



THE AGE

EDITORIAL OPINION

Saturday 22 April 1995

Drought relief for ducks

FOR THIS year at least, the ducks will dabble in peace on Victoria's swamps and waterways. The drought that threatens disaster for so many farmers has now spoilt the annual bloodthirsty ritual of the duck-shooting season. This year's season has been called off after Victorian Government surveys showed that waterbird numbers had not recovered sufficiently because of the drought. Prolonged drought in New South Wales and Queensland has taken a huge toll of waterbirds, and has driven some to Victoria, where the drought set in later.

To have allowed even the foreshortened season that duck shooters wanted this year might thus have imperilled the breeding stocks of other states as well as our own, and the Victorian Government has wisely followed the South Australian and NSW Governments in imposing a temporary ban.

This lull in the shooting should now be made permanent. The Government should follow the Western Australian Lawrence Government's permanent ban on public duck shooting (a ban partly lifted by the Court Government for shooters on private property). Then at last we would be spared the annual grisly exhibition of slaughtered swans, ibis, heron and rare protected duck species that are retrieved from the wetlands by animal welfare activists and dumped on the State Government's doorstep for the television cameras.

Tactics such as these make it clear

that many duck shooters either cannot or do not bother to distinguish between the eight duck species that could be shot legally during the season and protected birds, despite the introduction of compulsory waterfowl identification testing for shooters. Many more birds are believed to die in agony from lead poisoning when they ingest lead pellets scattered by the tonne across the wetlands by duck shooters' guns. A NSW Government study has found that some species of duck have declined by 80 per cent over the past decade.

It is hard to convince anyone, particularly a sophisticated younger generation of television viewers, that this ugly spectacle has anything to do with sport. The violent killing and maiming of native birds and animals can no longer be regarded as a legitimate recreational pursuit. It is surely more profitable and more enlightened to conserve our wetlands and their native inhabitants for the leisurely appreciation of local bushwalkers and ecotourists instead of permitting their violent exploitation by a gun-happy minority, many of whose members have no other excuse for owning a gun.

A ban on duck shooting, therefore, should be a logical first step in a wider campaign to restrict the use of firearms to police, farmers and others who need them for their work. In this way we can work towards a more peaceful and pleasant society for people as well as for waterbirds.