

ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

RSPCA
and the
hunting
debate

Taking the

HEAT OUT

of dealing
with the media

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In this issue

The political voice of the SSAA

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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

Denial appears to have become a common currency among Australian politicians and journalists alike - especially where gun control is concerned. The recent controversy surrounding the National Rifle Association of America's TV ads provides a good illustration.

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology's published Facts and Figures for 1999, armed robberies have indeed increased by 69 per cent since 1995, as the NRA pointed out. Moreover, Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data shows that victims of robberies involving firearms rose from 1565 in 1996 to 1910 in 1998.

Similarly, ABS figures indicate that the total number of 'Unlawful Entry with Intent' offences rose following the government's gun buy-back scheme - climbing from 402,079 to 435,670 victims between 1996 and 1998. The total number of assault victims increased from 114,156 to 132,967 during the same period, as did the number of victims of assaults involving firearms, rising from 629 in 1996 to 680 in 1998. The number of victims of sexual assaults involving firearms increased from 19 in 1996 to 24 in 1998, while the number of kidnappings and abductions involving firearms remained constant at 24 in 1996, with a similar number in 1998.

While firearm-related murders, attempted murders and manslaughter decreased overall between 1996 and 1998, factoring out the victims of the Port Arthur incident, the results are in line with the usual statistical ebb and flow from year to year. In other words, the government's confiscation scheme doesn't appear to have had

any serious impact at all. On the face of it, one might argue that statistically the average Australian now appears to have less chance of being murdered with a gun and a lot more chance of being robbed, assaulted, raped or kidnapped.

The Attorney-General, Mr Daryl Williams, can clutch at all the statistical straws he likes but the facts speak for themselves. To claim that Australia is somehow a safer place as a result of his government's anti-gun efforts is complete nonsense.

Bill Shelton
National President

See <http://www.nraia.org/show.cgi?page=/research/20000329-BanningGuns-001.shtml>

ASJ Letters

Erroneous facts

In a supplement to the January/February 2000 issue of the *Australian Shooter*, Dr David Carter offers a critique of the doctoral thesis "Killing for Sport" by Catherine Schuller of Macquarie University.

Dr Carter reports that Miss Schuller explores the question of cruelty in hunting by references to research from Britain concerning the blood chemistry of hunted deer. That well-known report has now been completely refuted by other independent research and those who are interested can obtain further details from bodies such as The Countryside Alliance.

In fact, both of the British reports appear to be irrelevant to Australian hunting. I have not seen Miss Schuller's paper but her reported comments may demonstrate very clearly just how shallow and superficial her work was.

The research that was concerned with the blood biochemistry of hunted deer was commissioned by the National Trust following controversy about the small number of packs of stag hounds that still operate in the west of England, sometimes across land owned by the National Trust. This is hunting in the old English style - just like traditional foxhunting. There are some 15 couple (another way of saying 30) staghounds with the hunt staff - huntsman and whippers-in. There are then the mounted followers, people on horseback who merely follow the hounds and take no part in the actual hunting. Stags are hunted by scent, occasionally for quite long distances, before sometimes being brought to bay when they are dispatched by the huntsmen.

There are very few packs of staghounds left in Britain but I have not heard of any in Australia. I know that some people use dogs in their hunting in Australia but that system does not equate with the system analysed in the reports from Britain.

Perhaps the criticism of Miss Schuller needs to be taken further.

**Colin Greenwood, Firearms Research & Advisory Service,
West Yorkshire, England**

A bureaucratic nightmare

I own a small farm in Victoria and, like all farms, I do have feral animals to dispose of now and then, as well as the odd accidents of cattle to deal with in a humane manner. For this reason, I have a firearms licence. I have just applied for renewal of the licence, which is for long rifles only.

I originally had a Farm Permit, which was issued by the local police officer, did not have an expiry date, did not cost me anything and was an efficient and legal document.

With the advent of Mr Howard's knee-jerk reaction to the Port Arthur incident, I, like everyone else who required or wished to retain arms for a specific reason, had to sit written exams for Law and Firearms Knowledge and make application for a firearms licence and purchase steel lockup cases and such. No credit or credence was given to gun club training or military service - I fall into the latter. The application form was very detailed.

The licence was eventually issued for three years at a cost of \$45, which I did not think was unreasonable. The licence renewals arrived and included serious threats of what would occur to one's long arms if the licences were not renewed by the expiry date of the original licence.

The renewal form consisted of nine pages, supported by six pages of threats and advice. Page three declared that I was to certify that the "number of firearms currently owned was correct" and the sum listed was NIL.

This was despite the fact that I had spent a great deal of time in

my original application detailing the two rifles I held.

My mate down the road, who also is a farmer, received his renewal about the same time and this particular page on his form stated that he owned two rifles and a shotgun. The shotgun was listed correctly but both rifles were the same rifle, with the same serial number. He owns one rifle and one shotgun.

For identification one was required to furnish one's driver's licence number. What is the point since it has just been established by the Victorian Police Force that there have been thousands more drivers' licences issued in Victoria than there are people?

What proof is that of one's identity? If it was valid, I cannot see the difference in that and the current shooter's licence held, as both have a photo and number. In primary production, one is asked, in triplicate, for a sales tax number and, in quadruplicate, for a copy of the original authority. If I have declared myself a primary producer, given them the address, property size, sales tax number and signed a Stat Dec, why is it necessary to supply all the other information again? In fact, why do they want all this proof and information the second time around including a Statutory Declaration just for licence renewal? This information was supplied for the original application and should be held in the records.

I should only have to notify the firearms office if I dispose of or acquire a firearm or alternatively sell the farm.

The cost has escalated from \$45 for three years to \$160 for five years - a rip-off. I have spoken to a number of police officers and to owners of gun shops and all agree that the situation has developed into a bureaucratic nightmare.

The criminals are not affected and never were. I, like many of my compatriots, are horrified by the paperwork, time and additional cost involved in this issue.

I have no objection to licensing and common sense; however, there is ample evidence that the latter is not part of the bureaucrats that produce the paperwork. If the same approach was made to drivers' licensing then there would be hell to pay and the car is no less lethal in the wrong hands.

What concerns me most is that I get an enormous amount of feedback from my friends and members of the Victorian police with regard to the result of the Firearms Act introduced by Mr Howard.

No-one, however, seems to be tackling the huge post-era problem that has developed as a result of over-zealous form composition, incompetence, castle building and indifference to the resulting imposition and cost to innocent individuals holding a shooters' licence. To quote an old film, "The members of parliament 'don't give a damn' and at this time we are stuck with a disgraceful costly mess.

Ivan L Neal, Heskett, Vic

Frustrated by ignorance

I was moved by the unfair backlash that went on by people after the recent commercial that was aired about the new indoor shooting facility at St Marys, NSW.

As a member of the SSAA and a responsible gun shooter, it makes me so sad and upset that there is so much ignorance among those who call themselves 'gun control' about facts and it seems the media always takes the other side and responsible shooters never get a fair go.

While I congratulate the SSAA and members about the indoor shooting club, which I found very impressive, I'd like the magazine to voice the issue and keep up all the good work. I thought the commercial was quite good and it should be aired more often.

Joud Machar, Bankstown, NSW



Keith Tidswell Executive Director Public Relations and International Affairs

The most important assets we have are members and those members belong to SSAA branches. These are people from all walks of life and it is their interaction with other members of the public that create the image of sports shooting and that image is the future of our sport.

The attitudes and the responsibility we instill into the next generation of shooters is the only way forward for us.

Talking with a friend the other evening about the image of sport, I was asked the question, "What can members do?" Well, there are a lot of things we can do, both as members and collectively as branches.

SSAA encourages branches to hold special range days when you can invite people to the range and let them try their hand at shooting safely under close supervision - although in NSW, legislation prevents people who are not licensed from using a firearm even under these tightly controlled circumstances.

Who do you invite? Take a look at people that you might believe would be of benefit if they had a clearer understanding of sporting shooters. What about your federal politician, your state politician, the local councilors or perhaps the mayor. Consideration should also be given to exposing newspaper editors to your sport and perhaps some TV or radio personalities. How about your local doctor? What about your schoolteacher?

There are many people who do business with each of us and an invitation to these people should not be overlooked. Not just the people who do business with the range but also those we come in contact with on a daily basis who would accept an invitation just as you may accept an invitation to go fishing or to play golf.

There is a wider community out there and there are those who are either philosophically or even vehemently and actively opposed to the concept of you owning firearms. Can we change a few attitudes? Is there a new way forward?

We believe there is a huge difference between those who would criminally use firearms and those of us who participate in a sport we have grown to love. We have found that the absolute concentration and visualisation techniques we use in training athletes help in other areas of our lives - improving the ability to study and improving our workplace performances. We are not asking to be left alone to participate in our chosen sport but that people come and experience this sport for themselves.

One of the other areas you need to talk about with the people you come into contact with is the future of recreational hunting in Australia. There is significant work being carried out by SSAA organisations and members with the yellow footed rock wallaby and hog deer projects as well as the other important work being carried out by the likes of Field and Game members in wetland conservation. Talk to people about the phrase 'sustainable use of wildlife' and share information with people you feel would benefit from having a deeper understanding of who you are and the fact that you truly do care about the future and that you're trying to do something about it.

Buy a copy of Geoff Smith's latest update of *A Guide to Hunting and Shooting in Australia*. It may be one of the most important books you will ever read - it does save lives.

It's not just about image. SSAA members are part of the community and we are proud of the role we play.

Out of RSPCA STEP

by Patrick Hewlett

The wading in of the RSPCA into the hunting debate is not entirely unexpected, but must be seen as disappointing. The RSPCA has always had a good reputation as an organisation with a practical approach to animal use - until now. Demanding a ban on any activity is generally a shortsighted and aggressive stance. Now the RSPCA has clearly declared war on recreational hunters. You cannot go back from that point easily and it is a foolish point to reach when dialogue and negotiation have not even been tried. This means that the RSPCA has selectively accepted data and demanded a traditional activity be banned without the more sensible approach of discussion with hunting groups and education in an effort to alleviate their concerns. This is the path they have taken with other stakeholders in animal welfare that they deal with. They have failed to understand that we accept the welfare of the species hunted as a prime concern of the hunter. Such a lack of regard for the rights and views of the hunting community is disappointing and counter to the achievement of a common aim.

At the same time, the organisation is going into the pork business in an effort to promote best practice in intensive farming. Surely, to be consistent, they should also be calling for a complete ban on all intensive agriculture. It is surely inhumane to keep pigs in large straw-filled pens with sows and piglets together until they are loaded onto a truck to be taken to the abattoir.

It also appears to the RSPCA's president

Dr Hugh Wirth, that the motivation for shooting ducks is a vital factor in deciding whether it is acceptable or not. In a recent television interview he stated that the organisation would condone ducks being shot "only if you're doing something like mitigation of damage to crops, as happens most frequently in NSW. But we would never tolerate those ducks being killed by sporting shooters. It has to be done properly and to be done properly means that you have to have skilled marksmen under supervision."

So it appears that it is okay to shoot ducks for economic reasons, but not for gastronomic reasons. Now just where are these superb marksmen who, under careful supervision, are going to sit night after night keeping the rice grower from financial ruin? Who is going to pay them? Who is going to train them? Perhaps the RSPCA should think about humanely adding a few wings to some of their pigs. We should also consider the alternatives, widespread poisoning, which surely is an abomination to all of us.

The question and answer approach put forward in the RSPCA's promotional material is a mixture of fact, half-fact and distortion more typical of the animal liberation movement:

Q&A

Q: How many ducks are wounded, injured and crippled every year in the name of 'sport' - as a result of recreational duck hunting?

A: It is estimated that every year between 594,000 and 900,000 ducks are wounded,

injured or crippled. Many will die within a few hours or days. Some will suffer prolonged pain before they die.

Comment:

Studies have indicated that about 30 per cent of battery hens showed recent evidence of bone fractures. They also employ people to remove the dead chickens from the sheds. One can assume that these birds did not just die in their sleep. Therefore the number of chickens that suffer prolonged pain runs into the tens of millions each year, but this is accepted by a community wanting meat at the cheapest price.

It is relevant to examine the fate of wounded birds shot by hunters, as we all acknowledge that it occurs. There are three options: most die fairly soon, a large number are superficially injured and make a full recovery and many are taken by predators. A few will die of starvation or infection, as do about 80 per cent of the population in any given year.

The crux of the matter is the amount of suffering and whether that amount is acceptable. This will always be a matter of philosophy. Just as the RSPCA can argue that one wounded bird is too many, the hunter can point to innumerable instances of modern food production practices that to the person used to gathering his own meat, seem barbaric. Yet a world market that demands efficiency readily accepts them.

Q: Where and when can ducks be hunted for sport?

A: Recreational duck hunting is permitted in Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Now the RSPCA has clearly declared war on recreational hunters.

Comment:

Again the motivation for hunting seems to be the sticking point. Most shooters hunt duck for food, not sport. The fact that they enjoy the pursuit is ancillary. Most people readily accept taking game for the table.

Q: How many ducks are killed outright?

A: About 900,000 ducks are killed outright every year.

Comment:

The RSPCA freely admits that hunting has no impact on the total population.

Q: Why are so many ducks wounded?

A: Because limitations in the way shotguns operate make it impossible to ensure that a duck is killed outright - even by a skilled marksman.

Comment:

The RSPCA maintains that a hunter fires about six to ten rounds a bird. They accept animal liberation movement data of one bird killed to one wounded. That means to get my bag I will need 12 times six cartridges, which equals 72. I rarely use more than 30. To have wounded 12 ducks I would have to have shot at 24 birds. This just is not the case.

Q: How many duck shooters are there in Australia?

A: There are about 27,500 licensed duck shooters in Australia - 85 per cent of all licensed hunters live in Victoria.

Comment: *Why is it relevant that 85 per cent are Victorian?*

Q: Why is duck hunting so cruel?

A: For duck shooting to be humane all ducks shot should be killed outright by the hunter. This is not the case. Some ducks

are brought down and killed by the hunter on retrieval, usually by wringing their neck, others are crippled (brought down but not retrieved) and these may die within hours, days or even weeks after being shot.

Comment:

The immediate dispatching of game not killed outright is an approach endorsed in the Code of Practice for Duck hunting. Wringing of the neck is the quickest and most humane method.

Q: Does duck shooting control the duck population?

A: The duck population is largely controlled by water levels, with wet winters leading to high breeding rates and dry winters leading to low breeding rates.

Comment:

Good. We agree on something. Habitat is the key to healthy wildlife populations. However, shooting can control duck damage. It is the optimum method, as it is species specific and deters birds from crops by fright rather than the mass killing - as opposed to indiscriminate poisoning.

Q: Shooting organisations put money and effort into conserving wetlands - does this help?

A: The input of shooting organisations to the conservation of wetlands is small compared with other conservation efforts. Conservation of wetlands cannot possibly justify the immense cruelty involved with hunting ducks.

Comment:

Perhaps Dr Wirth should take a look at the Watervalley wetlands in South Australia. It is well documented that the hunting frater-

nity worldwide has a significant impact on the retention and rehabilitation of important natural habitat. These projects benefit a myriad of species. Conservation of our wetlands is critical. It is not helpful to create mistrust and the belief that work done must be for politically correct reasons. This is out of step with current worldwide trends in conservation, which actively support the sustainable use of natural resources. The RSPCA's opinion reflects a regrettable lack of knowledge on the subject.

Q: How does the RSPCA know so many ducks are injured?

A: Independent studies estimate wounding levels of between 6.6 and 10 ducks wounded for every ten shot and retrieved by the hunter. Then studies examined the incidence of shotgun pellets embedded in ducks, observation of hunters and information on the way in which shotgun pellets strike ducks.

Comment:

The pellet embedded studies date from the mid 1970s - before waterfowl ID testing, hunter education programs and the loss of semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns. The truth is that far fewer shells are fired per duck today as a result of better-trained hunters, expensive ammunition and the use of more double-barrel firearms.

The battle lines are drawn. The RSPCA has taken a stance that is clearly out of step with the facts and given its entry into intensive meat production, its position on duck hunting looks more than a little jaundiced. I for one have bought my last RSPCA lolly. ●

The background features a collage of newspaper clippings. On the left, a hand is shown holding a handgun. The clippings contain various headlines and text, including "By Police Reporter JOHN MERRIMAN", "DEADLY weapons such as these will be banned in a bid to cut violent crime in South Australia", "The strict new laws will...", "comment about the knife and weapon laws before final regulations are drawn up", and "The public has just three weeks - until April 7 - to comment about the knife and weapon laws before final regulations are drawn up".

Taking the **HEAT** of dealing

Most shooters think that we have had a raw deal from the press and some of the time this has been true. On other occasions it has simply been bad journalism and on others we have no-one else to blame for the bad press but ourselves.

A couple of years ago I was told that the Attorney-General would be speaking at the law school of the Australian National University on the 'success' of the gun buy-back scheme. I rolled along, met a lot of people that I knew and sat down for his lecture. Apart from congratulating himself on the success of the scheme, he did not say a hell of a lot.

When question time came around, I got in first and asked him how he could say that it had been a success when his own survey, done by NEWSPOLL, showed that the number of people with access to firearms had not changed and that at least one-fifth of the 'now illegal' firearms had not been surrendered.

My question rocked him back on his heels because the full report had not been released, but I had obtained it under Freedom of Information. He didn't say too much.

The meeting collapsed in disorder when someone from the Shooters' Party started haranguing the Attorney-General. I left. No prizes for guessing what the television stations broadcast that night. Later, I spoke to one of the activists in the ACT about the incident. His view was that at least we bugged up their meeting. Wrong, wrong, wrong. If the anti-gun lobby had hired actors to discredit us they could not have done a better job of making us look like a mob of bellowing rednecks. Fortunately, as far as I am aware, nothing like that has happened ever since.

You cannot tell people whether they can or cannot speak at a public meeting but if you know someone who loses their cool easily or doesn't know when to shut up, it might be a good idea not to tell them about an upcoming meeting or to have a quiet word with them before it starts.

Don't give up on the Australian media.
Use it. The Opposition certainly does.

OUT with the media

On the other hand, if you have not spoken much in public or on the radio, now is the time to learn. A good way to 'cut your teeth' is on talkback radio. It doesn't have to be about firearms and it is probably better to get your practice in on something that doesn't matter all that much. You will be anonymous so if you fumble that doesn't matter. Remember, federal elections have been won and lost due to talkback radio and all the political parties have teams in each state whose sole purpose is to get on the radio whenever they can.

A couple of basic principles: be yourself, don't pretend to have an accent you don't have, speak naturally, clearly and not too quickly. Another basic point is to breathe between sentences. When you are put in the queue to speak, they will tell you to turn off your radio and listen through the telephone. There are two reasons for this. The first is to avoid electronic feedback and the second is because they delay the radio broadcast anywhere between four and 15 seconds so that they can hit the 'bleeper' if anyone swears

on air.

If I want to speak, I like to get on early. There is a better chance of getting on air and sometimes you can redirect the argument. The key time to be broadcast, if you have a choice, is 'drive time' - when people are going to or from work. About the worst time is in the evening when people have settled down in front of their televisions.

If possible, record your performance and listen to it afterwards, no matter how good or bad you thought you were. If you think you screwed up, it is not a hanging offence. Learn from your mistakes and do better next time.

Okay, you have 'cut your teeth' and have been approached by your local media. How do you handle it? One basic rule is to dress up rather than down. Men should wear a suit and tie. If the interview is outside in summer, use insect repellent. Nothing is more distracting - to you or the audience - than a fly landing on your face.

Find out ahead of time what the interviewer wants to talk about and who they

work for. Many times, they may not stick to the topic so do your homework. If you are being interviewed for a newspaper, going in with a written statement is a good idea. It saves the reporter work and makes it harder for them to misquote you.

Be suspicious but not paranoid. Keep your answers short and to the point, getting the important points in first. Most interviews will be recorded and 'they' do the editing. A 30-minute interview can be cut down to three minutes or less and you don't get to choose the three minutes.

What they are looking for is a short pithy 'grab'; the length depends on the program. Try not to say anything that can be taken out of context but, once again, don't get paranoid.

If you have a choice where the interview takes place, keep it on your home territory - at least for your first few - because you will feel more confident. If possible, it's always better to do the interview by phone.

Don't give up on the Australian media. Use it. The Opposition certainly does. ●

by John Coochey

encing

Grassroots Campaign

Sowing the seed for a firearms' future

Where does the money go?

by Gary Fleetwood

Dealing with members on a daily basis via the net is cost efficient. Meeting members face to face is not. May sees staff from the Special Projects department nearly halfway through visiting each state of Australia discussing relevant issues with members. This has resulted in an increased awareness of the underlying problems facing firearm owners and an opportunity to discuss, at the grass-root level, strategies that can be implemented to combat the rot.

The SSAA is communicating with members and policy makers as never before. While I am at the RSL Club in Gilgandra, Keith and a team are at United Nations firearm meetings in Vienna. The locations are a world apart but the purpose of the expenditure is the same, to strengthen the position of gun owners with politicians, policymakers and the broader Australian community.

Get involved

So what can you do to create a more positive image of firearm owners in the eyes of the community? Start by only discussing what is relevant to contemporary Australian firearm issues. Being able to quote an unsubstantiated 1933 comment from Hitler on gun laws in Nazi Germany has no effect on improving the image of firearm owners in the year 2000. If anything, it will have the opposite effect. If you actually talk to your neighbours, pick an appropriate time to advise them that you own firearms. This will diminish the impact of negative media comment next time there is an 'adverse (firearm) event' in our community.

(Why not discuss doctors with them and the 'adverse events' in our hospitals. Go to www.ssaa.org.au/casey.html for pre-discussion facts.)

While giving disabled kids the opportunity to have a shot at the local range seems a thoughtful act, it will in no way reduce the antagonism that is directed against us by the broader Australian community. Get yourself into community-based projects that do not involve firearms. A recent SSAA offer of support for a charity bike ride from Sydney to Whyalla in South Australia to gather funds to purchase specialist equipment for the Whyalla hospital was gratefully accepted by the organisers. Responding to calls from our e-mail list for donations, we received more than enough funds to fulfil the requirements of 'gold' sponsorship status.

Accordingly, when local community leaders meet the participants on their journey across Australia, the SSAA will be referred to as an Association that has involved itself in issues that support the wider community.

Extreme gun laws

If you wish to discuss the shortcomings of the Howard doctrine on firearm control, then do it in a calm and logical manner. (See www.ssaa.org.au/quoteozbuy.html for information on the gun buy-back and www.ssaa.org.au/quoteozcrime.html for information on Australian crime.) Leaning half-frothed at the front bar talking about 'jackboot Johnny' and quoting bumper stickers will only reinforce among your non gun-owning peers the perception that gun owners are wankers. While 'God and Guns made this place Great' may have been appropriate on the rear of your horse-drawn carriage, it fails to win the hearts and minds

of the motorists on the M4 in Sydney. In Australia there is no place for extreme views and it was the intolerant nature of Prime Minister Howard's gun laws that concerned many law-abiding firearm owners. The public accepted the PM's reasoning for extreme gun laws because 35 people were dead in a morgue. Emotion displaced debate and to demonstrate a quick political response the Prime Minister seized the moment using firearm owners as the sacrificial lamb. Mr Howard's awareness of the 'inconvenience' to gun owners in his now famous speech to gun owners in Sale, Victoria (www.ssaa.org.au/pmsale.html) is compounded by Attorney-General Daryl Williams' miserable words as he thanked gun owners for their efforts and highlighted the feeling of pride we should have in being part of this exercise (www.ssaa.org.au/press.html) - an exercise that was expedient but not smart.

We suffered because we had previously not done enough to instil in the broader community the belief that firearm owners had a place in Australian society. Too much individual time spent involved in our world of primers, projectiles and powder had resulted in a failure to adequately monitor and adjust to changes in society's perception of gun owners. Did we not find delight in the extreme views expressed by the gun prohibitionists during the recent St Marys indoor range advertising campaign in NSW? Their extreme comments won for us at least \$150,000 worth of free advertising. Reflect upon the delight of the prohibitionists when the extremists in the gun owning community surfaced after Port Arthur (albeit their words often misquoted by a hostile press). We must lobby for the pendulum to sit in the middle. We will accept reasonable controls but will resist to the end further intrusions on our ability to use firearms for reasonable purposes. Use the web site (<http://www.ssaa.org.au>) to gain access to information that is relative and accurate. Learn by rote responses to the

For more than 50 years the SSAA has led the fight when the issues are gun laws affecting the law-abiding gun owner.

unfounded claims that guns create crime. To throw some humour into the discussion tell of the comment by a Queensland criminologist that gun crime in Queensland climbed after the buy-back "because the criminals wanted to use the guns one more time before they lost the privilege" (www.ssaa.org.au/quoteozcrime.html).

Money

Sometime in the future there may be a need for members to again be generous with financial donations to the Association. The previous 'fighting fund' that was collected after Port Arthur was not enough to stop the gun laws Prime Minister Howard personally implemented using the resources of the Australian Federal Government. When next you ask about money and the SSAA, please contemplate the lack of action by other national or state associations that had similar funds available but failed to use them because the impact of the Howard gun laws was low upon their shooting discipline.

For more than 50 years the SSAA has led the fight when the issues are gun laws affecting the law-abiding gun owner. The SSAA's presence at the United Nations represents all Australian gun owners - even those that do nothing to support that presence financially and even those who do not believe that Prime Minister Howard's gun laws are used in the international arena as a model for global firearm 'reform'.

Political flexibility

The money collected by SSAA National and its state affiliates could not stop the PM's politically expedient decision. A change in your voting habits, however, can have an effect on further deliberations by all

politicians about gun laws. Did the Howard gun laws influence how you voted at the following federal or state election? It should have. John Howard's party lost a million primary votes at the past federal election - the worst result since Menzies formed the party in the 1950s. We strongly advise our members to remain flexible in their voting patterns until politicians appreciate the number of firearm-related votes concerned. This issue is far from over.

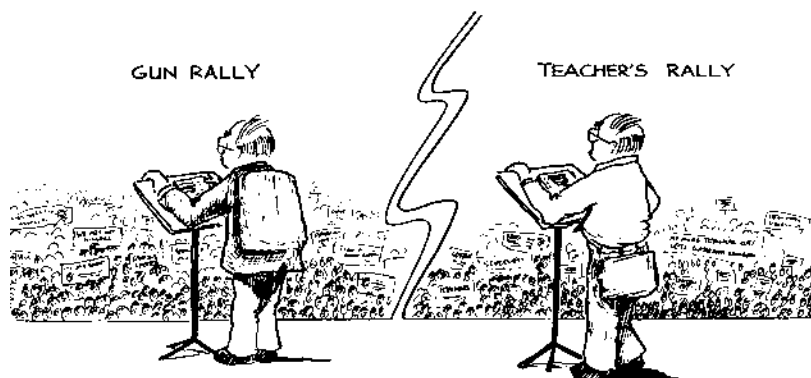
When was the last time you courteously reminded your local member that the extreme changes to the gun laws have caused you to rethink your voting habits? If you love your politician more than your ability to own and use firearms without vilification, then the sport of shooting is not for you. If you cannot become a 'swinging' voter then expect more of the same intolerant gun laws. Don't grizzle about the efforts of the SSAA if you voted for the Coalition Government. Just as clearly as Prime Minister Howard identifies the gun buy-back as one of his finest achievements, we clearly identify, without remorse, the Coalition Howard Government as the perpetrator of a social agenda that refused a large proportion of Australian society an opportunity for input to the final solution.

Changes to gun laws did not win votes for the Coalition. It cost them votes. The

SSAA maintains a list of gun prohibitionists and with whom they are affiliated. It is clear the overwhelming majority could not be Coalition voters. As they urged the Coalition to tackle the sensitive issue of gun control, they knew too well that the subject would not have a negative political affect on their political allies. 'Come in spinner' seems an appropriate Australian phrase for gun prohibitionists to use when discussing the PM's role in this sordid issue. Even a senior bureaucrat in the Attorney-General's Department who was then a major player in advising the government on gun issues has since left to take up other opportunities in the private sector.

The worst advice was yet to come. It involved clothing. When the conservative Prime Minister of Australia obviously wore a bullet-resistant vest when addressing a rally of equally conservative Gippsland farmers about why he changed the gun laws, it was the final straw. Those at the rally who saw the vest and felt the overt presence of federal and state police knew that they could not support extremism. They obeyed the law and surrendered their guns - then left the Coalition in droves.

As always, I am happy to talk to you about any issue I have raised here. My mobile phone is 0407 616 218. ●



Lies, DAMNED lies and polly speak

by Paul Peake

In an interview with Margo Kingston, published in the Sydney Morning Herald on January 28, 2000, former leader of the National Party and ex-Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fischer, claimed the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) had provided millions of dollars in funding for use against the Coalition Government:

*"It got John Howard to realise how bloody much we'd been carrying in the bush on Wik and guns. I only put a padlocked cabinet in my house after Port Arthur. I'd been meaning to do it for years and I stand by what we did on guns. . . . The bloody NRA [National Rifle Association] ... some millions of dollars from them which came into Australia against us."*¹

On the following Tuesday (1/2/00), the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Inc. issued a press release inviting Mr Fischer to furnish the details of the alleged NRA funding. On February 8, we sent an e-mail to Mr Fischer's office asking for information about the NRA's contributions. What we eventually got was the following paper trail and no real answers:

- 8/2/200

Dear Mr Fischer,

We write concerning your recent claims in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on January 28, 2000, regarding National Rifle Association of America funds being directed against the Coalition Government following the adoption of the Australasian Police Ministers Council resolutions in 1996.

Could you please supply us with the full details of the funding in question? How much money did the NRA channel into Australia? To which groups were the funds directed and what exactly were they used for?

We have spoken to the article's author, Margo Kingston, who assures us you did make the comment and in the context reported.

We look forward to hearing from you on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association
of Australia Inc.

- 9/2/2000

Dear Mr Peake,

This is to acknowledge your e-mail of February 8.

The quote is not exactly correct but I did refer to NRA assistance coming to Australia. At no time did I malign legitimate Aussie firearm owners going about their lawful business, which I will always support.

The NRA USA has a right to pursue its policies but no automatic right to promote automatics worldwide.

Yours sincerely,

TIM FISCHER MP

(Note: This response was almost exactly the same as one sent to a member who asked a completely different set of questions on 31/1/00 - Does Mr Fischer actually read his mail?)

- 9/2/2000

Dear Mr Fischer,

Thank you for your swift reply. Unfortunately, you failed to answer any of our questions. In line with your reported comments in

the *Sydney Morning Herald*, could you please supply us with the full details of the National Rifle Association of America funding supposedly directed against the Coalition Government?

How much money did the NRA channel into Australia? To which groups were the funds directed and what exactly were they used for?

Given your claims in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, surely you would acknowledge that our queries are straightforward enough. We would expect that you would be able to provide answers without too much difficulty.

We look forward to hearing from you on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association
of Australia Inc.

- 11/2/2000

Dear Mr Fischer,

We note that you have not replied to our request for information on National Rifle Association funding supposedly channeled into Australia, as per your recent comments in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28/1/00.

Given your very definite assertions in Margo Kingston's article, we find your lack of response both curious and disappointing.

We will of course pass the facts along to the 120,000 readers of our monthly magazine.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association
of Australia Inc.

- 11/2/2000

Mr Peake,

Mr Fischer will not be in Canberra until next Monday.

Perhaps you could re-mail your original request, which I will pass on to Mr Fischer.

Sue Cox

Personal Assistant

- 11/2/2000

Dear Ms Cox,

Thank you for your swift reply.

Rather than us re-mailing our original request to Mr Fischer when he returns to Canberra - a request we have now put forward three times - perhaps you could telephone Mr Fischer and advise him to respond post-haste, before we put the article we are currently preparing on his apparent inability to back up his claims to print.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association

of Australia Inc.

- 11/2/2000

Unfortunately I am unable to contact Mr Fischer by phone today as he is travelling. I would need to fax your request to him.

Sue Cox

- 11/2/2000

Ms Cox,

Then we suggest you fax him.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association

of Australia Inc.

- 14/2/2000

As I mentioned three e-mails ago, I no longer have the original question and that is what I have been asking you to e-mail me, but no doubt your publication has already gone to print.

Sue Cox

(Note: Ms Cox never said anything to us about no longer having the original questions.)

- 14/2/2000

Ms Cox,

Thank you for your reply.

The following is our original question to Mr Fischer:

• In line with your comments in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 28/1/00, could you please supply us with the full details of the National Rifle Association of America funding supposedly directed against the Coalition Government. How much money did the NRA channel into Australia? To which groups were the funds directed and what exactly were they used for?

We are a little confused. The answer to our original request for information carried Mr Fischer's name at the bottom. With this in mind, we naturally assumed that the answer had come from Mr Fischer himself. Would we be right in assuming that this was not

the case and in fact it was you signing on Mr Fischer's behalf?

The article has not gone to print yet and we would be happy to discuss Mr Fischer's *SMH* comments with him before it does.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association

of Australia Inc.

(Note: We never received an answer about Ms Cox passing herself off as Mr Fischer.)

- 15/2/2000

Further to your additional e-mails, I reiterate the following: I do not believe I said millions of dollars but I stand by my claim funding flowed from elements of the NRA and elements within the USA to elements in Australia including Queensland and South Australia in respect of gun policy and the national debate on same. This is no big deal in one sense as it has been previously acknowledged publicly.

I remain in support of the legitimate shooter going about their law-abiding business. I regard this correspondence as closed, as I have nothing to add.

Tim Fischer

(Note: We are not aware of any previous public acknowledgement that the NRA has provided funds to undermine the Coalition - or anyone else for that matter.)

- 15/2/2000

Mr Fisher,

With all due respect, you have not answered any of the specifics we put to you. Which elements of the NRA gave how much

to whom in Queensland and South Australia in respect of guns policy and the national debate on same?

To be blunt, it looks as if you will not answer our questions with specifics because your claims in the *SMH* (28/1/00) were unfounded. We will put all the facts before our members and let them make up their own minds.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Peake

Research Section

Sporting Shooters Association

of Australia Inc.

The novelist Mark Twain once noted that there are lies, damned lies and statistics. Perhaps he should have said there are lies, damned lies and 'pollie speak'. We believe that Mr Fischer could not answer the questions put to him because he doesn't have any answers. We believe his comments in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on January 28 concerning NRA funds supposedly channeled into Australia were either grossly ignorant or deliberately calculated to cast the organised shooting fraternity in a negative light.

The invitation to Mr Fischer to substantiate his claims remains open.

1. Kingston, M. (Jan. 28, 2000). Boss cocky of bush pollies calls it a day. *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Hunting labelled safe

According to a report from the US National Safety Council, hunting, often regarded as dangerous by those unfamiliar with the activity, is actually safer than such mild activities as badminton and ping-pong.

The Council's studies reveal that hunting has fewer accidents per 100,000 participants than football, baseball, cycling, volleyball, swimming, golf, tennis, fishing, bowling and even billiards.

Of the activities researched, hunting endures about seven injuries per 100,000

participants while the next safest, ping-pong, has more than 15 injuries per 100,000. As would be expected, football has the most, with about 3313 injuries per 100,000.

Ironically, hunting accidents may get more media attention than injuries in other sports because of their rarity. Mandatory hunter education courses throughout the United States are credited with dramatically reducing the number of hunting accidents in the past 30 years, making it eight times safer than bowling.



John Crook & The Australian Crime Prevention Council 19th Biennial Conference

by Paul Peake

Supporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) representatives, the author among them, recently attended the 19th biennial conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council at the Carlton Crest Hotel in Melbourne. Among the 60 speakers was Gun Control Australia's aging doyen John Crook, who delivered a maundering presentation entitled 'Myths and Realities in the Gun Debate'. The centrepiece was a bizarre formula for supposedly determining the extent of the 'gun problem' in Australia. The real problem, however, was that nobody in the small audience, which included a PhD, an economist and two policy researchers, could make head nor tails of Crook's strange theorem.

In contrast to a couple of years ago when just about everybody in the crime prevention fraternity professed an interest in the gun control question, hardly anyone bothered showing up for Crook's presentation. Looking at the half a dozen people in the audience, two possibilities sprang to mind. One, perhaps a little light was finally beginning to show through in the debate and two, maybe the fringe of the anti-gun lobby had finally worn out its welcome.

Gun Control Australia was formed in Victoria in 1989 and despite a decade of drum beating and its rather optimistic moniker, the group has failed to inspire much interest beyond its own backyard. However, the lack of success hasn't prevented it from carving out a reputation in some quarters as the truly eccentric end of the anti-gun movement - a fact due in no small part to the efforts of its patriarch John Crook. In a defamation case back in 1995, His Honour Judge Shelton had some interesting things to say about Crook:

"In his opening for the plaintiff, Mr Wilson described Crook as a zealot - a description I regard as being only slightly exaggerated. In the considerable time he spent in the witness box, Crook gave the impression of being particularly dedicated to, and almost obsessed with the subject of gun control."¹

While some of Crook's musings have landed him in court, others could only be described as completely over the top:

"Our logic is that shooters are the most ill-disciplined group... That's what attracts them to guns. It's a state of mind... They are usually poorly educated, they have never had success at school and were never very good at sport... Guns to them represent something they have never been able to achieve."²

How about this little gem from a letter which Crook sent to the president of the Commonwealth Games Association on behalf of Gun Control Australia, arguing that shooting be banned:

"Fundamentally, guns are designed to kill and the practice which competitors at the Commonwealth Games participate in is just the

same as normal target practice. This is aimed at making the shooters better equipped to kill some living thing. If the actual competitors at the Games do not decide to kill something then it is certain that in glamorizing shooting they are encouraging many others to get into the killing process."³

So just what myths and realities did Crook shed light upon during his presentation? Consider his formula:

$$A = \frac{K1(Ngl Pgl)}{(Ss Tr Te R St)} + \frac{K2(Ngl Pgl)}{P}$$

'A' supposedly represents the size of the 'gun problem' in Australia. However, when pressed for a clear definition of the gun problem Crook had a great deal of trouble outlining just what he meant. The rest of the equation consisted of some very strange relationships between the number of firearms in the community, their ballistic characteristics, how often they were used and for what, the number of licensed shooters vis-à-vis unlicensed shooters, the number of crimes committed with firearms and the associated penalties. Attempts at an explanation quickly deteriorated into farce when Crook was asked to clarify some of the formula's finer points. In the end it was difficult to tell who was more confused, the audience or the presenter.

However, the myths and realities soon began to flow thick and fast. At one point Crook claimed that while rifle and shotgun imports into Australia had declined during the past several years, the number of handguns coming into the country had remained constant. He looked a little overwhelmed when someone pointed out that after the huge numbers of self-loading pistols brought in for official use were factored out, the number of handguns destined for the private market had actually fallen by about half since 1996 - so much for the fewer guns fewer crimes theory.

Crook also tried to play up the notion that since the introduction of new gun laws there hadn't been a single mass shooting in Australia. That was until somebody commented that by his own definition a mass shooting involved two or more victims and that three motorcycle club members had been murdered in an Adelaide shootout only a week before. After about 40 minutes, even the meeting's convener had had enough and called the session to a halt.

Crook's hapless performance highlights a very important point from the shooter's perspective. True, Crook is an old man and probably not all he once might have been as an orator, but the fact is most of the anti-gun lobby's reasoning simply won't stand up to scrutiny when contested, irrespective of who's arguing the case. The best defence shooters have is to stay well organised, well informed and above all pro-active. Writing letters to the local paper, hectoring state and federal politicians, calling talkback radio shows and making the shooter's point of view known, all work to ensure that the anti-gun lobby's propaganda does not go unchecked.

The fact is, when seriously challenged many of the anti-gun movement's luminaries are a lot less formidable than shooters might think and a lot of them are drawn from out past the fringes of the debate. Anyone who attended John Crook's presentation expecting to hear Socrates would have been very disappointed to find they had actually signed up for Don Quixote. ●

1. 1995 judgment by His Honour Judge Shelton, in the matter of the SSAA (Vic) vs Gun Control Australia, as cited in Tobin, T K & Sexton, M G (1990). Australian defamation law and practice, Sydney: Butterworths p43, 442.

2. Debelle, P (1997, July 16). Taking aim at new gun laws. Adelaide Advertiser.

3. Crook, J (1998, Sept 21). Personal Communication.

Parting shots

THE GOOD:

Congratulations Independents

Sebastian Ziccone, president of the SSAA in Victoria, congratulated Independents Russell Savage and Susan Davies on the size of their primary vote.

“The success of Russell Savage and Susan Davies in being returned by their electorate, emphasises the need for representatives who listen to their constituents,” said Mr Ziccone.

He also pointed out that the addition of two more Independents in Parliament would benefit constituent-based representation and that it would make the next government more receptive to negotiation and consultation with all affected parties in any potential political reform.

“The result of this election is the culmination of seven years of frustration and disenfranchisement felt by voters across the state - especially in rural communities.

“Major changes have occurred in Victoria with precious little, to no, consultation. In most cases there was not even a rationale for the need for change.

“The style of leadership and the tacit approval of the National Party ensured a backlash from the people for both partners of the coalition.

“Firearms legislation in Victoria has been a farce with colossal waste of resources,” said Mr. Ziccone. Although the Firearms Act 1996 has been amended four times, it is still not correct. He said that this issue should not be construed as being the major issue for Victorian shooters but said it has certainly contributed to the election result.

“We extend our hand in friendship and cooperation to the incoming government, whatever its complexion, and look forward to making firearms legislation work in Victoria,” said Mr. Ziccone.

For additional information, contact Sebastian Ziccone on 03 9547 1974 or 0412 284 163.

THE BAD:

Slap on the wrist

Snr Const Kevin Desmond Morton, Queensland’s former police armourer, has been convicted of stealing as a public servant. His sentence for three charges was a mere 240 hours community service.

Mr Morton pleaded guilty to stealing a rifle, which was in his care as stolen property and ammunition handed in during the 1996 buy-back.

Consider what his sentence might have been had he not been a member of the police force.

THE UGLY:

Reapplications tracked

According to statistics obtained through the NSW Freedom of Information Act, police have been tracking gun licence renewals in country regions of NSW. The areas targeted include Tamworth, Grafton, Goulburn, Wagga Wagga, Bathurst, Dubbo, Mudgee, Broken Hill, Lismore and Cessnock.

National Party leader, Mr Souris, said attempts to track licence reapplications could only be seen as discriminatory. He also said it was extraordinary to single out rural reapplications when city gun owners would be more likely to use their weapons for criminal purposes than would gun owners in rural areas. According to Mr Souris, rural gun owners have a genuine need for firearm possession.

The Minister for Police, Mr Whelan, said that no attempt to track the reapplications of any group has been made. He believed that the data had most likely been generated due to a specific request by police - probably a regional commander wanting to know the statistics in his area.

Mr Whelan said the firearm registry “as a matter of course does not query or take any action on the basis of regional areas or postcodes”.

Recent NSW Firearms Registry preliminary figures show that about 993,000 guns are registered in NSW.

Out of 93,481 reapplications for firearms between January and July of 1998, the registry sampled 11,912, before the expiry of the gun buy-back offer.

A note on the file shows that the data had been compiled for local area commands and regional police districts within the areas targeted.

After the size of the legal gun stockpile was revealed, NSW Premier, Mr Carr, ruled out any relaxation of the state’s gun laws - including the 28-day cooling-off period for gun owners wishing to purchase a second gun and a parliamentary inquiry into the gun laws.

The NSW Sporting Shooters Association backed the National Party’s call for a wider parliamentary inquiry into the operation of the state’s gun laws.

Roy Smith, spokesman for the NSW Sporting Shooters Association, said, “We can understand that any government would be hesitant about changing the legislation and agreement reached between the states but if we can have an open and bipartisan review, we would like to think it would come up with proposals that would not weaken the firearms laws but make them more workable.”

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