of a growing push inside the party to ban duck hunting. “The response from the relevant minister is appropriate,” he said.

Agriculture Minister Mary-Anne Thomas, who approved the season, said arrangements were based on “independent harvest modelling” by two experts in waterfowl ecology and population dynamics.

“We know there are strong views in the Victorian community both for and against recreational game hunting,” she said.

It comes after a last-minute legal bid by activists to stop the season failed.

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting launched a late-night injunction in the Federal Court on Tuesday night calling for the season, which began at 8am on Wednesday, to be halted.

Volunteer Laurie Levy, for the anti-hunting coalition, said his group had discovered hundreds of protected birds killed in a “massacre” in previous years and feared all wetland species would be disturbed as guns went off.

“A lot of birds are illegally shot every year,” he said.

Judge Helen Rofe dismissed Mr Levy’s application against the Game Management Authority, stating it didn’t meet the requirements of an urgent injunction.

But she told Mr Levy, “I’m not saying there’s not a case here”, and encouraged him to try again next year with legal representation.

“We have to work within the act we have – we can’t just protect the birds because it would be a nice idea,” Justice Rofe said.

Mr Levy said: “Those birds deserve a better outcome”.