

# The West Australian

PERTH WEDNESDAY JANUARY 17 1990

## Daffy decision on wild ducks

DESPITE an ALP promise to take strong action to protect WA's native birds, the State Government is presiding this week over what amounts to a mass slaughter of water fowl.

The spectacle of hundreds of hunters heading off in the pre-dawn gloom to do battle with local ducks does no-one any credit.

The police felt worried enough about the mix of shooters, shotguns and protesters to place quick response teams, ambulances, first-aid crews and even a helicopter on standby in case of trouble.

As it turned out the only casualties were ducks, even though some shooters were blasting away in the darkness nearly two hours before the season opened.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management says its role is to advise on the effects of shooting on long-term duck numbers and not to make value judgments for the community.

That decision was up to the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, Mr Taylor. CALM estimated total game-duck numbers at 270,000, which it said was more than enough to sustain a short season safely. But research shows that some of the eight game species in WA are down to 3000 birds or fewer.

The Environmental Protection Authority has already warned that water birds are dying from botulism in WA lakes and population pressures are also threatening breeding areas.

The argument that shooting ducks for the roasting dish is no worse than slaughtering lambs does not hold water.

Sheep and cattle are killed under conditions that are as humane as possible while ducks are often maimed from a distance and left to die. And while lamb and beef are staples of our diet, the same could hardly be argued for wild duck.

It is hard to see why Mr Taylor ended the two-year shooting moratorium when public concern about the environment and wildlife is at a peak.

This season should be the last.