



Adelaide Office
PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061
Phone: 08 8272 7100 Fax: 08 8272 2945
www.ssaa.org.au

OPEN LETTER

Australian Institute of Criminology

Dr Rick Brown
GPO Box 2944
Canberra
ACT 2601

3 September 2015

Dear Dr Brown,

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 AIC is often quoted as the source of these claims, along with the Australian Crime Commission (ACC).

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 AIC put forward a submission citing its *Firearm thefts in Australia* reports as key evidence. We also understand that the AIC also pointed to the short-term National Firearms Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP), which looked at firearm theft data from 2004-05 to 2008-09, as a key source of evidence. It is understood that some jurisdictions did not provide data for particular collection years or did not provide the full complement of data requested for individual years.¹ The ACC's National Firearm Trace Database (NFTD) was also discussed.

In the Inquiry, the AIC representatives told the Committee that:

"In terms of illegal importation, we can only go on the analysis that we did on the firearm trace database. It certainly demonstrated that from that illegal importation was a fairly small contributor to handguns and the long-arms as well."²

And:

"The AIC itself advised that the study was based around reported firearm theft and therefore owners of unregistered or illegal firearms, or those who had failed to comply with the relevant storage requirements, were less likely to have reported their firearm stolen."³

¹ Australian Institute of Criminology Submission 2014, *Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 9

² Bricknell, S 2014, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2014, p. 46

³ Australian Institute of Criminology Submission 2014, *Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community*. Australian Institute of Criminology. Canberra. p. 9

Along with:

“Theft, failure to reconcile the interstate movement of firearms, and the importation of undeclared firearms and firearm parts are all key components of the illicit market.”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.”⁵

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 of organised crime syndicates.

We are writing to clarify the AIC’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 AIC 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.”⁶

Mr. Shoebridge had also stated that “just one percent of illegal firearms come from illegal imports.”⁷

We are of the view that the AIC’s studies are being 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 AIC acknowledge that unregistered firearms not handed in before the registration and licensing process was implemented is 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 Australian Institute of Criminology Submission 2014, *Inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 4

⁵ Australia, Parliament 2015, *Ability of Australian Law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community Senate Report*, Canberra, p. 140

⁶ Australia, The Senate 2015, *Debates*, 18 August, p. 99

⁷ *Life Matters* 2015. radio program. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Svdnev. 6 August.