



SPORTING SHOOTERS' ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA OFFICIAL RESPONSE
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United Nations Institute for Disarmament
Research - Exploring the Technical
Feasibility of Marking Small Calibre
Ammunition

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Introduction

The concept of introducing individual ammunition marking controls to assist with traceability in situations of criminal activity has been debated in the international arms community for upwards of a decade.

Boxed ammunition sold in Australia can typically be imported from any number of locations worldwide that operate under a set of unique legislation pertaining to the manufacturing and sale of ammunition. Producers often mark ammunition storage boxes with identifying information including lot numbers and specific calibre details. The individual cartridges can be marked with branding and calibre information as well, but this practice varies widely between manufacturers and regions of origin.

The following discussion examines points raised within the aforementioned paper and also looks ahead to the scenario for adoption in an Australian context to shed light on the feasibility of implementing ammunition marking in this country.

Licensing and industry

It can be assumed that the onus of funding equipment changes and processes for marking individual small calibre ammunition once legislated would fall on manufacturers. The comparison of the ammunition marking technologies made in this discussion paper identify it is likely alterations to programming and the procurement of new machinery would be required by most manufacturers to carry out any marking requirements.

The firearms and licensing system in each state or territory would then logically be responsible for maintaining records of ammunition markings and the corresponding purchasers through information provided by either retailers or customers or both. Australia's National Firearm Agreement introduced in 1996 and reviewed in 2017 is a commitment by the federal, state and territory governments to a minimum set of standards for firearm regulation. However, these jurisdictions maintain their own individual firearms laws, registry and licensing system. The weapons licensing applications and firearms licencing systems are regularly reported to be experiencing delays and in high demand, there are also ongoing issues with the accuracy and security of these registries.

The likely flow on affect in Australia's firearms industry from introducing this arduous process to ammunition manufacturing is impossible to measure and lacking in clear quantifiable benefits for law enforcement. There would need to be significant investment in the supply chain to support manufacturers, retailers and law enforcement in any addition to their processes in this way.

While not in the scope of this discussion paper, investing resources into the marking of ammunition processes research is short-sighted when considering the practicality of what is being investigated.

Reloading

A large number of law-abiding firearm owners in Australia and around the world participate in target shooting and recreational hunting using ammunition that they choose to manually handload. This practice, which is also known as reloading, allows people to produce their own firearm cartridges by assembling the individual components and tailor their ammunition to their specific firearm and shooting situation. Those set up for this process reuse the empty ammunition casings and can save significant amounts of money rather than purchasing mass-assembled, factory-loaded ammunition.

For this practice, empty cartridges can be used any number of times depending on the cartridge material, loads used and firearm. It is not unusual for brass cartridges to be used upwards of 50 to 60 times and be made and shared with other shooters.

This practice is widespread however, the discussion paper blatantly dismisses this sector of the law-abiding firearm owner community as being negligible. Introducing legislation of this type has the potential to negatively impact someone reloading by effectively outlawing the practice as it breaks the chain of traceability being sought after. It also has the potential to tie up law abiding firearm owners in the criminal tracing process if marked casings are on sold and used in a crime.

Firearm owners are some of the most regulated members of the community who comply with numerous levels of licensing and checks to own and maintain the ownership of firearms to participate in target shooting and recreational hunting. Introducing these measures would only result in exposing this segment of society to further checks and balances and taking the focus away from addressing the criminal element as the root cause of this issue.