

ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

**A dealer's
look at the gun
Buy-Back**

Guilt

by association



Targeting

a better future for shooting sports

September 1999 Vol.1 Issue 1



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The political voice of the SSAA

Editorial policy:
to create a better environment and
community understanding of all forms of
hunting and shooting sports.

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A word from the President

During the past few years, private firearm ownership has become highly politicised. Like most shooters I don't like it, but the fact is gun owners cannot afford to ignore the situation. The shooting sports are under constant attack and the only effective defence is to stay one step ahead of the opposition. One of the problems with the Australian Shooters Journal in the past has been the lack of available space to address legislative/political issues.

The legislative section has published some important facts and figures during the past couple of years, but often there is a lot more going on than the column has room to cover. Sometimes there are important developments in a particular state of which members should be made aware. However, because of the limited space and the magazine's national emphasis, regional issues have to be passed over in favour of a subject with a broader appeal.

Despite the anti-gun lobby's 'uniform gun laws' catch-cry, the licensing situation varies considerably from state to state. Often a minor inconvenience for gun owners in one jurisdiction is a major drama for licensees in another. Similarly, police policy plays a greater or lesser role in the licensing process and the question of what you can and cannot do with a firearm. As a national organisation, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) would like to bring as many topics as possible to the attention of its members.

Overriding the notion of anti-gun lobby pressure and various licensing regimes is the question of lobbying. Shooters in Australia have become a lot more pro-active during the past few years - self-preservation is a great motivator! In order to be effective, however, they need to know what's going on. Covering every proposal that is mooted month to month around the country would require a medium sized paperback publication. Most are little more than anti-gun lobby hyperbole, but some take on lives of their own with the potential to eventually become official policy. The limited space available in the national magazine means they sometimes have to go unreported.

With these problems in mind, the national Board made a decision earlier this year to instigate a new national magazine. The new publication will focus exclusively on legislation, licensing, politics and lobbying. The intention is to bring a broader range of issues to the readership while leaving the ASJ, soon to be the Australian Shooter: the magazine for sporting shooters, free to cover more of the sport's 'up' side. The new magazine, which will take over the Australian Shooters Journal title, will be mailed out bi-monthly along with the Australian Shooter.

It is our hope that readers will find the new publication informative, comprehensive and above all useful. The old adage 'the best defence is a good offence' is only valid if you have something to take to your opponent. The best any organisation can do is to bring the most up-to-date information to its members. The rest, as they say, is up to you.

On the subject of participation, members in New South Wales are urged to take note of the accompanying insert covering the forthcoming review of the state's firearm laws. The NSW Firearms Act and regulations desperately need a serious rethink and this is an important opportunity for shooters to have some input. The insert outlines how you can help bring about some sensible changes. The SSAA is encouraging as many gun owners as possible to offer up submissions and I hope you will all take the time to consider the issues and get involved. ●

Bill Shelton
SSAA National President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Shelton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'B'.

Japan's Soaring Suicide Rate

Paul Peake



Many readers would be aware of the integral part played by the Japanese Government in the United Nation's push for prohibitive gun laws. The Japanese have been at the forefront of the UN's efforts since the early 1990s by providing funding and offering a number of draft resolutions on global gun control. The country's preoccupation with international firearms regulation is fuelled by a mixture of paranoia over local gun-related crime and a long history of repressive domestic arms control.

The recent economic downturn in many Asian markets has had a significant impact on societies throughout the region. One of the more sinister consequences appears to be a huge increase in the number of suicides in Japan. According to the country's National Policy Agency, in 1998 the total number of suicides rose by an incredible 34.7 per cent over the previous year with 32,860 Japanese taking their own lives.¹

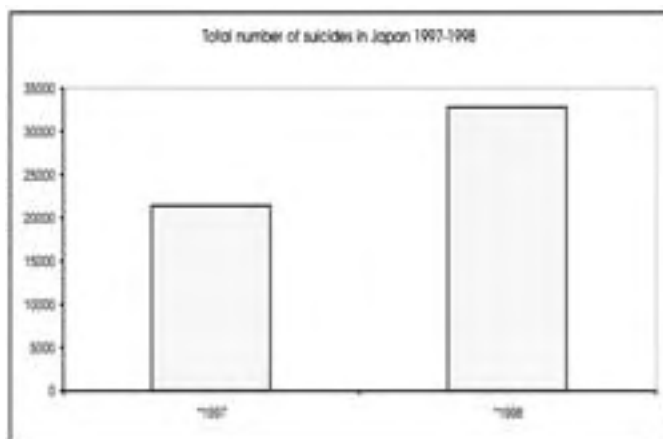


Table 1. Source: National Policy Agency data.

The increase is important from the shooter's perspective because it raises serious questions about the effectiveness of harsh gun laws as a means of combating suicide. One of the main arguments put forward by the anti-gun lobby in favour of harsh gun control is the supposed connection between the availability of firearms and the number of people who take their own lives. Table 2 shows however, that despite a history of severe firearm regulation, Japan's

suicide rate has been consistently higher than Australia's for more than 100 years. The only exception being a brief period during the 1960s when the two percentages were within a few points of each other. The fact that Japan experienced unprecedented fiscal growth throughout much of the decade may help explain the concurrence.

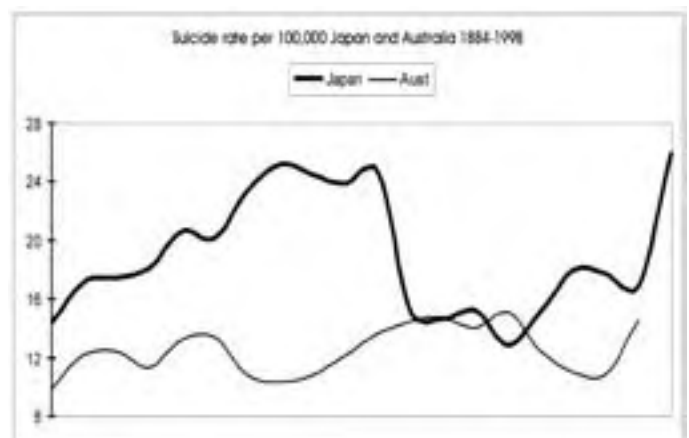


Table 2. Source: Pinguet, M. (1993). Voluntary Death in Japan. Cambridge: Polity Press and Australian Bureau of Statistics.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the economic well-being of a community has a far greater impact on suicide than the availability or otherwise of firearms. Table 3 contains Australian Bureau of Statistics figures covering a 20-year period. The data indicates a possible relationship between the level of unemployment and the number of people who resort to suicide.

The Japanese have traditionally regarded suicide as an honourable means of atoning for failure or showing remorse. That point aside, the impetus behind the latest increase is undoubtedly economic. According to recent reports in the Japanese media, a significant percentage of those taking their own lives are middle-aged 'salary men' who have fared badly as a result of the country's economic woes.²

When considering the potential impact of economics and especially unemployment on suicide, it is worth noting that the largest increases in suicide in Australia during the past 15 years have been among teenagers and young adults aged between 15 and 24. This

How many lives might have been saved had the government put the \$500 million used to seize firearms into a realistic youth employment program?

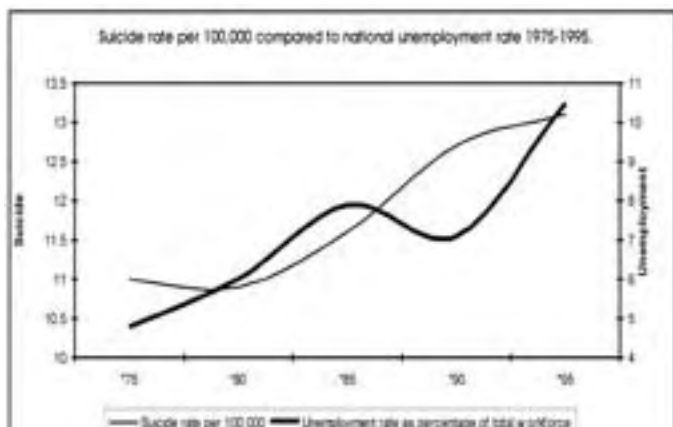


Table 3. Source: Figures for unemployment rate 1975-93 adapted from ABS data published in Langmore, J. and Quiggin, J. (1994). *Work for all: Full Employment in the Nineties*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press. Suicide data ABS (Cat. No. 3309.0).

group also has some of the highest levels of unemployment with figures showing the rate may be upwards of 25 per cent in some parts of the country.

The situation carries important lessons for policy makers in Australia. Obviously the availability of firearms has no bearing on why people kill themselves. Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Criminology figures clearly indicate that the forced confiscation of 640,000 firearms has had no tangible impact on Australia's overall suicide rate. While the number of firearm-related deaths has declined (a trend already evident prior to the 'buy-back' scheme) there has been a marked increase in suicides involving alternatives such as hanging, gassing and poisoning. Reinforcing the notion is the Japanese experience. Although private firearm ownership is practically unknown, the country's current suicide rate is almost double that of Australia.

The second important point is the link between suicide and the community's economic health. As Table 4 shows, a relationship between unemployment and suicide has been clear for some time. While the evidence is still inconclusive, the fact is the most disadvantaged section of the labour market in Australia, namely young people, also makes up a disproportionate percentage of suicide victims.

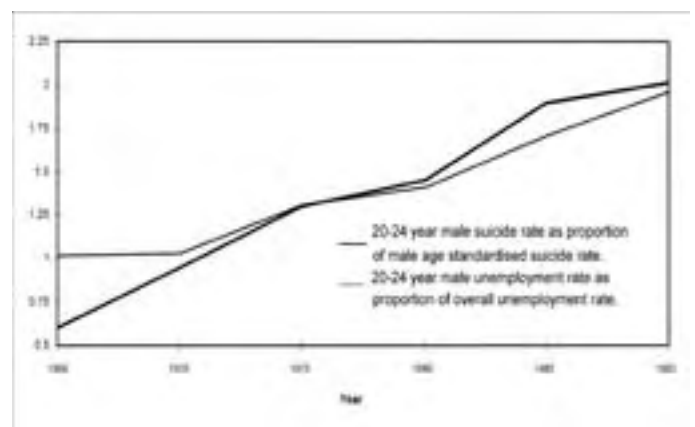


Table 4. Source: Figures adapted from a paper by Barry Malley, Senior Fellow, Centre for Independent Studies, December 1994.

Suicide is a complex phenomenon for which there is no single answer. Nevertheless, a number of points stand out. Confiscating hundreds of thousands of firearms has clearly failed to reverse the trend. At the same time, whether or not people have meaningful work seems to have a substantial bearing on the problem. How many lives might have been saved had the government put the \$500 million used to seize firearms into a realistic youth employment program? How many Australians will have to lose their lives before policy makers demonstrate the same enthusiasm for addressing the real issues as they have shown for persecuting shooters? ●

1. Coleman, J. (1999, July 3). Suicide surge in Japan. *The Advertiser*. p. 51.
2. (1999, July 22). Japan's woes result in suicides. *The West Australian*. p. 26.

The 1996 gun buy-back - *a dealer's perspective*

Bruce Noll

I used to think that being a firearm dealer in Australia was a pleasant occupation. I enjoyed meeting and dealing with the best and most reputable people in the community and I came to regard most customers as friends and reliable compatriots. You might be wondering why I have changed my mind. My head-on collision with the buy-back in 1996 is to blame.

When the legislation was put forward, gun dealers such as myself were given two options: allow the government to buy our stock and close down shop or allow the government to buy our semi-automatic longarms and try to continue to make a go of the business. I decided for option one. Little did I know what I would be up against. I was told that I would be compensated for the value invested in my business, The Taree Trading Post.

Having read the preamble written in the guidelines for claiming loss of business, I believed that I really would get the true value. The paragraph stated:

Loss of business compensation aims to ensure that the full value of the business, before the May 10 and July 17, 1996 resolutions and the resulting state legislation, equals the current value of the business plus assets and cash on hand by way of compensation.

With that, I began the process. My first step, under instruction

from the NSW Police Service state project manager, was to obtain a professional licensed valuation of my business. I did as told and the result was a valuation figure of \$80,350 and stock at cost. The total, \$148,238.

My second step was to get my personal accountant to submit the percentage of losses that would occur from the new prohibitive legislation. The result, a compensation amount of \$47,301.

A visit with accountants, appointed by the Firearm Dealers Association, was my third move. After deliberating for a year with this accountancy firm, my claim for compensation was reduced to \$21,421.

Step four was to submit these claims to the accountants acting for the government to be checked and reviewed. They had to ensure that my claims met the government's guidelines. Not surprisingly, they reduced my compensation claim to an astounding \$6504.

At this point I began to worry. If a few more 'professional' firms were to review my claims, I could just about count on owing the government a substantial amount to finalise my compensation package.

I wrote to my local Federal Member and a few other officials to express my disbelief at the final compensation amount. In return, I received insulting replies. After that, it became very clear to me that firearm dealers could almost apply for endangered species status.

Belligerence and pig-headedness dominated my thinking at this stage. The financial losses become less important than my will to remain a firearm dealer. I believe I came down with the 'Up Yours Syndrome'. Needless to say, I was beginning to question my original choice.

Not totally convinced I had made the wrong decision, I decided to sign a deed of release. I thought doing so would entitle me to the petty offer that had been made and loosen the grip these bureaucrats had on me. Unfortunately that did not happen.

After receiving a police service cheque for the amount offered, I was then contacted by the government, who informed me that in two weeks they would collect my stock, confiscate my dealer's licence and compensate me for the cost price of the stock collected. When I asked how I should verify the amount of the stock that I couldn't produce documentation for, I was told that the government would supply a valuer to determine the price.

Now the truth is I was born at night, but it wasn't last night.

Below are the figures that apply in my compensation package.

Original Value of Business..... \$148,238

Trading Losses for '96 \$23,482

Trading Losses for '97 \$18,281

Trading Losses for '98 \$8,327

Compensation Offered:

Loss of Business \$6,504

Personal Accountant..... \$1,460

Deloitte Fees..... \$3,960

Valuation Fees \$1,120

Loss on Plant & Equipment..... \$4,370

Total \$17,414

Amount Repaid to Remain in Business..... \$4,370



Bruce Noll,
The Taree Trading Post

Without expressing my true pent up feelings, I informed the government that I had changed my mind. After being told that I could only look at two business years to determine the financial worth of my business, which is not representative of its worth, especially since one of those years was 1996 - the year the prohibitive legislation was implemented - I realised that closing down would not get me the actual value of my business. I decided to retain my dealer's licence. When I made this announcement to the appropriate people, the response was an extended period of silence. I can only assume they were a little shocked.

Within two days I received a call from the state project manager who insisted that if I exercised this option, a substantial amount of the compensation I had already received would have to be returned.

Having now repaid most of the supposed compensation, I remain in business. In my opinion, this entire process cannot accurately be called a 'buy-back'. Not wanting to be too ill-mannered, I'll let you come up with a more appropriate name. ●

GUILT

A large group of motorcyclists, mostly men, are riding down a multi-lane street. They are wearing leather vests, some with patches, and many are wearing black balaclavas or face coverings. The motorcycles are various models, including cruisers and choppers. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the street as the bikers approach. The word 'GUILT' is superimposed in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the top half of the image.

The biker club Coffin Cheaters: members "not suitable" to hold a firearm's licence.

by association

In spite of the attack on individual freedom and the forced confiscation of private property, many shooters thought the concept of 'guilt by association' was the worst element of the Federal Government's buy-back scheme. The notion that all gun owners were held collectively responsible for the actions of one lunatic was and remains deeply offensive. While the idea of judging people en masse is bad enough, the idea of judging them based on mere speculation or who they happen to know is downright dangerous.

Western Australia's Coffin Cheaters and Club Deroes motorcycle clubs have been the focus of official attention during the past 12 months. Following a number of highly publicised incidents, the WA Police Service organised Operation Gallipoli - apparently to look into the groups' activities. The inquiries took an ominous turn late last year however, when authorities began threatening to revoke people's firearm licences. The police sent letters to dozens of individuals threatening to cancel their licence based on their supposed connection to the clubs. The six-page correspondence detailed a series of events, concluding in part:

"Given your probable involvement in and/or knowledge of the violent confrontation between the Coffin Cheaters and Club Deroes, and in light of the nature of the series of events in that violent confrontation, harm may be suffered by other persons as a result of your retaining possession of a firearm."

The problem is that the authorities provided no evidence whatsoever that the recipients had any "probable involvement in and/or knowledge of" the incidents or that they were actually involved with either club per se, as opposed to a handful of individuals acting independently. It is the SSAA's understanding that the majority of people who received the letters have no direct association with either club; they simply know or happen to be related to a member.

In one case, the father of a senior club member, a fellow in his late 60s who has held a firearms licence for almost 50 years, was asked to show why his licence should not be revoked despite having never been questioned in connection with the investigation. Similarly, an SSAA member was advised that his application for a handgun licence for club competition was likely to be rejected because his brother, who lives more than 1500 kilometres away, is a member of one of the clubs.

Issues of relatives and acquaintances aside, the police have furnished no evidence of an orchestrated campaign involving the entire membership of either club. It would be reasonable to assume that a large proportion of members in both groups have never been the subject of police inquiries connected to the Gallipoli investigation. Nevertheless, they have lost their firearms. When authorities have evidence, as opposed to speculation, that someone is not a fit and proper person to possess a firearm, they should have the power to refuse or revoke a permit. Withdrawing a person's licence however, or refusing to issue them one in the first place on the grounds that they have some "probable involvement in and/or knowledge of" a particular offence without offering up any corroboration, is simply wrong.

The idea that a person's suitability to hold a licence should be based on nothing more than supposition or who they may be acquainted with or related to, has potentially grim consequences for all shooters. What of people who merely know a felon? In light of the WA Inc fiasco, that might include half the Labor Party in WA for a start. What of unionists or environmentalists? Should a person be denied a licence because an associate confronted the police during a protest? Sound a bit extreme? Australia has some sinister examples of administrative excess over and beyond the injustices of the buy-back fiasco. Prime Minister 'Billy' Hughes ordered the creation of the Federal Police because he was hit by an egg at a rally in Warwick. Former WA premier Sir Charles Court had the state's Police Act amended to include a section restraining public gatherings. The confiscation of people's firearms based solely on who they know appears to be well under way.

The law provides authorities with a large measure of discretionary power when it comes to issuing firearm licences. The corollary being the sensible and fair application of that power. Where there is proof that someone is not a fit and proper person to hold a licence, one should not be granted. However, the criteria for judging an individual's suitability should not involve mere speculation and it certainly should never involve guilt by association. ●



How to **win** and **influence** politicians

John Coochey

Before Bill Clinton took office as the President of the United States, he and Hillary decided to drive across the country one last time, as private citizens. While in the Midwest, they stopped for petrol. Suddenly, Hillary jumped out and embraced the pump attendant in a rather passionate manner. Bill, a bit put out by this, asked her why she had hugged him. Hillary replied, "Well dear, we used to be sweethearts at school." "Well," said Bill sarcastically, "perhaps you should have married him instead of me and that way you would have been married to a petrol pump attendant." "No I wouldn't dear. I would be married to the President of the United States," replied Hillary.

The moral of this story is that we should look for the power behind the throne. In Australia, it is usually the party behind the throne and not the voters; however, sometimes a few votes can make a difference. Alexander Downer is our Minister for Foreign Affairs. He stayed in power because the shooters' lobby voted against the Democrats.

I've worked in the Federal Public Service for more than 20 years, and in 1998 I worked for an independent Member of Parliament (MP) and was able to get a pretty good idea of how things work. It is difficult to convince people who have not had regular contact with politicians how stupid many of them are. Some are quite bright, some are even reasonably honest, but there are many who you would not pay to change your tyre so do not feel intimidated by them. Most politicians have egos as big as planets and believe that they could be Prime Minister. They also think they came to power because of their own capabilities. The last election showed that this was not true. Only one independent was elected to the House of Representatives and even someone like Graham Campbell, previously the member of Kalgoorlie, did not retain his seat once he was dropped by the Labor Party.

A sure way for a politician to be removed is for them to fail preselection by their party. If they do not get preselection they will lose. In the Senate, your chance of success is where you are on the party list, if you are near the top of one of the major parties

lists you will be elected.

A quick checklist: Do you know the name of your local MP? Local Senator? Are you, and all your family, on the electoral roll? Are you a member of a political party? If you are not registered to vote because you don't want people to know your address, simply claim that your life would be threatened and demand to be put on as a silent voter. Your address will not appear on any public document. Remember, only a handful of people can decide who a party selects so you will have much more power if you join a political party.

Now that you know who your local member is, you can start to lobby him or her. That means that you try to persuade them to accept your view and you keep pressure on them. Faxing their office at Parliament House Canberra is a waste of time because of the number of faxes that arrive at their office. Yours will most likely get lost in a pile. Writing to a politician has a greater effect - especially if you are in their constituency. Even more effective is a letter followed by a personal visit. Many politicians have 'morning teas' or similar, why not go along? As always, make your case clearly and politely. There is no point in threatening or becoming abusive.

Without giving advanced notice, I met the ACT Chief Minister after I had written a letter. She remembered the letter and was apparently educated by it.

A 'letter to the editor' is a very cost-effective way of swaying politicians' attitudes and public opinion. However, they have to get published before they can have any effect. The usual rule of thumb is that one letter is worth 500 votes. Even if you do not earn a living by writing, you should still give it a try. It may be easier than you think. The same is true with articles. Even an anti-gun paper such as the Canberra Times has published articles critical of its own editorial policy. If you decide that a politician cannot be won over and you want to vent your anger, make sure it is in front of a large audience. Politicians take notice of that.

A couple of years ago, the ACT Attorney-General, who was the first to implement the new national gun laws, endorsed a report on domestic violence which contained key data that was obviously false. An article and a number of my letters published in the

Canberra Times proved this. At one point, we were both speakers at a conference on family law. I questioned why he was defending a false report. He said he could not see that anything was wrong. I lost my temper and walked over to his table. I slammed the key documents down in front of him and suggested he read them. Six months later our paths crossed in the centre of Canberra. It was obvious he desperately wanted to be somewhere else - he'd got the message.

In short, your efforts are never wasted. Never give up. ●

John Coochey spent 23 years working in the Australian Federal Public Service. He currently works for Defence, but is setting up a consultancy business. Frequently published, he is writing a book on the falsification of information by special interest groups. He has university qualifications in economics, accountancy and modern languages. He is fluent in Spanish and has travelled extensively in Latin America.

Duck man swamped with fines

READERS MIGHT remember back to a story late last year which detailed how Laurie Levy, spokesperson for the Coalition Against Duck Hunting, had received more than \$100,000 via the Federal Attorney-General's Department in order to fund a challenge to Victoria's duck hunting laws. The laws were based on the argument that preventing people from entering a hunting area was an infringement of their free speech. The Government spent more than \$750,000 fighting the case that they helped fund in the first place.

Mr Levy has been at it again. The doyen of duck devotees was convicted, for a fourth time, of being in a hunting area without a permit. Magistrate Jack Tobin fined him \$500 for entering Victoria's McDonalds Swamp back in March.

We wonder what kind of penalty would have been handed out if a hunter had been in an area in which he wasn't supposed to be.

Carr accused of secrecy

THE NSW Carr Government has been accused of secrecy over its handling of a review into the State's Firearms Act.

Upper House Independents were asked by NSW National Party Leader, George Souris, to support a National Party motion requiring the Carr Government to establish a Joint Select Parliamentary Committee to review the Firearms Act 1996.

The Upper House will review the motion during the next Parliament session. Currently, members of the Carr Government conduct the review.

Mr Souris emphasised that this motion was about the method of the review and not about aspects of the legislation. He wants the review to consider issues with the appropriate level of detail and take into consideration wide public comment so the problems with the Firearm Act can be repaired.

National Party members believe the establishment of a Joint Select Parliamentary Committee will remove any attempt at secrecy over the Firearms Act. Mr Souris said the Committee is necessary because it is the only way a comprehensive examination can be achieved.

SSAA NSW Executive Director Roy Smith, said, "The National Party motion is fully supported by the SSAA. We want a full and open review, not some white-wash conducted behind closed doors."

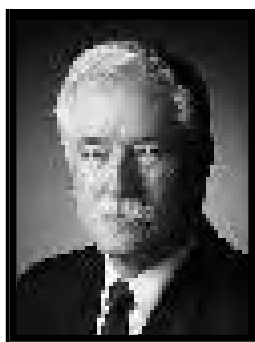
In response to Mr Souris' motion, Carr Government representative and Acting Police Minister John Aquilina said the purpose of the review is to ensure that NSW is implementing the National Firearms Agreement in the most effective and practical way. He emphasised that the review would not change NSW's support of the National Firearms Agreement.

According to the Carr Government, the review is in no way secretive. Community members and groups such as the Coalition for Gun Control, National Rifle Association of Australia Ltd, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, Arms Collectors Guild of NSW and any other approved peak firearms association are invited to make submissions and participate in the review of the Act.

The Government said it is hoping for wide community consultation.

"A Joint Select Committee is not the appropriate body to conduct the review - it would simply waste members' time and taxpayers' money," Mr Aquilina said.

The review will be chaired by Les Tree, the Director-General of the Ministry for Police.



Keith Tidswell Executive Director Public Relations and International Affairs

Recently, I spent some time in Canberra discussing issues of national and international concern on behalf of all firearm owners. I participated in a number of meetings with politicians of all political persuasions and spent time reviewing the role the SSAA holds as a non-government organisation (NGO) with several government departments.

With the approach of the Sydney Olympic Games, representatives from various shooting bodies were in Canberra that same week to talk about coaching and sporting performances.

The highlight of this visit was the donation of a number of books to the Parliamentary Library by the SSAA. The purpose of the donation was to provide politicians with factual, enlightening and entertaining information. Some of the books included *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America* by Gary Kleck, *Samurai and the Mountie* and *the Cowboy* by David B. Kopel and *Brother to the Dingo* by Murray Mitchell (Bwana Samaki).

A trip to the Australian Institute of Criminology to discuss research findings on homicide, suicide and accidents and the role alcohol, drugs and unemployment play in crime, concluded a very successful week for the SSAA.

Despite the feelings of hurt and betrayal that shooters have felt as a result of the buy-back deal, meetings with politicians and various groups are an essential part of reopening communication channels and implementing a deeper understanding of our sport.

Along those lines, I again found myself in Canberra, with representatives from various shooting, collector and dealer groups. We all met with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Defence and the Attorney-General's Department in Canberra to be briefed on Australia's new policy guiding future contributions to international efforts to address problems posed by the proliferation and misuse of firearms.

The complex nature of small arms issues is recognised by the Government and the policy points out that there is a need for efforts at national, regional and international levels to help generate an effective response to these issues.

During the meeting, other aspects of the policy were discussed,

one of which was that there was "no intention to impede the lawful use of firearms by legitimate owners" - great news for all SSAA members.

The illicit manufacture and trafficking of arms and ammunition is of great concern to many countries and these issues are being addressed at United Nations' meetings. Since becoming an NGO on the roster with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the SSAA has contributed to these discussions in order to promote a clearer understanding of sporting, hunting and collecting activities and the role that we can play in promoting friendship, peace and goodwill.

Unfortunately, the reality is that there are armed conflicts in many regions of the world and the complexity of this issue varies with the domestic, economical and political situations that may be encountered.

From a firearm owner's perspective, one of the most important issues that was discussed was the issue of marking. Apparently, large quantities of unmarked firearms end up in areas of political turmoil and delegates to the United Nations believe that international agreements, to be policed by all governments, are necessary to ensure that firearms are at least marked at the time of manufacture, which is intended to assist in tracing the movement of illicitly manufactured and trafficked firearms and the individuals responsible.

The SSAA has successfully played a part in bringing the sporting people, collectors, manufacturers and United Nations representatives to the table to discuss areas where special expertise is required.

This meeting marks the first time that the Department of Foreign Affairs has briefed sport shooting organisations, collectors and dealers and indicates that Australia's sport shooting people are being taken seriously and recognised for their positive role. Through such meetings the SSAA can promote on a national and international level, an understanding of the safe and responsible use of firearms and improve relations with concerned communities. ●



Gary Fleetwood Executive Director Special Projects

For Australian firearm owners to maintain their anger about the way in which they were treated in 1996 is not a difficult task. Anger is a natural human response to being wronged and firearm owners in this country have plenty of reasons to be angry.

It is my job, within the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, to co-ordinate the energy, enthusiasm and anger of members to remind politicians of their collective poor decision on firearm matters. It is a job that I take very seriously and one that is fuelled by my own disappointment in the way a group of ordinary Australians can be so vilified by the Government and the media.

While I am glad this job is mine, I would like to make several points clear.

I was a South Australian police officer who, for most of his career, was involved in firearms and firearms training at the highest levels. I have been to more sieges than most politicians have had free lunches. I was the officer in charge of the Firearms Registry in Papua New Guinea, in which time I was hounded and persecuted by 'law-abiding gun owners' for reminding them that there were laws that had to be obeyed. It was during this time that I realised how the firearm owner can be his own worst enemy.

As a law-abiding Australian, I walk freely in my country. I will always support those Australian citizens who have proven themselves suitable to enjoy the pleasures shooting sports can offer, but I will not support anybody who has a careless attitude towards gun safety or who has a disregard for the law.

I do not believe in conspiracy theories. I am not convinced in the factual correctness of the documents currently circulating throughout the shooting fraternity that says it was a government plot that initiated the mass murder at Port Arthur. I have no doubt that the actions taken by government agencies at the time immediately following the Port Arthur murders had their shortcomings. I have made my position clear on that issue and it is a stance supported by the SSAA.

Keith Tidswell and I work in the Special Projects office located in Adelaide. The Board has supplied Keith and myself with extra staff, Marlene Hartwig and Lucille Mastrullo, so that we can focus solely on our roles.

Communication must be the means by which the energy of the members can be focused on the issues at hand. Accordingly, I ask that members wishing to participate in reminding politicians that we are still here, get in touch with me in the Adelaide office.

I shall be travelling to all states before Christmas for the sole purpose of meeting members, and non-members for that matter, who wish to participate in this action. If you wish to find out when I will be in your area, please contact your State Executive.

I maintain the SSAA web site; I am not a webmaster and do not have the time to be one. Java was a place where spices came from. I am only interested in getting information out quickly to those who wish to locate news on gun issues. The guest book on the SSAA web site is now moderated because of the thoughtless words of both gun owners and some gun prohibitionists. Free speech is fine until it hurts another - and some language and comments were hurting the image of the SSAA.

A few words on image: in the unfortunate event of another mass shooting, the only thing that will save our bacon will be the goodwill that exists between society and the firearms community at that time. Politicians will only take radical decisions on social engineering when they believe that there will be no backlash from the community at the next election. Prime Minister John Howard thought that was the case when the May 10 APMC Meeting decisions were ratified. It is up to us to enhance the image of firearm owners - that starts with you and the way in which you publicly identify yourself as a gun owner.

Ending on a positive note, South Australian Democrat MLC Ian Gilfillan's Private Member's Bill to further restrict firearms usage was defeated in Parliament on August 4, 15 votes to six. The Bill would have disallowed anyone under 18 from holding a firearm's licence. ●

PARTING SHOTS

Learn the game first

During the past few weeks, I have been noticing that TV, radio and newspapers have had quite a number of calls for much stricter gun laws. That is fair enough I guess, we all deserve our say in Australia.

I think it would be wrong for some people who did not like football and had never played the game, to draw up a new set of rules. That said, the people organising the apparent campaign for the stricter gun laws should be required to pass the various tests necessary to obtain a pistol licence: being fingerprinted, being photographed and having references checked. Once these people go through the tests, they will then be able to make a more rational judgment. The police have already stated that the rules are quite strict as they are.

Just for the record, I am 70 years old and have been a shooter all my life. I still enjoy shooting and the good company I find at the clubs. The members are not a mob of rednecks, as they are often described. Shooters come in all shapes and sizes. Do not forget that Puccini was an ardent shooter - a typical redneck I suppose.

The mass killings that have occurred are fearful things. They were crimes committed by people with deranged minds who would use easily constructed bombs if guns were not available. Remember, the Oklahoma disaster didn't involve guns - just a vanload of fertiliser and diesel fuel.

I sometimes wonder if the anti-gun people rub their hands with glee when there is a shooting accident or killing mentioned in the media. More grist for their mill.

Bernard Perry, West Brunswick, Vic



THE GOOD: Australian Geographic ran a story (Putting the bounce back in the Flinders) in its July/September 1999 issue on pest control praising the SSAA on helping to clear the Flinders Ranges of goats. Good to see some positive mainstream media.

Crime Stoppers target illegal firearms

CRIME Stoppers is this month targeting people who have firearms in their possession, or have used firearms in illegal activity. The public is asked to provide information about people they know who have firearms in their possession, or have used firearms in illegal activity. Callers can remain anonymous and will be rewarded with up to \$1000 if their information leads to the arrest of a person. Phone 1800 333 000.

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Callers can remain anonymous and will be rewarded with up to \$1000 if their information leads to the arrest of a person.

THE BAD: This brief, which must have shocked more than a few firearm owners, was sent to the Australian Shooter by concerned SSAA member P Hossall of Brisbane. We hope that this is simply a case of bad journalism and not a sign of things to come. The sentence was in fact repeated in print media across Queensland word for word.

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3 ACTION LENGTHS

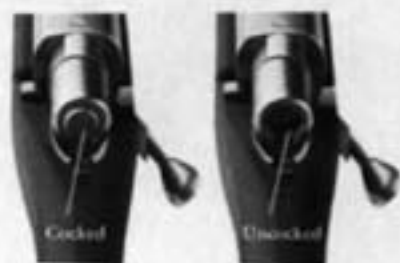
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	243
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DEALERS

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Erin Webb's Sports Store	(02) 4229-1915
Austin Bourke Firearms	(02) 6882-0879
Carrington Firearms	(02) 6882-3235
Goulburn Fish & Shoot	(02) 4822-1929
Foster Firearms	(02) 6765-8144
Highland Rod & Rifle	(02) 6772-8689
Peter Phillips	(02) 6778-4144

WA

Roy Alexander & Sons	(08) 9272-2205
Roy's Sports Power	(08) 9842-2842

QLD

QLD Gun Exchange	(07) 3252-5511
Rebel Gunworks	(07) 3883-1733
CRM Gunports	(07) 4031-4440
John Vichie Firearms	(07) 4681-4620
Halls Firearms	(07) 4772-1605
Rehbein Guns	(07) 4151-3194
Warwick Outdoors	(07) 4661-3533
Noosa Shooters	(07) 5447-7789

NT

The Gunsmith Shop	(08) 8983-3166
Fishing & Outdoor World	(08) 8981-6398

VIC

Allen & Lane	(03) 5443-8199
Shepparton Outdoors	(03) 5821-6572
Holts Gun Shop	(03) 5231-4933
Alpine Country	(03) 5134-1380

SA

Fisher Firearms	(08) 8362-8977
Adelaide Gun Shop	(08) 8231-3570

TAS

Sports Hut	(03) 6331-7090
Rod & Range	(03) 6273-4330

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