

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to
eliminate gun-related violence in the community
Written question on notice for the Sporting Shooters' Association of
Australia

1. The evidence the Sporting Shooters' Association gave to the committee emphasised the compliance of their members. The Australian Institute of Criminology's submission states firearms were stolen from an approved firearms safe in 58% of reported incidences, and a quarter of all gun owners were determined by police not to be storage compliant.¹ Does the Sporting Shooters' Association dispute these figures or have an explanation for them?

Taking into account the fact that 10% of non-compliant cases involved unlicensed and unregistered firearms, this demonstrates an actual non-compliance rate of 15% involving licensed and registered firearm owners. Of these reported statistics, the SSAA queries how many of these were actually charged with non-compliant storage, which is determined only by the opinion of the inspecting police officer at the time. The SSAA would like to see the figures on the subsequent charge rate against the reported non-compliance rate. Additionally, it is also important to understand the exact circumstances of the non-compliance; were for example, boxes of ammunition boxes accidentally left on top of the safe possibly recorded in the findings as significant non-compliance issues?

Evidence given at the public hearings also showed that some safes sold at large hardware stores did not comply with state regulations. The SSAA questions whether this was taken into account when recording non-compliance. Furthermore, the non-compliance rates from the police conducting storage checks during Operation Unification should also be considered to see if the results reflect the AIC's data.

The SSAA understands that the non-compliance rate involving licenced and registered firearm owners is incredibly low, and we would encourage further education over draconian regulation regarding storage requirements while remembering to never blame the victim of a crime. The SSAA has always educated our members about safe storage, with our AIC Crime and Violence Prevention award-winning Gun Safe Voucher program and ongoing initiatives assisting our members in ensuring they meet the storage requirements for their region. Firearm owners were eligible to claim up to \$100 in discounts off any safe purchases as part of our campaign, showing how the firearms industry is proactive in this area. We continue to inform our members on storage requirements through our Secure Your Gun, Secure Your Sport campaign.

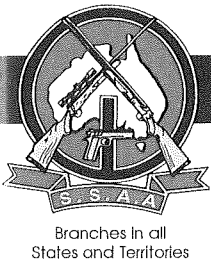
The SSAA also points to the Australian Crime Commission's evidence, with the 10,000 illegal handguns predominantly coming from nearly 7,500 deactivated firearms out of one jurisdiction under a legal loophole that was closed off in 2000. The SSAA swiftly brought this deactivation loophole to the attention of the Federal Government at the time, with the matter now rectified. Our letter regarding this is attached for your records.

We, like the AIC, understand there is a need for further compliance in regional areas, and encourage educational campaigns targeting farmers and the rural population to assist with this. Vehicle storage

1 Australian Institute of Criminology, *Submission 76*, p. 12.

compliance, in particular, is also an area where education is needed, as nearly 10% of thefts occurred from incorrect storage in vehicles.

Despite this it is reassuring to see there are such a small number of firearms stolen in Australia, with handguns the least likely as stated in the submissions and reiterated in the public hearings. It was also evident that theft is certainly not the fault of the sporting shooter.



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The Hon Margaret Reid
Senator for the Australian Capital Territory
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

30/3/2001

Amendments to the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) regulations 1956*.

Dear Mrs Reid,

On the 28th March 2001 members of the SSAA and the NDTA met with the Minister for Justice and Customs Senator the Hon Christopher Ellison in Canberra for a briefing on amendments to the 17th August 2000 *Customs (Prohibited Imports) regulations 1956*.

We wish to advise that as a result of that meeting we are satisfied that the legitimate concerns raised by the SSAA and the National Dealers and Traders Council in relation to the 17th August amendments have been addressed by this Minister.

We will now continue to lobby to achieve tightening of firearm legislation in both Queensland and New South Wales in respect to the matter that brought about the introduction of this federal legislation - deactivation of firearms. Once these state legislative changes have been achieved we shall be seeking further release from the Customs (Prohibited Imports) regulations.

We thank you for your support.

Gary Fleetwood
Executive Director
Special Projects

Robert Nioa
Director
National Dealers & Traders Council

sent 30/3/2001



Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA)

Hansard questions on notice – responses

Question from Senator Penny Wright, regarding what are the regulations regarding security of data storage, directed to SSAA Chief Executive Officer Tim Bannister.

The SSAA is aware that as an association we have director requirements to protect our stakeholders, the same as any company. To this end, the SSAA goes above and beyond our legal requirements to protect our membership list. All our member details are kept offline, which limits the automation of membership joining or renewal but protects our list from online manipulation. Even our online membership forms are offline, with information requiring manual integration daily. SSAA staff are not given access to the list, with only a very few directly responsible for its upkeep given restricted access.

SSAA National employs the latest in encryption software and IT developments to ensure our membership list and member details are protected. We proudly follow best practice, and through our research and discussions with police authorities we are confident that there are good governance requirements in place, in line with the Associations Act and individual's rights under the Privacy Act, for the protection of stakeholders.

Question from Senator Penny Wright, regarding the case in Western Australia in relation to the request of a member to access the membership list, mentioned by President Geoff Jones.

The SSAA's Western Australia division had a serious situation back in mid-2012 whereby under state law a member at any point can request to view membership lists. This situation came about after a member requested access to the membership list, to which the SSAA's immediate response was to protect personal information of member data. This information was collected in confidence and in line with the Privacy laws, therefore it came as an unwelcome surprise that such information could legally be viewed by other parties.

Lawyer's and the Western Australia Police advised that the member did in fact have rights to access the list, as shown in the following section of WA law:

Register of members of Association

6 (1) The Secretary, on behalf of the Association, must comply with section 27 of the Act by keeping and maintaining in an up to date condition a register of the members of the Association and their postal or residential addresses and, upon the request of a member of the Association, shall make the register available for the inspection of the member and the member may make a copy of or take an extract from the register but shall have no right to remove the register for that purpose.

The matter has since been raised in the Western Australian Parliament with a review currently underway. The SSAA understand that this has been previously tested in the courts with a sporting club president and secretary both fined for not allowing access to a local gymnastics club membership list in Western Australia. The SSAA is concerned that this may also be the case in other states, despite personal details protected under the Privacy Act.

Question from Senator Bridget McKenzie, in relation to the benefits of recreational hunting and the shooting sports to the economy.

An independent study by the University of Queensland study demonstrates that the benefits of recreational hunting to the economy is at least \$1 billion. The peer-reviewed scientific paper, 'Expenditure and Motivation of Australian Recreational Hunters', published in the CSIRO's Wildlife Research journal this year provides this independent assessment including the expenditure of Australian hunters on hunting activities.

The key findings of this report highlighted the average direct expenditure on hunting to be \$1835 per person per year and the average indirect expenditure to be \$2168. Combining these figures, the average total hunting expenditure per person per year was around \$4000.

The number of recreational hunters in Australia was calculated to be at least 200,000, but more likely 300,000. Using the conservative estimate and knowing that 80% of a large known segment of firearm licence holders identify themselves as hunters, the study shows that hunting and hunters contributes at least \$1 billion to the economy.

A Victorian Government study shows the contributions of hunters and hunting in Victoria alone to be in the range of \$400 million. The Victorian Government's 'Estimating the Economic Impact of Hunting in Victoria in 2013' report by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries breaks down hunting expenditure and shows hunter expenditure on game animals and pest animals creating a total expenditure of around \$417 million. The report also identified 42% of expenditure was spent on off-trip items (purchased prior to trip) and 58% on on-trip items (purchased while on trip), showing the flow of benefits to areas in which hunting occurs, which is most often in regional and farming areas.

Sporting shooters add another cost income and generate even more economic benefits on behalf of the firearms community. There are approximately 250,000 members of firearm-related associations across Australia, with 166,000 members of the SSAA. Members of associations pay an average membership fee of \$90 per person. If this is the case, it can be calculated that \$22.5 million is raised in membership fees. These fees are spent on the upkeep of ranges and facilities, with members visiting these ranges and facilities and in turn spending money in the area on travel, accommodation, supplies, and also firearms and ammunition. As mentioned, 80% of firearm owners identify themselves as hunters, which requires target shooting at ranges before participating in hunting activities, showing another area of economic contribution.

Taking all this into account, the SSAA conservatively estimates the contributions of hunting, pest control activities, farmers and the shooting sports to be between \$1.25b and \$1.5 billion per annum.

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1. There have been some negative perceptions presented by the media of the sport of shooting and the use of firearms more generally. Given your experience, could you comment on the scare mongering and smoke screen for banning shooting?

While we are critical of the at times inaccurate and exaggerated coverage by the media of the sport of shooting and recreational hunting, it is evident that they are fed what appears to be deliberate misinformation by those groups opposed to private firearm ownership, and in particular those whose very political ideology is at odd with this, such as the Australian Greens party.

SSAA produces *A Journalists Guide to Firearms and the Shooting Sports* to educate the media in an attempt to paint an accurate picture of shooting and hunting, and while this assists with the technicalities, we find we are continuously correcting negative perceptions pedalled by the Australian Greens. This Australian Greens-led Inquiry is an example of an attempt by the Greens to gloss over the positive economic, social and environmental benefits that shooting provides to our nation, and instead concentrate on the use of firearms, in particular self-loading handguns, by serious and organised crime operations, particularly in relation to drugs.

The SSAA will always be active in protecting our members and all shooters in the enjoyment of their chosen pastime.

The Inquiry's Chair, Senator Penny Wright, displayed surprise at the number of sporting shooters who made submissions and sought to appear before this Inquiry. This was because as an Australian Greens party-led Inquiry, there are those among us who believe this Inquiry is little more than a smokescreen to recommend the banning of handguns and to create many hurdles and restrictions that will make it almost impossible to own any kind of firearm.

At the hearings in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, the Committee was told by a variety of witnesses that it is not the law-abiding shooter who contributes to firearm violence. Our concerns as an association representing 166,000 members, is that the Greens have form in cherry picking facts and ignoring the evidence of industry and independent experts.

The Greens' history of deliberate misunderstanding or naivety is on the public record. Whether it's ignoring the advice of the previous government's asylum seeker expert panel lead by Defence Chief Angus Houston; the naïve and damaging attack on awarded corporate citizen Santos; or claiming that there are 250,000 legal 'hand machine guns' in Australian glove boxes. Border protection we believe is critical in stemming the illegal importation of firearms; however the lack of expertise demonstrated in this area by the Greens is quite remarkable, with one Senator actually believing the fictional border security television show *Sea Patrol* was a documentary on Australia's border protection activities.

In short we do not have faith in the terms of reference of this Inquiry nor the Green's subsequent analysis of the hearings. In fact, the chair's comments in the Adelaide Advertiser September 2 stating that most illegal guns originate from licenced shooters appears to show a predetermination in the outcomes of this inquiry. Therefore it should come as no surprise that, along with the Greens ideological policy to ban self-loading handguns, licenced law-abiding shooters have great concern regarding the recommendations of the Inquiry.

The SSAA along with other shooting organisations will always act to protect its members from spurious and draconian regulations, especially when they emanate from those who would prefer to shut our sport and recreation down. The ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community has more to do with the multi-billion dollar drug trade, the under-funding of our police and border agencies, and the reality as said by Victorian Detective Superintendent Peter De Santo that if a criminal wants a firearm, they will get one – banned or not.

Firearms expert Bob Schwarz has also given evidence that firearms violence makes up only 3% of violent acts. The question perhaps should be how do we reduce all violence in our society and not framework the Inquiry in Utopian elimination terms, nor solely concentrate on firearms.

Sports shooting and recreational hunting does not contribute to the criminal use of firearms but instead adds greatly to the economic, environmental and social welfare of our nation.

Sports shooting is fun, safe, teaches discipline, is non-discriminatory enjoyed by men, women, young and old, and those of all abilities. We trust that the future of our sport and the many benefits it brings the nation across economic, social and cultural levels is duly noted in this Inquiry.