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Quiet Victorians want ban on duck hunting as shooting support slides

Professional polls continue to show most Victorians want duck shooting banned. And the latest scientific survey data of effects on our native waterbirds is damning, writes Kerrie Allen.

Kerrie Allen

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Unprecedented environmental conditions have devastated communities and wildlife across Victoria, but shooting lobbies say if they don't get their recreational bird shooting season next March, then votes are at stake. Similar threats before the 2018 state election had no impact on Labor's landslide victory. It's a mute but nonetheless disturbing ultimatum.

This is not about duck shooting.

Latest figures show the number of licensed duck shooters has fallen to just 0.38 per cent of the population, with about half this number inactive.

Conversely 98 per cent of Victorians care deeply for our fauna, according to Labor's Animal Welfare Action Plan 2016. Duck shooting does not equal animal welfare.

Ballistics experts say at least one in four birds will not be killed outright. Many will flutter away and die slow painful deaths over days or weeks. Others will be left with permanent injuries.

To most, this is an unacceptable way to treat the hundreds of thousands of our struggling native waterbirds — many unique to our country — who are the victims of Victoria's annual recreational duck shoot.

Other states have long banned it. Professional polls continue to show most Victorians want it banned here too.

This year, the question of why it has persisted in Victoria is particularly exposed due to record hot dry spells scorching our country.

The latest scientific survey data regarding impacts on our native waterbirds is damning.

Wetland area is the lowest since surveys began 37 years ago and there is little if any breeding among "game species". Numbers are well below long-term averages.

Those observed in Victoria have declined about 40 per cent since 2018.

Minimal ability for large scale movement of birds between north and south (due to lack of water habitat) means birds are effectively marooned, "sitting ducks" for shooters if any kind of season goes ahead.

Previous Victorian Labor governments have closed duck shooting seasons in 2003, 2007 and 2008 for less dire environmental conditions.

It's not just our dwindling numbers of birds that suffer.

In the absence of public consultation, Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting conducted an online survey on the impacts of duck shooting on those who live or work around the waterways.

Hundreds of respondents from around the state reported heartfelt accounts of unbearable noise from gunfire, cruelty, financial loss and fears for safety.

The wife of a war veteran reported “after a few days I hear him say ‘I just want some peace’.” Sleep was disrupted. “The noise disturbs my sleeping children which ruins their entire day schedule”; “I had to give up my night shift job as I couldn’t sleep during the day”; “We’re constantly tired during duck shooting and the guns scare our granddaughter”.

Safety was a major concern; “Shooting too close to a retirement village — dangerous and distressing”; “Pellets regularly strike our house. On one occasion a family member was struck”; “Shooting occurs next to households and the road”; “Trying to fish or ski is dangerous”; “We feel we aren’t safe in our own backyard”.

Animals suffered. “I’ve had horses go through fences because of it”; “I have wounded ducks flap across the ground trying to find shelter near our house;” “It’s bill was split in half and it was unable to walk.”

Landowners were angry too. “Outrageous, we seem to have no rights;” “It’s ridiculous locals can’t enjoy the area in peace.”

And the notion of economic benefit was overwhelmingly shot down. “It’s never been lucrative, just ask the local store;” “Two things terrify tourists, one is bushfire, the other is shooting close by.”

At its September conference, the Labor Party voted — almost unanimously — to review duck shooting in Victoria.

Yet the Game Management Authority, the taxpayer-funded regulator which has been criticised for being “too comfortable with shooters”, according to the Pegasus Consulting Report, has just completed a stakeholder consultation process about a further shooting season.

Will the Andrews Government listen to the quiet Victorians, that is the majority who oppose the cruelty, fear and noise of duck shooting and cancel the 2020 season?

Particularly in light of dire environmental conditions and the party’s vote for a review?

Or is there something else going on?

With an announcement due within weeks, we will soon see.

Kerrie Allen is spokeswoman for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting