

ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

**Licensed
Shooters
VINDICATED**

See page 10.



**travelling
with guns**

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In this issue

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 months, two major findings have been released that support the fact that licensed shooters are not responsible for the vast majority of gun-related murders in Australia and the half a billion dollars spent on the buy-back has had little affect: 1) the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) paper entitled 'The Licensing and Registration Status of Firearms Used in Homicide' and 2) the *Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)* figures.

These reports finally concede what we have known all along. While great news, it is no time to let our guard down. Those opposed to firearms are not going to just back down willingly; they will find other areas to focus on, such as the storage of firearms and the number of firearms we are allowed to own.

In this issue Paul Peake, *Australian Shooter's* head researcher, takes a closer look at the ramifications these reports could have. Also of interest is the quote from a local radio station that highlights just how easy it is to turn facts against us, that in this instance, are in our favour and clearly illustrate how ineffective the gun buy-back was against crime and murder. See page 7.

Further on how facts can be misconstrued or 'dressed up' to serve a not so hidden agenda, have a look at 'Professor Michael Brown's Journalist's Guide to Gun Violence Coverage'. While satirical and

quite a chuckle, many of the Australian law-abiding firearm owners will find many of his 'hints' painfully familiar. We all know how the subtle use of words can convert the impression of the reader, listener or TV viewer.

Also in this issue, Gary Fleetwood discusses a few of the rules and regulations relevant to shooters transporting their firearms via aircraft. Boarding a plane is a trauma for many at the best of times but transporting your firearms or ammunition clearly adds to the stress. Gary's guidelines are designed to take the drama out of the experience and help you, once again, illustrate your ability as a safety-conscious firearm owner.

To end on a bright note, no doubt our Olympic shooters will do us proud this month. Support them with your voices, tell others of their achievements and for once, enjoy the positive media coverage of these sportsmen and women.

Bill Shelton



by Gary Fleetwood, Executive Director of Special Projects

Air travel with a firearm as part of your accompanied baggage can be stressful if you are unaware of the aircraft operator's requirements.

The following is a brief summary of the rules if you wish to take firearms and ammunition as accompanied baggage on airlines in Australia. Please check for updated criteria before travelling and be aware that international carriers may have additional requirements. The Australian Customs Service has its own rules, some of which are discussed at <http://www.ssaa.org.au/customs.html>

Booking a ticket

When booking a ticket it is important to advise of the intention to carry firearms or ammunition. This includes informing your travel agent as well as airline reservation staff.



By this stage you should have advised of firearms in your luggage.

Carrying unloaded sporting firearms as registered baggage in passenger aircraft is permitted on the condition that the firearm is unloaded, made inoperative and declared to staff at the time of check-in. The firearm is also carried on the condition that access is denied to the passenger during the journey. Commonwealth legislation by way of the

Air Navigation Act 1920, specifically Sec 22c (5), prohibits aircraft operators allowing access to baggage by a person other than the operator before the completion of the flight.

There have been urban myths about handing the firearm to the pilot. Airline operating procedures prohibit even a disassembled firearm to be carried in the cockpit or cabin of a passenger aircraft. Law enforcement officers (both state and federal), couriers and VIP bodyguards are prohibited under a Qantas policy from carrying firearms, ammunition and weapons on an aircraft while in flight. There are no exceptions.

Checking in

Check-in staff will utilise their power to inspect your luggage and if it appears that the check is to be conducted in public, ask if it can be done in an area away from public view. Qantas decrees that any inspection shall be undertaken in a discreet area. Do



Your firearm may not be available for collection at the carousel.

not get annoyed or show obvious dismay at being requested to open a parcel that may have taken you an hour to secure. Politely make an offer to handle the firearm and demonstrate that it meets the criteria required before acceptance as luggage. This offer will be welcomed by staff who may not be familiar with handling firearms and it should go a long way to reduce the stress that may be developing. Remember that the public may be in the vicinity and your capacity as a safety-conscious firearm owner will be on show. In particular, watch that muzzle. The staff will seek to confirm that the firearm is unloaded and that it is inoperable. With lever action rifles you should carry flexi-cuff ties that can be used to secure the finger lever against the butt once the gun has been cleared. It will be obvious that you know more about firearm types and actions, so use that knowledge to build friendships.

Some aircraft companies require that check-in staff advise the destination port when firearms are uplifted. You may find that your firearm and ammunition will not be placed on the carousel at the destination point, but delivered to another point for collection.

If you are taking sporting ammunition then it is exempt from normal dangerous goods regulations when it is carried as checked baggage, securely boxed and marked as

Gun powder, primers and solvents will not be allowed on commercial aircraft.



'Cartridges for Sporting Purposes - Division 1.4s'. The weight restriction on the quantity is 5kg (11lbs) gross mass and the ammunition must be for your use only. Quantities in excess of 5kg must be shipped as cargo accompanied by a shipper's declaration. Needless to say, but we shall say it anyway, the ammunition must not be loaded with incendiary or tracer projectiles. The check-in staff should attach a 'Hazard' label to your ammunition container at the time of acceptance.



Custom-made rifle containers such as this 'Tuffpak' are available from Sporting Agencies in Sydney. Web-site: www.sportingagencies.com.au

Gunpowder, primers and cleaning chemicals are declared as 'Dangerous Goods' and cannot be carried. Contact the cargo division of the airline for information on the transportation of these items. Explosives are defined as anything that can detonate, explode, is flammable or that which could 'arc'.

Packaging


Your ammunition should be packed in the manufacturer's original box, but it will still be subject to confirmation that the contents will be protected against shock, movement and stored so as to stop accidental discharge during transport. Be aware that we have heard stories from travellers that the moulded plastic, commercial style of container used by reloaders has not been accepted by some airlines. Abide by the wording and carry your ammunition in a commercial manufacturer's package. The firearm needs to be suitably packaged in one of the many custom-made carry cases available at your local gun shop. Anything less will increase the chance of possible damage. Clearly mark your parcels with your name and contact phone number. The security question about placing your address on such an item is left to your discretion. Keep in mind that the law demands that operators attach a tag to each piece of baggage that indicates the flight number and destination and, unless you are physically on the aircraft, your baggage shall be removed from the aircraft.

Weapons defined

Aircraft companies are obliged under federal law to screen passengers before entry to a sterile area, such as the passenger lounge. Section 20 (2) of the Air Navigation Act makes it an offence for the operator of the aircraft to allow a person who has not been screened and cleared to board the aircraft.

Australian airports have metal detectors available for this purpose and part of the fun of travelling is the emptying of pockets of all things metal before walking through the sensor. It is a federal offence to intentionally carry a weapon through a screening point or intentionally have in your possession a weapon in a sterile area, unless you are an authorised person.

Air Navigation Regulations, Schedule 1, Regulation 5a, is quite specific in its definition of a weapon:

1. A device designed for attachment to a firearm for the purpose of muffling, reducing or stopping the noise of the explosion of a cartridge discharged in the firearm.
2. An article commonly known as, or similar to, a knuckleduster.
3. An article commonly known as a sap glove. 

HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL

4. A studded glove.
5. A spear gun.
6. A weapon that, in appearance, substantially replicates a riding crop, walking stick, walking cane or umbrella.
7. A weapon capable of discharging, by any means, an irritant liquid, powder, gas or chemical or a dye or a pyrotechnic flare.
8. An irritant or toxic gas.
9. A weapon capable of discharging a projectile by the action of an explosive or other propellant.
10. A crossbow.
11. A knife commonly known as a flick-knife, having a blade that opens automatically by gravity, by centrifugal force or by pressure applied to a button, spring or device in or attached to the handle of the knife.
12. A device commonly known as, or a device similar to, a Taser Self-Defence Weapon.
13. A knife commonly known as, or a device similar to, a star knife.
14. A knife that, in the opinion of the operator of an aircraft, is a potential weapon.
15. A flame-thrower.
16. A device in the nature of a hunting sling, catapult or slingshot that is designed for use with, or a component part of which is, a brace that fits or rests on the forearm or another part of the body of the user to support the user's wrist against the tension of elastic material used to discharge a projectile.
17. An imitation or replica firearm or other weapon.
18. Ammunition for, or a projectile designed for use with or discharge from, a firearm or a weapon specified in this Schedule.
19. An explosive or incendiary article or device not elsewhere specified in this Schedule.
20. An object that, in the opinion of the operator of an aircraft, is a potential weapon.



All firearms are transported in the cargo hold of the aircraft. There are no exceptions.

Transport of firearms as cargo

If you wish to ship a firearm to another destination by air as cargo, then you should again make the firearm inoperable and present it packaged ready for inspection. Common sense will tell you to delay the final secure packaging of the firearm until the inspection has been done. Airline staff indicated to us that the most stress occurs when the firearm owner is asked to undo a parcel that has been wrapped up securely. So be prepared to open your parcel for inspection and remember to be courteous and co-operative. If you are shipping ammunition then you will be required to complete a 'Shippers Dangerous Goods Declaration', which will require a detailed account of what is in the parcel. The Declaration requires the United Nations code for the goods involved and for small arms ammunition it is 1.4s. Having this number available will make the job easier for the staff to facilitate your transport needs.

Knowledge of the system should alleviate the stress involved in presenting your firearm for carriage by an airline company. Remember that some staff may be unsure of their company policy regarding this matter

and you should remain patient and courteous throughout the procedure. Your knowledge of your firearms operating characteristics will be helpful to airline staff, so assist where possible. Give yourself sufficient time to arrive at the airport so as to accommodate any hiccup that may occur in relation to the firearm being accepted. If you have a lever action rifle, carry some flexi-cuffs to secure the finger lever - your preparation will impress the staff. Remember that when it comes to the safety of the flying public, the aircraft operator has the final word.

Please contact me if you have any questions concerning this article on mobile telephone 0407 616 218. This article is available at www.ssaa.org.au/flight.html

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- ◆ Air Navigation Act 1920
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/ana1920148/
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- ◆ Qantas Airport Product and Service Manual
Contacts for further information:
- ◆ Ansett Australia website
<http://www.ansett.com.au>
- ◆ Ansett Freight website
http://www.ansett.com.au/about/freight_f.htm
- ◆ Qantas website <http://www.qantas.com.au>
- ◆ Dangerous Goods Transport Specialists
- ◆ Dangerous Goods Air - Mobile 0419 816366

When facts lie

“New figures reveal a rise in the number of murder victims last year but the Bureau of Statistics says there has been a five-year low in the number of people killed by guns, hinting the Federal Government’s gun buy-back scheme has worked.”

RADIO: 104.3 GOLD FM JUNE 28, 2000

Interviewee: Amanda Vanstone, Federal Justice Minister



by Paul Peake

When it comes to scientific propositions the cardinal rule is consistency. In order for a theory to be valid it must work across a range of settings given similar variables. A simple example might be the notion of gravity - the theory says it doesn't matter where you are on earth, objects will always fall to the ground. The idea is accepted because you can carry out repeatable experiments that prove the point. When it comes to the social sciences however, things are rarely so certain. Nevertheless, the same basic rule applies. In order for a theory to be sound it must produce predictable outcomes given similar inputs.

The problem with theorising about the government’s buy-back scheme and its impact on firearm-related crime is the lack of consistent results. While the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures show that on a national basis shootings declined in proportion to the total number of murders in 1999, the same statistics indicate that the ratio actually went up in two states. Compared to the previous year, the rate in Western Australia increased by 19.5 per cent and by 40 per cent in Tasmania.¹ Similarly, the ratio of gun-related murders in Victoria was 21 per cent - almost eight per cent higher than before the government’s confiscation program took 200,000 firearms out of the state.

Looking at the national figures, Table 1 shows that the percentage of murder victims killed with firearms was actually about the same in 1999 (17.8 per cent) as it was in the two years before the government’s buy-back scheme, despite the fact that 640,000 guns were subsequently removed from private hands.

In other words, not only did the total number of murders show a six-year high in 1999 and the total number of shootings increase over the aggregate for 1998, but the ratio of firearm related killings was no different than before the government spent \$500 million confiscating people’s guns.

Similarly, the latest ABS data dealing with attempted murders

shows that while the total number of victims declined slightly in 1999, the overall number of firearm-related crimes and the ratio of offences compared to the total was the highest it has been for six years - even outstripping the rate in 1996, the year of the Port Arthur incident. Table 2 shows a 33 per cent jump in the number of victims and a 12 per cent increase in firearm-related crimes.

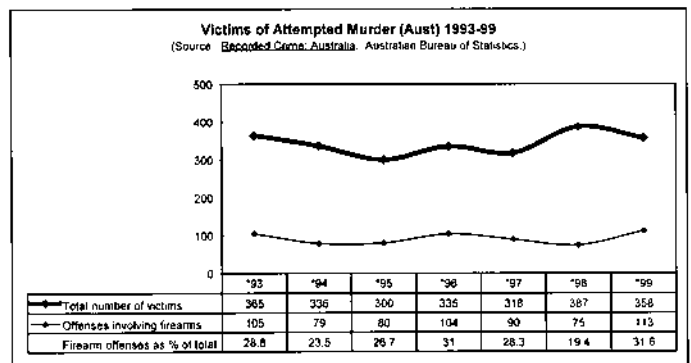


Table 2.

The situation raises some important questions for the Federal Justice Minister and her fellow travellers in the anti-gun movement. If confiscating firearms from average shooters leads to fewer crimes and a supposedly “safer community”,² then how do you explain the fact that in some jurisdictions, not only did the total number of murders increase, but the ratio of firearm-related killings actually went up along with the ratio of attempted killings?

Furthermore, if the government’s buy-back scheme has really had any impact on serious crime, then why are gun-related attempted murders at a six-year high and firearm-based offences, as a percentage of all murders, the same as they were when there was more than half a million additional guns in the community?

The facts, as opposed to the theories, are clear - more people were murdered in 1999 than in 1998; more people were murdered with guns in 1999 than in 1998; more attempted murders were undertaken with guns in 1999 than in 1998; the ratio of gun-related attempted murders grew by an alarming 12 per cent, while the rate of gun-related murders was no different than it was before the Federal Government wasted half a billion dollars trying to make an impuissant Prime Minister look good.

References:

- (2000). 1999 Recorded Crime: Australia. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Gordon, M. (1996, June 17). PM braves angry crowd. The Australian, p. 1.

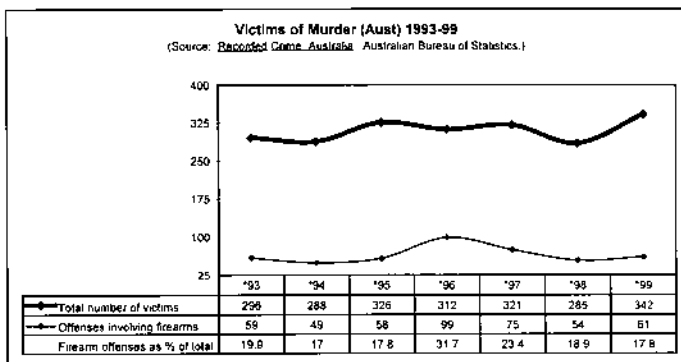


Table 1.

ASJ Letters

Locked out

As I understand the law, only a person with a shooter's licence can have access to a gun safe. As my gun safe is the most secure place in our house, my wife (who does not have a licence) wanted to keep her jewellery with my guns. When I explained I could not allow this because I would be breaking the law, she pointed out that she owns as much of the house as I do and wanted to know how I could prevent her from accessing any part of it.

I had no answer.

Phillip Dunn, Aspendale, Vic

Editor's Reply: By law she cannot have keys to the safe.

Stand up for your rights

I am writing to you in respect of AVOs and firearms.

Last year I was served with an application for AVO by the local police. A neighbour had decided that they would be vindictive and get on the anti-gun bandwagon.

What I wish to say is that there is hope in the legal system. When this matter was finally heard, the end result was that the magistrate ruled that the applicant had no real fear for personal safety and was also made to pay my solicitor's costs.

All I wish to say is if you haven't done anything wrong don't be afraid to stand up for your rights, as 'it is easier to tell the truth than to remember a lie'. There are too many people out there who abuse and clog up the legal system and who pays? Once again, the poor old tax payer.

Apparently there has recently been changes to the system, due to the inappropriate application for AVOs, which should hopefully protect, to a certain extent, the innocent law-abiding gun owner from harassment. Maybe, once people know that they may have to pay all the costs, they may think twice about applying for an AVO for a purpose other than it is intended.

I wish to thank all the people who supported us.

Trevor Allen [Address withheld]

Gun control tightens its grip

For those of your readers who are not convinced that tighter gun control laws affect participation in shooting sports, we would refer them to the Sept/Oct 1999 issue of *Ducks Unlimited* magazine. This issue shows that from 1978 to 1998 the number of waterfowl hunters in Canada decreased from almost 525,000 to slightly more than 204,000. Coincidentally, 1978 marked the beginning of the early stages of increasingly restrictive Canadian legislation concerning the acquisition and possession of sporting firearms.

In fairness, there could be other factors such as the growing animal rights movement and sporadic downturns in waterfowl populations, which could also have contributed to this dramatic decline. It is important to note however, that these statistics are not based on estimates - waterfowl hunters across Canada are required to purchase annual waterfowl hunting licences and these statistics are simply a measure of the decline in the purchase of such licences.

J E Graham, Canberra, ACT

We are not fooled

It seems to me that the Australian media (television) is promoting the anti-gun lobby in a subtle way through their programs. In most Australian-made dramas, ordinary members of the public seem to be able to acquire handguns at will and in most cases without explanation.

In a recent episode of 'Water Rats', which on the whole I enjoy, a young woman kidnaps a police officer and a suspect using a 1911 Model Colt Auto, with no explanation as to where it came from or how she got it. This gives the audience the impression that guns are readily available and therefore they should be banned. Perhaps the SSAA can let the media know that we are not fooled.

D M Vowell, Eumundi, Qld

**Mail your letters to:
Australian Shooters Journal
PO Box 2066
Kent Town, SA 5071**

Australia should lead, not follow

I read with interest Colin Greenwood's article on Britain's handgun ban. My husband and myself are shooters and ex-Poms and were still in the UK when all this took place. Shortly after the Dunblane massacre, we were both asked to appear on a live debate program to put forward the shooters' points. Although the program and the presenter were supposed to be neutral, it was very plain to see that they were anti-gun. The whole program was set against us and had it not been for the fact that my husband and myself, both professional entertainers, were unfazed by the cameras and able to continue to be articulate under stress, the anti-gun lobby would have slayed us.

We are sure that there were 'plants' in the audience and many so called 'facts' that were put forward by the anti-gunners were untrue. The producers, etc. of the program even asked the pro-gunners to bring their weapons with them to show the studio and viewing audiences. Had any of us done that, we would have been breaking the law.

A live trailer was run half an hour before the program went out in order to let the viewers know what was coming up. For this trailer, the presenter sat at the front next to me and as soon as the cameras rolled, he painted me as the 'bad' person. The program then started with us already pigeon-holed as the bad guys. Even some of the crew were shocked by the presenter doing this. (The presenter, by the way, was an ex MP.)

Throughout the run-up to the ban, the British public was not given the true facts and figures. At one point I believe the figure bandied about by the government that would be paid out under the compensation scheme was one million pounds. This sum was paid out to one dealer alone for his stock.

It also cost a huge amount of money to have the live ammunition destroyed. The army didn't want it and the government was charged a substantial sum for its disposal.

We were lucky. We knew that we were coming to live in Australia and would therefore be able to continue our much-loved sport of shooting. As we all predicted, and the surveys and figures have since proved, the ban hasn't worked and we both hope that Australia will learn by Britain's misguided government and not try to follow Britain's lead.

Sheila Lorraine and David Lee-Jay, Qld



Keith Tidswell
Executive Director
Public Relations and
International Affairs

Olympic Images

The Olympics are with us again and even though I like to think I remain cool about this event, I can feel the excitement rising. In Sydney we have the greatest opportunity to present some positive images about shooting.

So often the good news stories are passed by, with the media favouring those of tragedy, conflict, war, hatred or violence. The Olympic historians tell us that during the original Olympic Games, even warring armies halted battles to allow competitors safe passage to compete in the Games. And so we hope that these Games will bring greater opportunities for peace and understanding.

Here is our chance to promote the positive side of our sport with all the color, glamour and fanfare that will be built up by television images being beamed around the world. This is an opportunity for each of us to share the experience with family and friends and call the radio talkback programs with excitement in our voices as we follow the shooting events.

There will be medal counts by governments to decide how much money will be allotted to the respective sports during the next few years. Yes, it does cost money, time, effort and dedication on behalf of the athletes and commitment to planning and support by their various supportive associations, but the national pride that this engenders is something that we can all be part of and is worth every cent.

Most of all we should remember the athletes as they prepare for competition. Shooting requires the greatest mental discipline of any sport, as in the case with running target or shotgun...you wait in the ready position, holding a mental sight picture in your mind, waiting for the target to appear, you recognise the target, raise the firearm, move with the target, control your breathing, acquire the target, refine the correct sight picture, release the shot, follow through, lower the firearm and reload again in preparation for the next shot. Each shot, a one-shot match of its own. Each shot requiring absolute concentration.

Sardinia Workshop

The informal workshop 'Firearms Marking: Model Standards and Common Serial Number Codes' was held on the island of Sardinia, Italy during the month of June. The meeting was hosted by the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities (WFSA), of which the SSAA is a founding member. Participants were from governments, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, the United Nations and the firearms industry.

Firearms marking has been discussed as a part of several international firearms regulation efforts. Model standards for marking and a possible system of serial number codes for manufacturer and place of manufacture

were considered by the workshop.

Conclusions on codes for each country were deferred, but the informal workshop made the following recommendations on firearms marking:

1. Standard for Firearms Marking - Each manufacturer shall mark identifying information upon the firearm in such a manner as the mark may be recoverable.

2. Duplicate Markings - Each manufacturer shall establish control procedures to avoid duplicate (identical) marks on the firearms it produces.

3. Records Retention - Each manufacturer shall establish procedures whereby records of what markings were applied to what firearms are kept for at least ten years.

4. Tracing Requests - Each manufacturer shall establish procedures whereby any request for tracing information from an appropriate law enforcement agency is responded to as soon as possible, but not later than within 72 hours of receipt of the request.

5. New Technologies and Information Sharing - An appropriate mechanism shall be established to:

a. Periodically evaluate new firearms marking technologies and make recommendations regarding such technologies.

b. Communicate the model standards on firearms marking to relevant government bodies and members of the firearms industry.

c. Consult on and periodically review the model firearms marking standards and if necessary, recommend amendments to such standards.

Firearms marking has been a frequent topic of discussion in the various regional and international efforts on small arms and firearms. These efforts include the proposed Firearms Protocol and the 2001 international conference on the 'Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects'.

The Sardinia workshop built upon the prior efforts of both the international community and the firearms industry on the subject of marking.

Several themes seem to have emerged from World Forum efforts during 1999 and 2000, in which SSAA have played a contributing role:

- ◆ All firearms should be marked with name of manufacturer and place of manufacture.
- ◆ There should be some model standards on how firearms should be marked.
- ◆ Unique serial numbers should be considered.
- ◆ There needs to be industry involvement.

These themes created the context within which the workshop was held. ●

Licensed shooters **VINDICATED**

'...licensed shooters are not responsible for the majority of gun-related murders in Australia.'

by Paul Peake

A recently released Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) paper entitled 'The Licensing and Registration Status of Firearms Used in Homicide', has shown conclusively that licensed shooters are not responsible for the majority of gun-related murders in Australia. According to the report, licensed gun owners and registered firearms are involved in less than ten per cent of all homicides.¹ The findings support what the SSAA has been saying for years - legitimate owners are not the problem when it comes to the criminal misuse of guns.

While the findings may be good news, the conclusions have been overshadowed by sections of the report, which focus on the issue of handgun-related offences and the origin of firearms used in crimes. The paper notes that while no registered handguns were involved in homicides during the review period, the number of handgun-related offences has nevertheless increased from 13 per cent in 1995/96 to 42.2 per cent in 1998/99.²

Echoing the anti-gun lobby's mantra, the report argues that *One of the main methods of illegal acquisition of firearms by individuals is through theft from gun dealers, owners or others.*³ The inference is clear; now that licensed shooters have been exonerated the strategy is to condemn them indirectly by pointing to supposedly lax storage arrangements. Referring to the current situation, the paper goes on to say *a greater focus should be directed towards enforcement and monitoring of compliance.*⁴ Can shooters now expect a new crop of laws aimed at a further tightening of safe storage requirements?

Just as disturbing are the report's suggestions concerning the number of firearms held by dealers and the way in which they are stored. In tones reminiscent of the anti-gun lobby's 'community armouries' argument, the report, speaking about handguns recently stolen from a dealer in South Australia, notes:

A theft of this magnitude highlights the dangers associated with stockpiling such

*weapons and the increased vulnerability of such stores in terms of potential targeting by illicit traffickers. This leads one to question whether there is a 'genuine need' for some firearm dealers to maintain such high levels of stock.*⁵

It's a very short jump from arguing that if dealers shouldn't be allowed to keep multiple firearms because of the risk of theft, then neither should private licensees - several jurisdictions already require owners to install burglar alarms if they have more than a prescribed quantity of guns. The idea of supposedly reducing the potential for robbery by restricting the number of firearms a person may own has not been lost on the anti-gun movement, which renewed its call for centralised armouries as soon as the report was released.

While shooters can take some comfort from the AIC's report, they should be deeply disturbed by the fact that it goes out of its way to imply that more restrictions on law-abiding gun owners may be a good thing -

*As those who engage in firearm-related violence in Australia are least likely to register their weapons or comply with appropriate licensing procedures, the preventative efforts would need to be directed at curtailing the supply of firearms to such persons.*⁶

In other words, if one accepts the premise that most guns used in crimes are stolen from legitimate sources, then it follows that the best approach is to tighten the noose around the neck of bona fide licensees. The problem is the report provides no empirical evidence whatsoever to back up the notion. The fact is, very little data exists about the number of firearms smuggled into Australia each year or the extent of the illicit trade involving guns that have never been registered.

What information there is available is both diffuse and poorly co-ordinated. Anecdotal evidence suggests there may be literally millions of firearms in Australia that have never been licensed, with a significant proportion in the hands of the criminal underworld. It is drawing a very long bow to intimate, as the report does, that a rise in firearm offences is predominantly akin to

theft from legitimate owners.

While the evidence may vindicate sporting shooters as far as homicide is concerned, the underlying agenda appears to be the same. The government has never let the facts get in the way of its anti-gun platform in the past and there is no reason to believe the AIC's findings will alter things. One need look no further than the current review of the *Firearms Act* under way in New South Wales, where the government is presently considering a limit on the number of guns a licensee may own, along with new storage requirements, which are tipped to include random police checks.

1. Mouzos, J. (2000). No. 151, The Licensing and Registration Status of Firearms Used in Homicide. *Australian Institute of Criminology: trends & issues in crime and criminal justice.* p. 6.
2. *ibid.* p. 4.
3. *ibid.* p. 5.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*



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Fax: 02 4957 7166

The Journalist's Guide to **GUN VIOLENCE COVERAGE**



By Professor Michael Brown,
School of Journalism, Brady Chair,
Vancouver College of Liberal Arts
(Political satire by: Dr Michael Brown,
who is actually an optometrist in
Vancouver, Washington who
moderates an e-mail list for
discussion of gun issues.)

Guns are a sad fact of life in Australian culture and are a major topic in modern journalism. A good journalist has a duty to get involved and make a difference in this important social debate and by following certain guidelines the concerned journalist can be assured of having the maximum impact on this shameful problem.

The first principle to remember is that subtle use of terminology can covertly influence the reader. Adjectives should be chosen for maximum anti-gun effect. When describing a gun, attach terms like 'automatic', 'semi-automatic', 'large calibre', 'deadly', 'high powered' or 'powerful'. Almost any gun can be described by one or more of

these terms. More than two guns should be called an 'arsenal'.

Try to include the term 'assault weapon' if at all possible. This can be combined with any of the previous terms for the best results. Nobody actually knows what an assault weapon is, so you cannot be criticised for this usage. Your local anti-gun organisation can provide you with a list of the latest buzzwords like 'junk guns', 'Saturday Night Specials' and 'the criminal's weapon of choice'.

Don't worry about getting the technical details right. Many a reporter has accidentally written about semi-automatic revolvers or committed other minor errors. Since most people know little about guns, this is not a problem. Only the gun nuts ►

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will complain and they don't count. The emotional content of your article is much more important than the factual details, since people are easily influenced through their emotions more so than through logic.

Broadcast journalists should have a file tape showing a machine gun firing on full automatic. Run this video while describing 'automatic' weapons used in a crime or confiscated by police. At the least, a large graphic of a handgun should be displayed behind the on-air personality when reading any crime story.

Do not waste words describing criminals who use guns to commit crimes. Instead of calling them burglar, rapist, murderer or repeat offender, simply use the term 'gunman'. This helps the public associate all forms of crime and violence with the possession of guns.

Whenever drug dealers are arrested, guns are usually confiscated by the police. Mention the type and number of guns more prominently than the type and quantity of drugs. Include the number of rounds of ammunition seized, since the number will seem large to those who know little about guns.

Obviously, the drug dealers who had the guns should now be called 'gunmen'.

Political discussions on gun control legislation usually involve pro-gun organisations. Always refer to these organisations as the gun lobby. If space permits, mention how much money the gun lobby has spent to influence political campaigns and describe their legislative lobbying efforts as arm-twisting or threats.

Gun owners must never be seen in a positive light. Do not mention that these misguided individuals may actually be well educated or have respectable jobs and healthy families. They should be called 'gun nuts' if possible or simply gun owners at best. Mention details about their clothing, especially if they are wearing hunting clothes or hats. Mention the simplistic slogans on

their bumper stickers to show that their intelligence level is low. Many gun owners drive pick-up trucks, hunt and live in rural areas. Use these details to help portray them as ignorant rednecks. Don't use the word 'hunt'. Always say they kill animals.

Don't be afraid to interview these people, they are harmless even though we don't portray them that way. Try to solicit comments that can be taken out of context to show them in the worst possible light.

Never question the effectiveness of gun control laws or proposals.

Guns are evil and kill people. Removing guns from society can only be good. Nobody really uses guns for legitimate self-defence, especially women or children. Any stories about armed self-defence must be minimised or suppressed.

Be careful about criticising the police for responding slowly to 000 calls for help. It is best if the public feels like the police can be relied upon to protect them at all times. If people are buying guns to protect their families, you are not doing your job.

Emphasise stories where people kill family members and/or themselves with guns. It is important to make the public feel like they could lose control and start killing at any moment if they have a gun in the house. Any story where a child misuses a gun is front-page material.

View every shooting as an event to be exploited. Always include emotional quotes from the victim's family if possible. If they are not available, the perpetrator's family will do nicely. The quote must blame the tragedy on the availability of guns. Photos or videos of grieving family members are worth a thousand facts. Most people will accept the assertion that guns cause crime. It is much easier than believing that some people deliberately choose to harm others.

Your story should include terms like 'tragic' or 'preventable' and mention the current toll of gun violence in your city or

state. Good reporters always know exactly how many gun deaths have occurred in their area since the first of the year. List two or three previous incidents of gun violence to give the impression of a continuing crime wave.

Little space should be devoted to shootings where criminals kill each other. Although these deaths greatly inflate the annual gun violence numbers, they distract from the basic mission of urging law-abiding citizens to give up their guns. Do not dig too deeply into the reasons behind shootings. The fact that a gun was involved is the major point, unless someone under 18 is affected, in which case, the child angle is now of equal importance.

Any article about gun violence should include quotes from anti-gun organisations or politicians. One quote should say that we must do 'something for the children'. Anti-gun spokespersons should be called 'activists' or 'advocates'. If your employer wishes to appear unbiased, you can include one token quote from a gun lobby group to show that you are being fair. The anti-gun statements should be accepted as fact. The gun lobby statement can be denigrated by including text like "according to gun lobbyist Jones...".

Fortunately, statements from anti-gun organisations come in short sound bites that are perfect for generating an emotional response in the reader or viewer. Gun lobby statements usually contain boring facts that are easy to ignore.

Feel secure in your advocacy journalism. The vast majority of your fellow journalists support your activism. The nation will be a better place if only the police and military have guns. Remember, you are doing it for the children so the end justifies the means.

Eventually the government will have a monopoly on power. Don't worry about the right to freedom of the press - just contact me for more helpful hints. ●

Official reports now show the gun buy-back to have been a **TOTAL FAILURE**



by John Coochey

“300,000 banned firearms still in circulation. Gun buy-back a failure”

That was not quite the headline that the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran in March 1998. The second sentence was missing. The article went on to say according to leaked NSW police documents they expected to buy back 450,000 firearms but they only got 155,285. In other words, two out of three were not surrendered. The article refers to the minutes of a special meeting of police ministers at which senior police officials stated they expected to retrieve almost 1.5 million firearms nationwide. They in fact got 643,000 or 43 per cent.

This could mean that two out of every three semi-automatics have now disappeared from the legal market and are on the ‘grey market’. That is to say the owners are breaking the law by possessing them but they have not been used for criminal purposes. When a gun is already illegally owned and someone offers money for it, no questions asked, then some may be willing to sell it, whereas if it were legally owned and registered then few would even consider it.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* contrasted this “one in three being handed in” with a government-sponsored survey that showed that 80 per cent of those who owned such firearms would, or had, surrendered them. The poll was conducted by Newspoll and was not publicly released until I obtained it under Freedom of Information. The accuracy of the poll was dependent on people being rung up by a stranger, who obviously had their telephone number and had probably used an easily available reverse telephone directory to get the respondent’s address. The people being polled were asked if they intended to break the law. Would you have expected many honest answers?

If someone ran a telephone poll asking people if they were going to cheat on their tax return would you believe the results?

Likewise we do not know how many people, who answered the poll and said that they were happy with the new legislation, were actually firearm owners. Some could have been anti-gunners who wished to strengthen the government’s hand by pretending to be firearm owners. In the survey profession this is known as strategic answering. If we assume, incorrectly, that firearms make the community less safe, then the issue is not the number of firearms but the number of people who have access to them. If you are going to shoot your neighbour, your neighbour’s cat or more likely yourself, 80 per cent of firearm-related deaths are suicides, then you only need one firearm to do it. What in fact the government-funded study found was:

The decrease in the number of people owning a gun is of an order of magnitude which is not statistically significant. (Newspoll Australian Firearms Buy-back Tracking Study Phase Two advertising June-July 1997 page 14.)

Or in other words, the buy-back had made no difference to the number of people with firearms - possibly two-thirds of newly declared ‘illegal firearms’ were not handed in. So we would not have expected much change in firearm related deaths.

Moving forward to May 1999 to a study released by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), paper No. 116 Firearm-related Violence: The Impact of the Nationwide Agreement on Firearms, by Jenny Mouzos. That paper concluded:

The findings outlined in this paper from a preliminary analysis of data on causes of death and official crime statistics seem to indicate that, nationally, there has been a decline in firearm-related deaths in 1997, mostly due to a decline in the rate of suicides and accidents. This reduction has occurred in each state and territory, with the exception of NSW and Victoria. There is also preliminary evidence that in some cases, for example suicide and armed robbery, firearms may be ►

...two out of every three semi-automatics have now disappeared from the legal market and are on the 'grey market'.

being displaced by other methods or weapons.

It also stated, in part:

The death rates for homicide and legal intervention were quite similar to those observed during previous years, the reduction in the prevalence of firearm-related deaths observed in 1997 was mostly due to a decline in the rate of suicides and accidents.

In fact, the evidence from the Australian Bureau of Statistics is quite clear that any restrictions on firearms have reduced neither overall suicide rates nor armed robbery and it is strange that the AIC does not admit this. Suicide rates have been increasing throughout the 1990s but the number involving firearms has been declining. So the buy-back has not reduced overall suicides.

Alarmingly, Mouzos refers to a study of suicides in Queensland (Cantor P. H. and Slater P. J. 1995: *The impact of firearm control on suicide in Queensland, preliminary findings, Medical Journal of Australia* vol. 162 p 583-5) that found that restricting firearm ownership in Queensland led to a drop in suicides. That study was discredited when (see the ILA Report March 1996) it was shown that the authors had disguised the fact that in the year restrictions were brought in suicides actually increased slightly - they dropped dramatically the following year. The authors had combined these two years and ignored the third year, after restrictions, when the rate had gone through the roof. This is typical behaviour when a method of suicide, such as coal gas, is removed.

Suicides may show an immediate decline but this is made up for later as those prone to suicide find other methods. Not only do suicides rise to previous levels, but for a period, they exceed them until the backlog is made up. That is certainly what happened in Queensland.

In each of the two years before restrictions were introduced there were 423 suicides. In the first year after there were 428, they dropped to 367 the following year, rose to 455 in 1994 and in 1997, the last year for which figures are available, there were 425 - virtually the same as before the restrictions. Interestingly, Cantor and Slater have not revised their paper but the original "preliminary figures" are still being quoted.

The idea that firearms cause or facilitate suicides is also rebutted easily by looking at the different suicide rates for men and women in rural and urban areas. If men from country areas commit suicide at a higher rate than men in the cities because they have guns to do it with, then why do rural women, who also have access to firearms, commit suicide at a lower rate than those who live in the cities?

In the case of armed robbery, the AIC study concluded *...there is a declining trend in the percentage of robberies involving the use of a firearm and this has been accompanied by increases in the percentage of robberies involving other weapons.* So the buy-back has not reduced armed robberies and I for one would be just as worried by a blood-filled syringe as I would be by a firearm.

So what about the situation with accidents? According to Mouzos's paper, there has been a decline in firearm accidents since the gun buy-back: 30 in 1996 and only 19 in 1997. However, when a longer-term view is taken a different picture emerges. According to official statistics in 1995 there were 15 such deaths that year. There were 20 in 1994, 18 in 1993 and, going further back, accidental deaths averaged 26 each year from 1989-91, 28 from '86-88, 32 from '83-85 and a staggering 50 per year from 1980-82.

When I asked Jenny Mouzos why she had not looked at these early figures, she said that it had never occurred to her. Surprising, considering that I got the figures from the AIC's own web-site. What is absolutely clear is that accidental deaths involving a firearm were falling at a much higher rate before the buy-back than afterwards - due largely to the safety training provided by the SSAA and other similar organisations.

This data was not dreamt up. It did not come from some right-wing militia web page. It is from government-financed reports and agencies and, with the exception of the Newspoll study, is all publicly available. So according to official police documents, possibly only one in three of newly declared illegal firearms were handed in. According to a government survey the number of gun owners did not decline. According to official figures there has not been a resulting decline in murders, suicides or accidental deaths involving firearms. Other than that, it was \$500 million well spent. ●

Parting shots

The good:

In the May *Australian Shooter*, SSAA President Bill Shelton urged SSAA members opposed to the banning of duck hunting to write to the RSPCA's Dr Wirth. The response so far has been very encouraging, with SSAA members voicing their serious concerns regarding the RSPCA's attitude towards duck shooting.

Your support on matters such as this is critical to the future of our sport. Don't be afraid to make your opinions known.

Here is a copy of a letter sent to Dr Wirth by SSAA member Ray Pallister.

Dr Wirth,

This letter is to advise you of my utter disgust and disappointment at the attitude and actions taken by the RSPCA regarding recreational hunting.

Upon my investigation, I found the RSPCA had no communication with recreational hunters or their associations prior to your advertising campaign.

I have always supported the RSPCA both morally and financially...until now.

Since your organisation obviously has funds available for anti-hunting TV advertising, it sure does not need my financial support and I assure you it will not receive it.

For your information, I am not a duck hunter, though I do hunt feral pigs, rabbits and foxes. Personally I am an animal lover, until most recently my family included two dogs and two cats. The support and care for our pets can be verified through the St George Animal Hospital at Carlton, NSW.

The damage done to the RSPCA's image, and I am sure financial support, through this anti-hunting advertising is enormous.

Much work would need to be done to repair this damage but a good start would be to have the imbeciles responsible for this campaign dealt with.

Secondly, to apologise to the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia.

Frankly, I don't expect you will do much, as is usually the case with the bureaucratic bungling present in some Australian institutions but I have made my feelings clear.

Sincerely,

Ray Pallister

The bad:

City councils have always been responsible for providing efficient and effective management, maintenance and development of a city - focusing on parkland maintenance, economic growth, tourism and safety. They have not, however, been responsible for promoting and supporting specific, controversial political matters - until now.

The Wyndham City Council in Victoria has added the duck-hunting debate to its agenda. By supporting the RSPCA's scheme to ban duck hunting the council is entering uncharted and unpopular waters.

The ugly:

A number of companies, including McDonalds, Channel Ten, Western Potatoes and West Coast Eagles, sponsor various exhibits at the Perth Zoo.

On a recent visit to the zoo, SSAA member Ron Bryant noticed these different sponsoring companies and thought it would be good public relations for the SSAA to follow suit, as it does a great deal of work in the area of wildlife management and conservation. As the Vice President for SSAA WA, he approached Perth Zoo about this opportunity and received this response:

Dear Ron,

Thank you for your inquiry regarding sponsorship of an exhibit at Perth Zoo. It is important that any sponsorship agreed to here at Perth Zoo is one that is based on a principle of complete synergy between the sponsor and the Zoo.

After careful consideration, we must advise you that we believe that there is not the level of synergy between the two organisations to make any such sponsorship mutually beneficial.

Please accept our thanks for your offer and your interest in Perth Zoo.

Kind regards,

Sponsorship and Business Development Manager

Obviously the SSAA doesn't share Perth Zoo's understanding of 'complete synergy'.

If we did, we'd know that it is okay to kill millions of cows to boast 'one billion people served' but it isn't okay to hunt a few deer to feed your family.

Is this just another case of emotions taking the place of facts and commonsense? Makes us wonder if maybe 'zoo poo' is produced not only by the animals in residence.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE!



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