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OPEN LETTER

Australian Crime Commission

Michael Fitzpatrick
GPO Box 2944
Canberra
ACT 2601

3 September 2015

Dear Mr Fitzpatrick,

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) is the premier sports shooting and recreational hunting body representing more than 170,000 licensed firearm owners.

SSAA National wishes to clarify several claims predominately made by the Australian Greens Party regarding stolen firearms from licensed owners, with the common criticism that licensed owners are the main source of supply to the illicit market through incidents of theft. The ACC is often quoted as the source of these claims, along with the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC).

SSAA National understands that during the Senate Inquiry into *'The ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community'*, the ACC put forward a submission citing the 2012 *National Illicit Firearms Assessment (NIFA)* as key evidence. The ACC's National Firearm Trace Database (NFTD) was also mentioned. In your submission, you stated that:

"The main methods of diverting firearms to the illicit market are theft, illegal importation and illicit domestic manufacture..."¹

And:

"Australia's firearm market is facilitated mostly by trade among criminal groups...these entities deals in stolen or lost, illegally diverted, owned or imported, modified and manufactured firearms, as well as grey market firearms."²

In regards to the AIC's National Firearms Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP), you stated that "based on data from the NFTMP, illegal importation only made up one per cent of total diversions."³

¹ Australian Crime Commission Submission 2014, *Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community*, Australian Crime Commission, Canberra, p. 4

² Australian Crime Commission Submission 2014, *Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community*, Australian Crime Commission, Canberra, p. 3

³ Australian Crime Commission Submission 2014, *Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community*. Australian Crime Commission. Canberra. p. 4

The Senate Inquiry report signed by the majority of Committee members found that:

“The hypothesis that illegal guns are mainly stolen from registered gun owners was not supported by the evidence presented to the Committee.”⁴

The Senate Inquiry majority report also acknowledged our nation’s porous borders and lack of policing and border patrol resources as having a real impact on the number of illegal firearms coming into our country and into the hands of criminals or organised crime syndicates.

We are writing to clarify the ACC’s position on claims by members of the Greens, such as outgoing Senator Penny Wright and New South Wales MP David Shoebridge, who often point to research by the ACC to paint theft from licensed firearm owners as the main source of supply to the illicit market. Senator Wright has time and time again claimed that:

“It is an inconvenient fact for gun advocates that the primary source of illicit guns is theft – as stated by the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Institute of Criminology – and many of those guns have been stolen from legal owners.”⁵

Mr. Shoebridge has stated, without clarification or context, that “just one per cent of illegal firearms come from illegal imports.”⁶

We are of the view that the ACC’s studies are used in a misleading attempt to suit the agenda of a political party. Mr. Shoebridge does not clarify that his above quote is based on reported incidents of firearm theft from licensed owners, with the result based on financial year data provided by Australian state and territory police services regarding reported stolen firearms. It is misleading to exclude this fact, as it is highly unlikely, if not improbable, that the criminal with an illegal or unregistered firearm would report any theft, hence of course the studies would account for a higher number of firearms stolen from licensed owners. We are also seeking clarification on the following question:

Does the ACC acknowledge that unregistered firearms not handed in before the registration and licensing process was implemented are a main contributor to the illicit market (previously referred to as black or grey market)?

We eagerly await your response, and trust you will receive this letter in the good faith it is intended.



Tim Bannister
SSAA National
CEO

⁴ Australia, Parliament 2015, *Ability of Australian Law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community Senate Report*, Canberra, p. 140

⁵ Australia, The Senate 2015, *Debates*, 18 August, p. 99

⁶ *Life Matters* 2015. radio program. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Svdnev. 6 August.