

Shooting ducks hard to justify

ED GANNON, *Herald Sun* 4 Feb 21



MANY who grew up in the country would know the sound — the “pop pop” in the distance as the first light hit on duck season opening morning.

It was a sound heard across Victoria as thousands of shooters descended on wetlands and farms for the annual shooting of ducks from mid March. But what was accepted by most as just something that happened is now viewed by a growing number of people as something that shouldn't happen.

And the noise of those opposed is certainly getting louder.

What was regarded as a ratbag minority led by campaigners such as Laurie Levy has clearly grown as people start to question every aspect of how humans treat animals, particularly, hunting.

Duck season is an annual headache for the state government, particularly a Labor government in a tussle with the Greens over innercity seats. While it wants to be seen as the party of the working class — generally the background of duck shooters — it must bow to the progressive views of the inner city to keep in power. And that urban view is increasingly that duck shooting is well past its use-by date.

Each year the government plays a game of umming and ahing over whether to have a duck season. Drought has provided cover in recent years, with the season scrapped twice and shortened to just five weeks last year.

Crucial to the season green light is an annual survey of birds through the Murray Darling Basin conducted by the University of NSW. Surprisingly, despite the wet La Nina conditions of 2020, duck numbers are well down on longterm averages, which has sparked the usual argy bargy as to whether this season should go ahead.

But there is a bigger long-term issue ahead for shooters — a growing view among authorities for a skills proficiency test of shooters.

Currently, once you get your shooters licence — which already includes a firearm safety course — you then need to obtain a game licence to hunt duck, quail or deer.

The Game Management Authority has raised the spectre of putting another requirement on top of that, testing how well shooters can identify protected animal species and also safety skills.

Of course, a move to a new test is opposed by duck and game shooters, as well as farmers, who also face a growing call for extra testing to shoot rabbits and foxes.

Shooters believe it is merely a smokescreen to make shooting more expensive to the point where the red tape makes it all too hard.

And, ultimately, less “pop pop” sounds across country Victoria.

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