

# OPINION

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## Labor chasing a small target

BY ELIZABETH MCCANN,  
REGIONAL VICTORIANS  
OPPOSED TO DUCK SHOOTING

IT's 'down, down' for the number of licensed hunters, according to new data from the Game Management Authority.

Licences have shrunk in every category of game animal - duck, deer and quail.

Not that you would know, judging from the GMA's spin on the issue.

The total number of game hunters has fallen to 58,611,

representing less than 1 per cent of Victoria's population.

Duck licences have been trending down since 2017.

Currently at 21,664, the number of duck licences has fallen almost 20pc in seven years.

Did the state government check the licence statistics before rejecting the key finding of its parliamentary inquiry - to ban duck and quail hunting?

When announcing the decision to back shooters rather than majority community

sentiment, or veterinary and environmental experts, Outdoor Recreation Minister Steve Dimopoulos promised "common-sense" changes.

However, the new hunting regulations finalised this month do nothing to reduce the well-known cruelty of bird wounding.

There is no mandatory training or accuracy testing for shooters.

Hunting is still permitted in poor light - in fog, rain and mist, pre-dawn and post-sunset.

Shooting is still allowed in reedy, bushy areas where retrieval of stricken birds is impossible.

How is such a regime consistent with so-called 'humane' hunting?

The duck hunting season has been extended to 90 days, now 50 per cent longer than in the 1960s.

As the GMA has often spruiked, a view that season length has little impact on the total number of birds bagged, why not shorten the season in deference to re-

gional residents whose lives and livelihoods are impacted by the carnage?

With lethal bird flu predicted to inevitably hit Australia, there is no provision of sanctuaries, such as Ramsar wetlands, to offer protection for vulnerable waterbird populations.

Finally, it's outrageous that the government expects the 99 per cent of us who are not game hunters to continue to contribute tens of millions of dollars towards hunting.

Surely these funds are

better spent on regional Victoria's road and water woes.

Overall, the duck hunting 'emperor' has no clothes.

Participation is declining.

It relies on a myth about economic benefits but not one shred of hard evidence (as opposed to shooters' opinions) has ever backed that up.

When announcing his new regulations, Mr Dimopoulos listed the groups he had consulted with.

Rural Victorians weren't on that list.