

ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

Victory at last!

Government uses
common sense on
handgun imports



Lib's man under scrutiny

We talk with Olympic shooter and
would-be Liberal Party politician
Russell Mark on the buy-back,
gun laws and politics.

May 2001 Vol. 3 Issue 3

Members-only insert to the *Australian Shooter*



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A word from the President

At last we can report a win over the new handgun importation rules. The SSAA has been lobbying the Minister for Customs for some sensible changes to the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956 amendments that were introduced late last year. Under the alterations, which came into effect this past August, dealers have only been allowed to hold ten new pistols in stock (the rules don't affect secondhand guns). However, after negotiations, the Minister has agreed to overhaul the regulations to allow dealers to hold more guns in-house, while removing the requirement that pistols held for demonstration purposes must either be destroyed or sold overseas.

The changes are a significant step forward and reflect the effort the SSAA has put into getting a better deal for shooters. The Association's Executive Director for Special Projects, Gary Fleetwood, and representatives from the National Firearm Dealers and Traders Council have successfully convinced the government to accept a position whereby dealers can operate in a commercially viable environment and pistol shooters can continue to participate in their sport without being forced to accommodate obvious flaws in legislation. It is a great win for shooters and an indicator of Gary's untiring efforts during this whole episode - efforts that I personally wish to acknowledge.

Perhaps the best way for members to show their support in light of the changes is to consider buying a new pistol. Dealers who have been suffering under the weight of the

amendments would certainly appreciate the business and the more shooters who take up handgun competitions the stronger the argument for protecting the sport.

I also wish to acknowledge the executive members of the NFD & TC who committed their organisation to seeing this issue corrected. I am pleased to say that because of the greater communication tools now available to us through the Internet, and the systems now in place within the Association, dealers and activists were well placed to receive updated and relative information on this subject. Some 2700 faxes were sent to keep those interested informed on the status of discussions with the government. Three computers were specifically assigned to transmit the material and they sit ready for the next important issue that may arise.

This infrastructure, this system, these people are the result of our increase in membership. If we are to maintain them for future use then we need to maintain and increase our membership base. I ask that you shrug off the negativity thrust upon you during the past five years and find the energy to enjoy and participate in the shooting sports with renewed enthusiasm. Get to the range and shoot. Plan that hunting trip and make this the year that you are going!

Bill Shelton
National President

ASJ

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WHERE is it?

For years firearm owners have paid good money to have accurate information stored on the police information system. There is, however, good reason why they often question the accuracy of the data.

by Gary Fleetwood

Police firearm records are often criticised for being inaccurate. The event of April 1996 was the catalyst for firearm registries across the country to re-assess their data and make urgent and politically supported efforts to ensure records are accurate. In November 1996 Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams (Liberal WA) made several public statements about how the Coalition Government would be giving some \$55,835,000 to the states so they could administer the gun buy-back scheme and “for the establishment of a new registration and licensing system”. The SSAA has recently had the opportunity to see how some of the registration systems have been operating.

‘Where is it?’

Police have convinced government that those three words satisfy the need to register guns. That question may be asked of a firearm owner after police have checked details on the registry database - details that we hope are accurate. The scenario often used by the gun prohibitionists is that registration gives the police information concerning an individual’s possible possession of firearms before implementing a raid or checking premises on matters that on the surface do not relate to firearms. That argument can be countered by the hope that police would at all times be diligent in the

way that they approach any premises. But is that very expensive information used every time police have to deal with an individual? Would those officers involved in the recent fatal shooting of a New South Wales man have initiated a check of the firearm registry database before attempting to serve a warrant in relation to a motor vehicle offence?

For years firearm owners have paid good money to have accurate information stored on the police information system. There is, however, good reason why they often question the accuracy of the data.

In 1995, Tim Fischer, when he was in opposition as Leader of the National Party, said, “The question of firearms registration is one which I feel needs further examination. I believe the case for firearms registration is not yet proven, because of massive irregularities. In fact, one state says 66 per cent of the firearms registration is inaccurate.”

The proposed gun buy-back struck a nerve with barrister and chairman of the Victorian Consultative Committee, Lindsay Ford, when he said, “I don’t know what the value of the register is. It’s a political necessity. It creates an illusion. So, to tell you the truth, I don’t know what this register does whatsoever.”¹

In 1994 a review of the Victorian firearm database was carried out following comments by the chief commissioner, Neil Comrie, who said that police could not guarantee the accuracy of information on the register. John Crook from Gun Control Australia added some humour to an otherwise serious matter in 1996 when he said about the firearms registry, “Some of its senior officers had



The 1996 gun buy-back initiated a ‘spring clean’ of firearm registries across the country.

Victorian dealer Graeme Forbes (right) supports the efforts by Vicpol to make the system work.



fallen under the influence of the gun lobby".² We wish.

In 1991 NSW Police Commissioner Tony Lauer reflected upon the accuracy of NSW police firearm records when giving evidence to a government inquiry on gun law reform. The Commissioner rejected a proposal for lifetime firearm licences, informing the government that, "When a new gun booklet was recently mailed to all licensed shooters, 20 per cent were returned as 'not known at this address'."³

In February 1987 the then Officer in Charge of the Victorian Firearms Registry, Alex Newgreen, said in a report that if the Government of Victoria wanted to stay with a registration system of guns, then "repressive laws would have to be enacted on the 'show cause' basis or a labour intensive system adopted which would rely heavily upon police time and resources to make registration more effective and to provide some degree of accuracy."⁴

The SSAA is aware of one dealer who had been in business for three years. A small operator, he was forced to seek compensation after the events of 1996. He was given a list of 23 firearm queries to be resolved before the matter of compensation would be initiated. Luckily for him, he maintained his own computer firearm database of his inventory and had to advise the registry that 21 of those queries were problems that stemmed from police record-keeping procedures. The dealer processed a total of 427 firearms until the time came for him to get out of the trade. In three years, a 5½ per cent error had occurred in the accuracy of police records. Those figures fit with claims that registry records of dealers who have been in the trade for 20 years or more are inaccurate by up to 25 per cent.⁵

Individual firearm owners are often in contact with firearm registries asking them to explain why the information on their firearm licence is not correct. In 1998 a media executive received his firearm licence with his correct details, but the photograph was of a farmer living 600 kilometres away.⁶

Registry Reform

Victoria has committed major resources to get their system right. The SSAA recently had an opportunity to spend a day at the Licensing Services Branch within the Victoria police. The branch is managed

by Superintendent David Dettmann, who explained that the first round of audits on dealers has now been completed after a two-year period. Although some problems were identified in relation to the way that some dealers maintained records, they were of such a minor nature that a polite caution was given.

Mr Dettmann said, "We hope to build a working relationship with those who are involved in the handling, purchase and storage of firearms on a daily basis. We understand that this is their bread and butter and if we can reduce the stress of complying with what can be at times a complex issue, then it makes our job easier. We are, however, here to make the system effective first and then efficient second.

"It is the government's position that there is a need to ensure that the ownership of firearms does not endanger the day-to-day activities of the citizens of this state. Once we have the systems in place to satisfy the legislative requirements determined by parliament, then we shall tackle the task of making those systems user friendly as best we can.

"I am aware of the call by many sporting shooters that they feel hounded by new laws and regulations, while the criminal element continue to use illegal guns in the cause of their illegal activities. They need to be rest assured that I and my staff can clearly differentiate between the activities of sporting shooters and those of criminals and advice that I may be asked to give on this issue reflects that ability."

Since 1997, Victoria police have been monitoring the movement of firearms across state borders and while the expiry of gun licences and the subsequent 'loss' of those firearms related to that licence has been small, it is a matter that now is being actively pursued by Victoria police. The message is

to ensure you make adequate arrangements to obtain a new licence in the state you move to or place your firearms into the hands of a dealer pending your future move.

Victoria police are soon to issue a 'stand alone' system, whereby those dealers who have computers will be issued a floppy disc with their inventory details attached. They will be able to make records of their sales and incoming guns by way of this new system. At the end of the month, the dealer will then e-mail the file to the LSB to update the police records. The police rely upon the knowledge and expertise of the dealers in identifying the firearm, its correct serial number and action type. By using the dealers as a source of expert information, the LSB has been able to reduce the number of errors that exist in their system. The 1994 report to the Victorian Government said the errors in the firearm database were "...further compounded by errors in keying in the thousands of registration cards previously maintained manually. Again this was coupled with a lack of suitably trained staff...a considerable backlog also meant that firearms often had been passed onto new owners before prior entries were made."

To ensure accuracy of data entry a 'template' has been designed and promoted by technical advisor Robert Schwarz. Once applied to the system, it does not allow the addition of information that does not match the criteria laid down for a particular firearm make and model. It will clearly identify a Stirling M20s as a semi-automatic 22LR - and any attempt to register that model rifle as a bolt action will be rejected by the system. It also recognises serial number types as belonging to a particular make and model of firearm, thus enhancing the reduction in errors.

A further innovation is the production of a library of photographs that identify firearms.

WHERE IS IT?

This library will soon be on-line within the intranet of the Victoria police. It will allow those police officers that do not have good firearms knowledge to quickly have access to quality photographs of a particular gun and text information concerning serial number location and other points of interest. Mr Schwarz advised us that so far they have finished some 2500 photographs and will continue with the project into the future. It is envisaged that the complete picture library will soon be on the Internet, available to all.

Graeme Forbes, president of the Victorian Dealers Association, has welcomed the changes to the system introduced by Superintendent Dettmann.

Mr Forbes said, "The system has obvious benefits to dealers. It will eliminate errors caused by keystrokes done by registry staff. David Dettmann is an extremely good manager and deserves credit for his efficient manner in developing the registry."⁶

A Typical Audit

SSAA attended an audit of Adelaide dealer Fisher Firearms by the South Australian Police Firearms Section.

The recent introduction of another firearm policy by the South Australian police requires dealers to list those guns held for repair, consignment or safe keeping in their dealer transaction book. While time consuming for the dealer, the advantage is the ability of both parties to quickly identify the location of a particular firearm at any given time. Many repairs are sent off the premises for specialist work and it has proven difficult to locate a firearm quickly. This new system should eliminate that problem.

During Fisher Firearms' audit, new guns on show were easy to identify and tick as being present. Those new guns still in their factory boxes were opened and the serial

Guns are received, inspected, secured, recorded and tagged. Dealers across Australia do it all.



number checked against the factory carton and the police record. The firearms held for safe keeping, consignment and repair were more time consuming, as details of the owner were also recorded in longhand for future cross-checking back in the registry. The police worked in pairs - one identifying the details of a particular firearm and the other checking that information against their own records.

Receivers that were in the workshop had their serial number recorded, including those that had obviously been part of a firearm stripped for parts. This activity of cannibalism has been a direct result of the difficulty of obtaining spare parts since tightening of Customs regulations. Manufacture of spare parts has now become another feature of the gun trade.

The handgun safe was given particular attention - not surprising in light of recent events for which all law-abiding dealers are now paying. Each handgun was checked for its serial number and that the correct 'tag number' was attached on a label. The police paid particular attention to detail.

Sergeant Doug Riach was in charge of the day's activities and he said that the audit

Recent events that have now resulted in a dealer being before the court has emphasised the need to more accurately account for those guns that do not make up part of the dealer's stock.

had several purposes. "There is a legislative requirement to account for firearms held by the dealer and, in particular, those that are being held for safekeeping, consignment or repair. Some owners have advised us that they sold or gave the gun to this dealer and yet there is no record of such an activity happening. We then find out that it was another dealer who received the firearm.

"Recent events that have now resulted in a dealer being before the court has emphasised the need to more accurately account for those guns that do not make up part of the dealer's stock (eg, repairs and safe keeping). We have so far completed audits of about 15 dealers and the results have been satisfying for both parties. It is an opportunity to clean up any discrepancies that exist between our records and those of the dealer.

"The audit also allows us to again check that the standard of security meets the requirement determined by legislation. We are working on the basis that all dealers shall have the same standard and the same test of that standard shall be applied.

"Next year we are looking at a review of



Greg Sparrow works with Sapol officer Angelo Pippos to determine the status of all items on hand.

the Dealers Activity Book and re-assessing its format. This review shall naturally take into consideration the suggestions of the dealers."

Fisher's proprietor Greg Sparrow commented that the recording system of firearms needed to be updated and made electronic. He said, "I am aware of the pilot project in Victoria and we need to have that sort of system here in South Australia. There is no-one endeavouring to be more accurate

in recording the details of guns kept on these premises than I. We had one un-holy blue with the registry some years ago about what guns were supposed to be here and that's a situation I don't wish to see repeated.

"At least the audit was on a Tuesday. It was done on a day that's not busy for us and I appreciate that consideration by the police."

Five years after the buy-back, no amount of mint-fresh explanations by politicians will appease those firearm owners who surrendered guns. Taking steps, however, to reduce the stress felt by firearm owners when dealing with the firearm registry is a big step in ensuring that compliance with the new gun laws is achieved. The SSAA is pleased to see the Victorian registry ensuring that the inherent frustration of the compliance regime is managed with some thought to customer service. ●

Please ring me on 0407 616 218 if you have any questions concerning this story.

Footnotes:

¹ - 11/5/96 "Firearms register flawed; adviser" *The Age*

² - 2/6/96 *The Sunday Age*

³ - 1991 "Gun Law Reform" NSW Government. Copy held SSAA

⁴ - 26/2/87 "Firearms Registration System" CIP

Newgreen Vicpol File 39/1/1385/84

⁵ - 15/3/01 SSAA interview with Firearms Dealer

⁶ - 30/11/98 "Storm over wrong photo licences" *The Advertiser*

⁷ - 15/3/01 SSAA interview with Graeme Forbes

LOSING GROUND

SSAA Pontville Club

A significant number of shooters in the southern part of Tasmania are getting a bit of a run-around when it comes to participating in their sport.

Members of the SSAA Pontville Club (Tasmania's largest SSAA Branch), who lease the range from the Australian army, are finding it difficult to secure training and competition days.

The TC Simpson Army Range Complex has been in use since before the start of WWII and for the past 30 years part of the range has been leased to the SSAA Pontville Club. For the greater part of those 30 years, the SSAA has had considerable access to the facilities and throughout time had built up their portion of the range to accommodate benchrest, shotgun, metallic silhouette, pistol and rifle shooters and has held various national championships there.

In late 1999, all their hard work came crashing down when talk of a highway through the TC Simpson Army Range Complex was proposed. After investigation by the state's Parks and Wildlife Service, the Complex was apparently found to be scattered with a number of 'rare' Tasmanian plants. As a result, the road proposal was cancelled and the army decided to 'protect' the endangered plants - but only the plants that were in direct competition with the range used by SSAA Pontville.

Most of the SSAA's shooting facilities were removed from the range, leaving members with severely limited access to a pistol facility and a small rifle range, which is by no means adequate to service all members and disciplines shot by the Pontville Club.

As well as being forced to deal with a reduced

section of land, SSAA members also have to deal with limited access. The club used to be able to shoot at the range on each Saturday and Sunday of the month but are now restricted to only three Saturdays a month - and often, due to army operations, those days are cancelled with little or no notice.

Many of the members drive considerable distances to shoot at the range and when bookings are cancelled without warning, they are often left to find out the bad news after it is too late. With the erratic shooting schedule, Pontville is struggling to keep participants up to date.

However, despite all the problems the club is facing, it wants members to know that it is still functioning and has not closed shop. At this stage, it still shoots at the Complex, when permitted, and at other

ranges when feasible. Pontville members believe that while the army may not have plans to discontinue the club's lease, opportunities to use the Complex may continue to diminish, making it all but impossible to provide members with a chance to participate in their chosen disciplines.

Currently, the club has set up an answering service (03 6273 0837), which members can call to find out if the day's events are still taking place before they make the long drive in. It also has a group of members charged with finding another site with enough room for current club membership and for future growth. The club would appreciate any information on land available for purchase or lease in the south of the state that would prove suitable for development as a range complex.

Only time will tell what Pontville can expect in terms of their shooting availability at the TC Simpson range. ●

Despite all the problems the club is facing, it wants members to know that it is still functioning and has not closed shop.



Taking down facilities at Pontville range.



Looking downrange.



Taking down the clubrooms.



3P Shoot at the Pontville club.

by Jennifer Martens



by Paul Peake

Interview with Olympic gold and silver medallist Russell Mark

Olympic shooter Russell Mark recently won Liberal Party preselection for the Victorian seat of Ballarat. Mark, who has had some controversial things to say about the Coalition's gun laws, agreed to an interview with the SSAA's head researcher Paul Peake.

PP: Russell, congratulations on your performance at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

RM: "Thanks very much."

PP: The fact that you've won Liberal Party preselection will raise some important questions for a lot of shooters. Your support for John Howard's gun laws has put you out of favour with a lot of people in the shooting fraternity. How do you think shooters will interpret your endorsement as a Liberal Party candidate?

RM: "Well, I'm not sure I'd agree that I'm out of favour with a lot of shooters. The Shooters Party has certainly had a go at me, but the fact is I've never even spoken to anyone from the Party. They've never contacted me. I've said right from the start that I support the ban on semi-automatic centrefire rifles, but the new laws are far from perfect. I'd like to see a review committee set up to look at the impact

of the changes. Clearly, some people have been disadvantaged."

PP: You've had some unflattering things to say about the shooting fraternity in the past. Back in 1997 you told *The Age* newspaper, and I quote, "People's attitudes are slowly changing towards our sport and I believe the recognition of the gap between the gun lobby and the genuine sport of clay target shooting is gradually increasing." Would you agree that a lot of shooters might see those sorts of comments as elitist?

RM: "I certainly hope that people don't see them as elitist. I think that after Port Arthur we all recognised that some people who claim to represent shooters actually do the sport a lot of harm. Unfortunately, all the media attention meant that a lot of people came to equate the gun lobby with a handful of people whose views don't really reflect what most shooters think."

PP: You've said that you support the Coalition's ban on centrefire semi-automatic rifles, but the fact is most of the firearms confiscated during the 'buy-back' were shotguns. Do you support John Howard's prohibition on semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns?

RM: "No I don't. I think a lot of people,



Russell Mark

especially farmers, were disadvantaged by the ban and I think there has to be a review and some room for change."

PP: How do you feel about the monopoly on semi-automatic shotguns that was given to the Australian Clay Target Association as part of the Coalition Government's gun laws? Do you think it was fair that ACTA members got to keep their shotguns while thousands of people from other associations who shoot similar disciplines were forced to surrender theirs?

RM: "I think that people who had

a genuine reason for keeping their semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns should've been able to do so."

PP: Russell, back in 1996 during a 'Four Corners' broadcast you said, and I quote, "I think it's only fair that you need to prove a right to own a gun...I think if you can't justify the reason for having a gun, then why own one?" What do you say to shooters who argue that leaving it up to governments to decide what constitutes a 'genuine reason' will inevitably lead to firearms being banned?

RM: "I believe there has to be some controls in place. For instance, I don't think that people who are mentally ill or who've got a violent criminal record should be able to get hold of a firearm, but I'm absolutely sure the Liberal Party doesn't have an agenda to ban guns and certainly wouldn't support it if it did."

PP: The Shooters Party in Victoria has said it's likely that you'll be placed last on its how-to-vote cards at the next Federal election. Would you agree that support from gun owners in Ballarat could be crucial to you getting over the line and if that's the case, can you understand how a lot of shooters might be sceptical about you joining the ranks of a party that has done so much to undermine their interests?

RM: "Well, I'd certainly like to have the support of shooters in Ballarat, but on the issue of the Shooters Party, you have to remember that these people don't represent everyone who shoots. In that respect the Party's name is a bit misleading. There are thousands of firearm owners who don't support the Shooters Party. As I said, the Shooters Party has never bothered to contact me to find out where I stand on the issues. As far as being a Liberal Party candidate, I've never backed away from my support for the ban on semi-automatic centrefire rifles, but at the same time I have always maintained that the ban on .22 semi-autos and shotguns needs to be reviewed."

PP: Russell, thanks for taking the time to speak to me. ●

Arming yourself

WITH



The following are reproductions of quotations that have been collected and placed on our web site at www.ssaa.org.au/quotes.html

Quickly identifying the source of any quotation you use is paramount and it is far better not to say anything than be found wanting when those you speak to demand a source. It is all about credibility.

- Quotes by Prime Minister John Howard

On banning skateboards -

"Well look, I don't like getting into the business of banning things. I'm not a banner. I'm an encourager and a persuader and an advocate."

PM John Howard (2/2/01) Doorstop Interview - Meewen - Victoria

On gun control -

"I don't have any simple solution and I'm not an expert on extracting small arms from anybody, let alone general circulation. So, I'll have to bow to the experts on that."

PM John Howard (30/10/00) Pacific Island Forum - Kiribati

Full Interview <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/2000/interview519.htm>

"The States have been magnificent in their efforts to achieve better gun laws. Their contribution to making our country safer has been - and I'm sure will continue to be - massive."

PM John Howard (21/7/96) - *Sunday Telegraph* - NSW

"I don't pretend that it is simply a matter of imposing a stricter regime regarding the possession of automatic or semi-automatic weapons, but that is an element of turning

around the culture in the country and that is the reason why the Government has taken the decision that it has taken." PM John Howard - Sale Rally (16/6/96)

"Now I don't pretend for a moment, ladies and gentlemen, that the decision that we have taken is going to guarantee that in the future there won't be other mass murders. I don't pretend that for a moment."

PM John Howard - Sale Rally (16/6/96)

"If the political process in Australia turns against me because of the decision that I have taken, I will accept that decision."

PM John Howard - Sale Rally (16/6/96)

"I also have a view about gun control that is a very strong one, I think you have to have some exemptions properly for rural people and for sporting organisations, but, beyond that, I think any legitimate moves, any bans on semi-automatic weapons and so forth are needed to keep the curse of proliferation of guns out of Australia." Opposition Leader John Howard MP - Laurie Oakes Channel 9 Interview (4/6/95)

SSAA 'National Grass Roots Campaign'

AS PART of the SSAA 'National Grass Roots Campaign', Gary Fleetwood, Executive Director of Special Projects, will be in Tasmania early in May this year. As well as attending Agfest, Gary intends to hold information meetings in both the Launceston and Hobart areas at that time.

Having just completed similar visits

to NT, SA, NSW, Qld and Vic, Gary is eager to meet some Tasmanian members. He is well versed to inform them of the latest developments from around the country including legislation, politics and current initiatives that assist to promote and defend our ability to private firearm ownership.

ASJ Letters

Hope for the future

After reading the article in the *ASJ* by Paul Peake entitled 'For-Employment' I felt the need to put pen to paper. It was good to finally read an article that was precisely accurate.

As a person working on the frontline with people contemplating suicide, I often get annoyed when I read articles that imply suicide will be prevented if access to means of suicide is restricted. This, as I've said in previous letters to the *ASJ* and others, is utter rubbish. People kill people and people who commit suicide kill themselves and its not because a gun, sturdy length of rope or high cliff and so on are available that people commit suicide. As your article said, people commit suicide when they are overwhelmed with a feeling of total hopelessness; this is very, very true.

From my experiences, I would lower the age spoken about in the article from 40-year-old men to 30-year-old men. As the article suggests, suicide is prevented by addressing the causal reasons for the developing behaviour. In 80 per cent of cases involving people developing suicidal ideation, the 'mental illness', as it's referred to, is not inherent (genetic) in origin but behavioral and often originating from social struggles.

Medication, although widely used, often has very little therapeutic value in enhancing the quality of life for these people or combating their illness. I believe that the medicos' Hippocratic oath is interpreted as 'save life at all costs' by most medicos. This means that if medication, institutionalisation, incarceration,

removing potential items that could be used to commit suicide from society, legislation, etc could help to any degree, then that justifies the action. How wrong. What about quality of life? What about self-esteem? What about addressing the core issues responsible for the development of the condition? Let's look at the greatest causal reason for hopelessness - lack of a positive future.

I cannot think of a better way to express this than in the following example.

After the recent Queensland election, the result of the election was announced like this on the television news, 'an overwhelming victory for Peter Beattie's Labor Government'. What's wrong with that statement? It ought to have said, 'The ALP, under Peter Beattie's leadership, were overwhelmingly elected by a large majority of Queenslanders'. The government is not his or ours, it's the people's.

The next thing on the news was footage of Premier Beattie commenting on the ALP victory. He said how he and his government would do this and that.

What's wrong with that? One, it's not his government; it's our government. Two, I never heard him say that the ALP, under his leadership, would work with Queenslanders, supporting their endeavours for the benefit of the state and its people. My point from these examples is that it appears the very core of thinking is wrong and we, as a nation, accept it. That needs to change first before anything else will.

Unemployment, underemployment and despondency leading to suicide will only

continue to increase in a country where our political leaders follow their own agendas and trade policy and Australian property for international loans and favours - all at the expense of the average Australian wanting a fair go. This applies to the majority in all age groups.

While we, the Australian people, continue to be complacent and allow governments to make major decisions for us without consultation, often decisions that in a very real sense affect our lives in a negative way, nothing will improve. The 'she'll be right mate, the government should do something' attitude is largely responsible for the industrial, social and economic mess we have in Australia. In our free democratic society, blame lies with each one of us for not uniting and making the effort to take positive stands collectively to protect the Australian primary, secondary and tertiary industry, social values and realistic opportunities available to Australians from all walks of life.

It is impossible to offer hope to someone when tangibly there is no hope to offer. Apart from teaching people to improve the way they think about themselves and manage their life situations, you've also got to offer them some tangible future direction and goal.

So, after looking at www.for-employment.net.au there might be hope the people will be able to make a difference. All I can say is good on 'em for having a go.

Bruce Dimmock, Mt Gravatt, Qld

Political correctness gone mad

It appears that the same bureaucrats that misdirected \$3 billion of road funding from the motorists' pockets have drawn up the latest handgun legislation. Firearm dealers are only permitted to display up to ten newly imported handguns as demonstration stock; they cannot be sold to law-abiding licensed firearm owners. Only one of each model of any firearm can be held. This stock must be owned and possessed by the dealer and destroyed by police or exported once it is no longer needed or if further demonstration stock is required.

All Federal Liberal/National party members passed this legislation.

This is political correctness gone mad.

I suspect this was a backroom deal made when the Democrats allowed the Federal Government to introduce the GST. The logical extension of this is the government telling the motor industry to crush its display vehicles every time a new model is released; display vehicles could never be sold.

However, the Federal Government continues to tighten the thumbscrews at every

opportunity. From road users to drinkers and smokers, all are being taxed to the hilt. Even blind Freddie can see that the GST has caused the economy to slow down. Liberal and National party backbenchers must be very nervous after Western Australia's massive Labor victory, regardless of Howard's public lack of concern.

John McLeish, Wodonga, Vic

[Editor's note: John, thankfully the regulations have now been improved.]

Crime rate tops world list

While reading *The Sunday Mail*, I was immediately interested in the attached article, 'Our Crime Rate Tops World List'.



I find it amusing that this article was so small and hidden away on page 19. The part that I find disturbing is the opening sentence, claiming that Australia has a higher crime rate than even the United States.

What's happened to our country? Why are these statistics so high? I feel that perhaps lenient punishment coupled with the fact that homeowners have virtually no means of self defence contribute greatly.

Yes, I have a rifle, and yes, it's locked up down in the shed. Heaven forbid that I should want to keep it in a concealed, accessible place in my house.

I am not a nut. I am not a loony. I have absolutely no desire or intention to shoot anyone. I do, however, have a strong desire to protect my family and the property that I have worked the better part of my life to obtain.

All of this is nothing new to firearm owners. Sometimes airing your opinion just makes you feel better, as I can't see the situation changing in a hurry. It burns me to think that in the eyes of the law, while no crime has been committed and no person has been injured, by not keeping my firearms stored in a safe I am a criminal.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that we should have a rifle for every room of the house and one for every member of the family, but I think common sense must come into the equation somewhere. It just seems we are not allowed to even have that any more...

Jim Trammell, address withheld

Poor depiction of shooters

I am writing in regards to an episode on 'Neighbours' on Network Ten Tuesday, February 27, 2001. In this episode, the character of Michelle finds a loaded firearm (air rifle) in her father's garage. Before handling the gun, Michelle tries a number of times to tell her parents what she found, but they are always too busy or arguing and she never gets the chance. After picking up the air rifle, she takes it into her tree house and, unaware that it is loaded, pretends to aim it. It then accidentally goes off. A look of shock comes over her face when she realises the gun was loaded.

The next scene shows Harold, the next-door neighbour, finding a dead bird that Michelle accidentally shot. This is where things get worse for all firearm owners.

As a bird watcher, Harold had been watching two birds nesting in his tree. The dead bird was one of the two birds he was watching and now the other bird is without its partner. Due to all of the anti-firearms publicity the general public receives from the media, I feel that this is another blind misrepresentation of all firearm owners.

I have written to Network Ten to voice my disgust at this representation of firearm owners and have suggested that they owe all firearm owners an official public apology. I will be boycotting all Network Ten productions until an official, public and genuine apology is made and I will be encouraging all other people I know, shooters or not, to do the same.

The networks need a wake-up call and must be made aware that they can't continue to discriminate against legal firearm owners without receiving retribution - in the way of boycotting their network. I can remember when the SSAA was behind a boycott of all Valvoline products because John Laws was doing the TV ads and he was carrying a handgun for personal protection but was speaking against all shooters.

Alan Sharp, Greensborough, Vic

Dealers - try being polite

At a time when shooting as a sport is in such a precarious situation, I find the attitudes of firearms dealers and shooting range attendants deeply disturbing. Although the majority of people I have met have been helpful and friendly, as a young man I have often experienced considerable condescension and even hostility from assistants in firearms shops and shooting ranges.

If shooting is made exclusive, which is one outcome of treating customers poorly, we will all suffer.

It seems to me that people who work in the industry must have more to lose than I. After all, if recreational shooting were banned tomorrow I could walk away and although I would be disappointed my life would not change drastically. In the case of firearms dealers, the financial losses would obviously be significant and their lives would be seriously altered.

After attempting to devise some kind of scientific hypothesis as to why people who had a lot to lose would deliberately hamper the growth and sustainability of their industry through something as frivolous as poor manners or snobbery, I gave up in frustration and wrote this letter. To the sizeable minority of those people that work at firearms stores or ranges who aren't friendly and helpful, I'd like to say: politeness costs nothing but rudeness can cost a lot; you are hurting yourselves more than your customers.

Andrew Scali, Sydney, NSW

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

Animal Matters

Father of Animal Liberation, Peter Singer, caused quite a stir when he released his article 'Heavy Petting' in which he questions why people find consensual sex with animals so repellent.

"You could say Singer's take on animal rights is: you can have sex with them, but don't eat them," wrote the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

For a closer look at Singer and his new take on 'loving your pet', see 'Singer stirs up a hornet's nest' in the March 31 edition of *The Age*.

Concerned about the kangaroo industry, NSW Animal Liberation recently sent out an e-mail saying "tonight and every night of the year, 4WDs continue to criss-cross the fragile soil of rangelands seeking the kill..."

After implying that the vehicles damage the rangelands, the e-mail goes on to say that the government "should be promoting a world-class wildlife experience through eco-tourism". The group questions whether the government has considered that this type of activity would attract large numbers of tourists and therefore contribute to Australia's wealth.

We wonder how these tourists would be transported across the "fragile soil of the rangelands" to see the kangaroos. Perhaps they would be flown over the countryside by the fairies living at the bottom of the garden.

Convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh will be executed on May 16. In an attempt to prevent McVeigh from taking "one more life", the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has requested that he be forced to eat a vegetarian 'last meal'. The request has been denied by Prison Warder Harley Lappin. (*The Australian* - 30/3/01)

Animal activists have threatened to cut down one tree for every bat killed by the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. The threat is in response to Melbourne Botanic Gardens director Philip Moors' plans to cull 1000 of the grey-headed flying foxes damaging rare trees and plants within the gardens.

Humane Society for Animal Welfare president Lawrence Pope said that the cull "constitutes an act of war as far as activists are concerned".

The bats were recommended for threatened species listing but were rejected by the state government.

Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens is experiencing similar problems, but there are no plans for a cull, as the problem is not as widespread. (*The Australian* 28/3/01)

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Victory at last

Amendments to the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956



The Hon
Christopher Ellison

Picture courtesy of AUSPIC

Representatives from the SSAA and the National Firearm Dealers and Traders Council met the Minister for Justice and Customs Senator, the Hon Christopher Ellison, in Canberra on March 28, 2001. The Minister briefed both parties on further amendments to the initial August 17, 2000 introduction of changes to regulations controlling the importation of sporting handguns. We have reproduced a letter from the Minister which outlines the changes that will once again allow commercial viability to those who trade in sporting handguns.

The SSAA and the NDTC have expended large amounts of money and time in pursuing changes to firearm-related legislation that had obvious flaws. Both organisations have lobbied governments at state and federal levels seeking to correct a situation that was financially crippling to most dealers. We acknowledge that our lobbying goals, albeit challenging, reflect the purpose for which both organisations exist. It is a major win and one that has refreshed the hearts of firearm owners across the country, who, for the last several years, have felt the misplaced wrath of politicians and the public alike.

Further Customs information can be found at:
www.customs.gov.au/

Senator the Hon. Christopher Ellison
Minister for Justice & Customs
Senator for Western Australia

Gary Fleetwood
Sporting Shooters Association of Australia
P O Box 762
KENT TOWN SA 5071

Dear Gary

I am writing to advise you of changes to handgun import controls, approved by Federal Cabinet this week.

The amendments to the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956 respond to legitimate concerns raised by sporting shooters and authorised gun dealers since the handgun import controls were first introduced in August 2000.

The current system

The August 2000 measures resulted in a requirement for imported handguns to be stored by the Australian Customs Service, pending sale to an authorised end-user. Under that arrangement dealers have been unable to hold handguns in stock for sale to other dealers or direct to end-users.

These measures were introduced at the request of the States and Territories and to address the problem that some legally imported handguns were being diverted to the criminal market.

In consultation with the States and Territories the Commonwealth Government has developed an improved process, which will address these concerns without compromising the original objective of the handgun import controls.

The new system

The revised regime will permit dealers to hold a number of handguns as stock. Authorised handgun dealers will be allowed to hold a number of newly imported handguns for sale within a "certified stock limit". The certified stock limit is determined by Customs and will generally be no more than 10. However, a condition of release of handguns from Customs will be that the importers may only dispose of them to an authorised end-user or to another Customs certified firearms dealer (if that disposal is within that dealer's certified stock limit).

Under these new measures there is also an ability for importers and licensed gun dealers, who fulfil a number of conditions, to apply to Customs for a higher certified stock limit (beyond the limit of 10). When setting stock limits, Customs will seek the advice of State and Territory Police. The police will report on such matters as the compliance by dealers under existing stock reporting requirements.

Other amendments to the Regulations will be implemented at the same time to address anomalies, which prevent importation for legitimate purposes or to supplement the regime. These include:

- exempting antique handguns from the requirement to be stored with Customs;
- extending the definition of Category H articles to treat handgun frames/receivers in the same fashion as complete handguns;
- permitting temporary firearms imports for a broader range of government-related purposes;
- permitting importers to sell to government agencies firearms initially imported temporarily for one of a number of official purposes, such as demonstration or testing; and
- permitting transshipment of firearms accessories, ammunition and components of ammunition to bring these into line with complete firearms transshipment regulations.

The new Regulations will come into force following gazettal, after signing by the Governor General, which I anticipate will occur in early to mid-April 2001. Customs will soon be conducting information seminars for industry and sporting shooters to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

I trust that this information will be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

Chris Ellison
Senator for Western Australia
28 March 2001



Keith Tidswell
Executive Director
Public Relations and
International Affairs

Marking Update March 2001

The United Nations Ad Hoc Committee for the Elaboration of A Convention Against Organized Crime, which had already completed the convention and two other protocols as part of their task, met in Vienna February 26 to March 3, 2001 to again attempt to thrash out the firearm protocol. The meeting had been unable to reach consensus in October 2000 because of entrenched positions that were seemingly dictated by the capitals of some delegates. A report on progress to that stage was sent to the UN General Assembly and a mandate sought for one final meeting to try and come up with an agreement on a firearm protocol.

Most western countries send people with a certain degree of flexibility, in that they know how far they can go in negotiations. Some countries require their delegates to take close instructions with little room to negotiate. The differences over words do not matter a great deal, providing the intended goal is reached.

The chairman had met with delegates and produced a compromise text for 'Article 9, Marking' because this was the greatest sticking point. He had pointed out at the start of the meeting that there needed to be greater flexibility from all parties if they were to complete their work.

It quickly became apparent that the hope of reaching an agreement was still not going to be an easy task and numerous side meetings by interested parties and consultations by the chairman and his assistants were held to try and break the deadlock.

The language for Article 9 had been through many changes and on the evening of March 1, Mexico, Switzerland, the European Commission and European Union (EU) representatives had also tried to hammer out an alternative to arrive at acceptable wording.

Their contribution read as follows: "States Parties shall require at the time of manufacture of each firearm a marking permitting ready identification by all States Parties of the country of manufacture and a unique numeric or alphanumeric marking.

"This notwithstanding, States Parties that at the time of the adoption of the protocol use symbols as part of the unique marking, may continue to use geometric figures, as long as these figures are simple, limited in number, commonly recognizable, easily recordable and co-located with the other elements of the unique marking."

Close to the end of the conference the wording of the chairman's new proposal UN Document A/AC.254/L.281 dated March 2, 2001 read:

"Article 9 Marking of Firearms

1. For the purpose of identifying, recording and tracing firearms:

(a) Require at the time of manufacture of each firearm, appropriate unique marking providing the country or place of manufacture, the name of the manufacturer and the serial number."

The Peoples Republic of China proposed the following wording at the 11th hour on March 2, 2001:

1. "For the purpose of identifying and tracing firearms, States Parties shall:

(a) Require, at the time of manufacture of each firearm, either unique marking providing the name of the manufacturer, the country or place of manufacture and the serial number or maintain any alternative, unique, user friendly marking with simple geometric symbols in combination with numeric and/or alphanumeric code, permitting ready identification by all States Parties of the country of manufacture."

The concern of the United States of America and the EU was that the wording for the alternative method did not require serial numbers to be applied but merely required "simple geometric symbols in combination with numeric and/or alphanumeric code..." A request from the EU to have the words "and the individual firearm", added after the wording of the Chinese proposal met with strong disagreement from the Chinese delegate.

At 8pm on the Friday evening the proceedings were closed and the meeting was informed that a report accurately presenting all the various points of view would be conveyed to the UN General Assembly for their final decisions or actions. The General Assembly is to consider this report in May or June 2001.

To sum up, the present situation allows one set of rules for some people and another set of rules for others, so we still await the deliberations of the UN General Assembly and then it is up to each country to effectively implement measures to control illegal trade in firearms. ●

Parting shots

The good:

As Labor's Federal Minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Environment, Barry Cohen spent years in a position where he could have done something to help reduce the damage feral animals wreak on Australia, but it wasn't until after he left that position that he realised he could have actually made a difference. He said in an interview with the ABC that, "I was in a position to do something, I did nothing through ignorance." Frustrated by missed opportunities, he began writing about ferals and found that even that wasn't enough. So, after witnessing the success John Wamsley and Earth Sanctuaries was having with native Australian species in 1991, Mr Cohen took every cent he had and began building Calga Springs Wildlife Sanctuary in NSW, where, after culling foxes and cats and building two-metre high protective fences, the presence of native animals has increased.

Mr Cohen says that governments are not tough enough when it comes to dealing with Australia's feral animals and that, "If we're going to get rid of foxes and cats, unfortunately we have to cull them, which means we actually kill them."

Through his sanctuary, Mr Cohen hopes to change people's attitudes towards feral animals. He admits that the answer is not hundreds of enclosed sanctuaries but rather applying pressure to the government to do something and that pressure needs to come from the average Australian citizen.

The bad:

While most of us spend the day rolling up our sleeves trying to make enough dollars to put food on the table, \$90,000-plus a year Greens Senator Bob Brown apparently spends his time thinking up inane motions for the Federal Senate to pass.

His latest is:

That the Senate notes the increased prevalence of handguns in Australia and calls on the government to immediately implement measures to reduce the number and tighten the conditions for ownership of handguns in Australia.

Yet again, our legislators appear to think it a good idea to pin more laws on the already law-abiding in an effort to change the behaviour of criminals.

In reality the motion has no teeth and is merely a limp-wristed attempt at posturing by the senator.

The Senate passed this motion without debate and without going to a formal vote, although Brown noted that the government opposed the motion. Good to know the few days the Senate actually sits are being used wisely.

The ugly:

Crimtrac not yet on track

In late March, the ABC's '7.30 Report' aired a story about the apparent loopholes in Queensland's firearm laws and, as an example, reported on the sale of 21 handguns by respected Sydney firearms dealer Ken McBroom to William Francis Watson, a licensed 'collector' in Tasmania.

Mr Watson sold the guns he purchased from Mr McBroom on the black market and one of them was later found at the scene of the shooting of a NSW police officer.

According to Commander Graeme Morgan from the NSW Police Service Mr McBroom "told the NSW police of every transaction that had taken place" and that he did so formally and therefore had met all his obligations as a dealer.

With access to Crimtrac, Australia's national policing database, records of the transaction should have been available to the Tasmanian police immediately, who then could have conducted their own checks on Mr Watson. However, the Tasmanian police stated that they had not received notice from the NSW Police Firearm Registry of the details concerning the sale of the handguns between Mr McBroom and Mr Watson.

When Crimtrac was initially implemented, in March of 1999, the then Minister for Justice Senator Amanda Vanstone said, "Crimtrac will be a mechanism that provides police with access to current information on persons, objects and events on a national basis" and includes details of registered firearms.

"Rapid access to such information is essential for police to serve the community in an effective manner."

And in 1999, Tasmanian Police Minister David Llewellyn MHA stated that Crimtrac will "be underpinned by a national approach to handling police information".

Even with the \$53 million spent on Crimtrac, we, the taxpayers, have obviously yet to see the real benefits of such a flirtation with 'policing information' technology.

