



THE AGE

EDITORIAL OPINION

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Duck shooting should be outlawed

DUCK shooting is not a sport, it is an obscenity. Last weekend, which marked the formal opening of the duck-shooting season, an estimated 11,000 Victorians took up their guns and went duck hunting. Around the state they blazed away from early dawn to dusk, while protesters were kept at bay by new Government regulations. No one knows for sure how many ducks were bagged and no one knows how many other waterfowl suffered at the hands of these so-called sportsmen. What is certain is that protected as well as unprotected species were killed in their thousands. There is no possible justification for this annual killing spree.

Regrettably, the Kennett Government does not see it this way. Instead, its new regulations are designed to help the shooters while deterring both the bird rescuers and the media. The regulations, limiting the times at which non-shooters can enter the shooting areas, were designed to stop harassment of shooters. There was also concern that the protesters were putting their lives at risk. However, no regulations would be necessary if the Government outlawed duck shooting.

In New South Wales, the Opposition has said it will introduce legislation outlawing duck shooting. If the independents and Democrats support their bill, as seems likely, the state's wildfowl will be protected. Victoria should follow the NSW Opposition's lead and outlaw mass killing of birds for pleasure.

Outlawing public duck shooting should be the first step in a wider campaign to restrict and discourage the use of guns, both sports and non-sports. There are too many guns in Australia. The gun lobby, which is a powerful lobby group in this country — if not quite as powerful as it is in the United States — will of course howl like wounded animals at any suggestion that guns should be restricted and that shooting animals for sport is a form of barbarism. But it clearly is. We believe that no one, except for police and farmers, actually needs a gun. Still less do they need some of the firearms that are available for private sale. While there are problems in achieving and enforcing uniform gun laws, the effort must be made. Guns are deadly weapons and we must do everything we can to make sure that access to firearms is restricted to as few people as possible. Ideally, there should also be a disarmament campaign aimed at reducing the number of guns in the community. Those men who need guns to reassure themselves about their masculinity should be forced to look elsewhere for reassurance.