



THE AGE

EDITORIAL OPINION

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Too many guns

FROM 6.30 this morning, Victoria's lagoons and marshes will ring to the sound of cracking shotguns. The duck shooting season starts today. And in a move calculated to please the shooters but not the hapless ducks, the Kennett Government has decided to extend this year's killing spree by a fortnight. This means that shooters will have until the Queen's birthday holiday on 13 June to do their worst. Why the Government should make it that much easier for shooters is hard to understand. No one needs to kill ducks. It is an ugly thing to do and on any reasonable reckoning, cannot be considered a sport. To call it a sport is to debase the meaning of the word.

In Western Australia, the then Premier, Dr Carmen Lawrence — now the federal member for Fremantle — banned duck shooting in that state. The community, she said, had reached the stage of enlightenment where it could no longer accept the institutionalised killing of native birds for recreation. The current premier, Mr Court, has apparently decided duck shooting is not such a bad thing and has lifted the Lawrence ban.

That's a strange thing to do for a premier so deeply concerned about law and order and the increase in violent crime in his state. Outlawing public duck shooting should be the first step in a wider campaign to restrict the use of guns.

The gun lobby will, of course, fiercely resist any move to curb its activities. But the fact is that there are too many guns in suburban wardrobes. Apart from police and farmers, no one actually needs a gun. Certainly not some of the guns which are available for sale now. People should need a very good reason before they are granted a gun licence. Removing duck shooting as a reason could be the start of a very significant reduction, over time, of the number of guns in the community.

There are admittedly difficulties in controlling the supply and use of firearms. But we should be prepared to make the effort. Guns are deadly weapons, and everything should therefore be done to restrict the use of firearms to as few people as possible. The mass slaughter of ducks for almost three months of the year simply reinforces the cult of weaponry.