

Backdown on duck ID wrong

THE 11th-hour decision by the State Government to phase in its so-called "compulsory" waterfowl identification test is ill-advised.

The move will not help the Government improve its credentials with conservationists — shaded from very light (which includes most members of the community) to dark green.

And the welcome given the change by members of the shooting fraternity will not add to the authenticity of their claims that they care about preservation of protected species.

The Government's justification for the move, that there would not have been time to sit all the tests and get the results back from interstate, is a sad reflection on its state of preparedness.

After all, it is the body which decided on the tests, and should have been capable of determining the time for testing and marking which was needed.

The argument from the shooting fraternity that phasing in will help compensate for the lack of time which has prevented many of the state's nearly 2000 duck hunters from sitting for the test just does not hold water.

Tasmanian shooters, unless they live in a vacuum, should have been aware since late 1993 that an identification test, based on the Victorian model, was on its way to this state to try to help prevent the shooting of protected species of ducks and other wildfowl.

Responsible shooters, in general, agreed that the measure was sensible.

They also recognised that it was a wise move in that it would help take the heat off them in the growing debate about the legitimacy of shooting ducks for sport as it would show that they were willing to take steps to help prevent the killing of protected species.

Credibility

Backing the decision to phase in the identification test this year will undo any good the shooters believed supporting the test would do for them. As well, it will not help their long-term campaign to defend what they say is their right to shoot ducks.

The claims that lack of publicity and that there had been insufficient time for duck hunters to take the test lack credibility in the face of the fact that 800 shooters have already allowed time to sit for it in Tasmania.

It may well be the case that those who have not sat the test — who have failed to realise in the 17 months since it was first revealed that a test would be imposed and would apply to them — include among their number some so severely lacking in powers of comprehension that they would never pass.

If this is so, then it would appear to be in the best interests of shooters and the public at large to keep such people away from duck hunting spots, as they would surely loom large as a danger to both man and beast.

It also makes little sense for the State Government to adopt a policy of "shoot now, sit later" for the identification test.

What does the Government do, if a shooter sitting a test, realises as a consequence that a duck he shot and killed during the phasing in period was, in fact, a member of a protected species?

Does the Government and the shooter write a letter of apology?

The whole question of shooting as a sport has, in recent years, become embroiled in controversy all over the world as civilised people question the need to kill lesser species in the name of recreation.

The decision by the State Government to ease its requirements over duck identification will only add fuel to the fire of that controversy.

The move may please duck shooters in the present, but it could have negative repercussions for them in a not-so-distant future.