

## Ducks pay high price for the coming election season

**H**UMAN loss has inevitably dominated the thoughts of Victorians this week. Yet some of the images of the devastation wrought by bushfires have also reminded us of the vulnerability of native fauna, and how much their survival may depend on governments following advice from agencies such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment. How strange, then, that next month Victoria will open the first duck-hunting season in three years, despite the department's opposition.

Last week, Environment Minister Gavin Jennings cited the view of the Hunting Advisory Committee and duck surveys of the eastern states in declaring a 49-day season from 21 March. Hunting groups dominate the committee, which, as Mr Jennings notes in the *Victorian Hunting Guide*, "continues to represent the hunting community". It is chaired by Bill McGrath, a vet-

eran of the National Party, which has made an issue of duck hunting in seats where Labor is vulnerable.

In November, Mr Jennings told Parliament that aerial surveys by scientist Richard Kingsford were most important. "I am happy to rely on what the science says," he said. Professor Kingsford says any increase in duck numbers is "far removed" from Victoria, where numbers have fallen 60 per cent in the past year. "If the Department of Sustainability and Environment, using a whole lot of indices, has recommended that there shouldn't be a season, then ... it is about time this thing stopped being a political decision and became a scientific decision," he said.

*The Age* opposes duck hunting because of the losses to rare species and the cruelty to the one-in-four ducks that are wounded and not retrieved. The science is against Mr Jennings' decision, which should be reversed.