

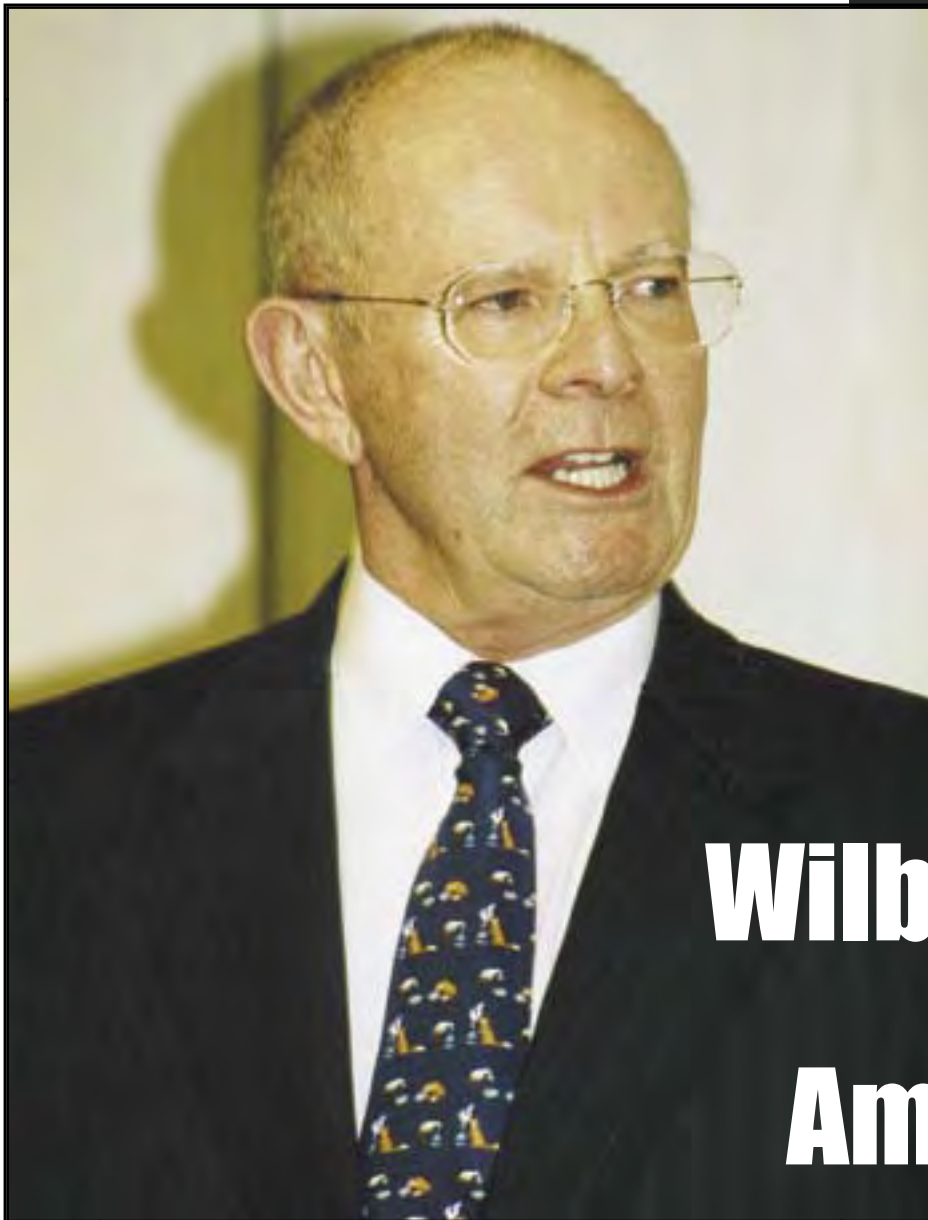
ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

**The Myth
of Uniform
National
Gun Laws**

**Gun Control
Australia
and the NSW
Game Bill**



**Wilbur Smith -
Shooters'
Ambassador**

May 2002 Vol. 4 Issue 3
Members-only insert to the Australian Shooter



In this issue

ASJ

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A word from the President

The debate over handguns has recently been reignited in the wake of several gang-related shootings in New South Wales. Predictably, the anti-gun movement has used the situation to reiterate its call for a complete ban on semi-automatic pistols. During a recent radio interview, the Coalition for Gun Control's Samantha Lee claimed that "what we've seen in relation to firearms violence is that most of the violence is perpetrated by licensed gun users." The problem with Lee's argument is that it flies in the face of published Australian Institute of Criminology figures, which show that legitimate shooters are responsible for less than ten per cent of gun-related homicides.

Speaking on ABC radio following several drive-by shootings in Sydney's western suburbs, anti-gun campaigner Roland Brown said in relation to tighter restrictions "the reality is most illegal handguns start their life as legal weapons and we can't forget that". Unfortunately, Brown's claim completely ignores the mounting anecdotal evidence that the trade in illegally smuggled handguns from South East Asia is growing steadily - fuelled in large part by illicit drug trafficking and the gang-related crime that accompanies it.

The anti-gun lobby's attempts to blame the criminal misuse

of firearms on legitimate gun-owners may ignore significant government research. Its call for more restrictions may conveniently overlook things like the now well-documented failure of Britain's handgun ban, but there's no reason to think that the powers-that-be will let the truth get in the way when it comes to drafting legislation. While it's generally acknowledged that the nub of the problem centres on Australia's burgeoning drug culture and the criminal underworld that supply it, shooters should not be complacent. They need to speak to their local politicians, both state and federal, and remind them of the facts before policymakers desperate for a few cheap political points decide that it might be a lot easier to penalise law-abiding gun owners than to try and tackle the real issues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Shelton". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bill Shelton
National President

Gun Control Australia and the NSW Game Bill

by Paul Peake

While the SSAA monitors the anti-gun lobby's activities closely, for the most part we try not to over-emphasize their ramblings. However, every so often something comes along that is so outrageous we feel compelled to bring it to the attention of members - if for no other reason than to highlight the mentality of those working to destroy the shooting sports.

No doubt many members would be aware of the recently mooted New South Wales Game Bill, which aims to give shooters a greater say in the management of feral species. The legislation has incensed the anti-hunting/anti-gun movement, which have reacted with a barrage of attacks in the media on both the Bill itself and the NSW Government. Amid all the whining, however, our old friends from Gun Control Australia have once again taken out the grand prize for hyperbole. The following statement was recently posted on the GCA web site as an open letter to NSW parliamentarians:

The Deplorable NSW 2001 Game Bill 20/02/2002

GCA Has Sent This Open Letter To All NSW Parliamentarians Regarding The Grovelling Of The NSW Government To The Gun Lobby.

Our special concern with this Bill is the extraordinary power it gives to one of the most poorly behaved segments of our community, gratuitous hunters. In short this Bill takes away the responsibility of the parliament for shooter misbehaviour and greatly reduces the accountability of parliamentarians to the public. As such it is a deplorably irresponsible piece of potential legislation. GCA spokesperson Mr Randy Marshall said, "The Bill's political supporters do not seem to realise that the hunting fraternity acknowledge that their real reason for killing with a gun is precisely that - they love killing with bullets. There is no honour or good public purpose in gratuitous hunting yet this Bill, with its creation of a shooter dominated Game Council, seeks to give them a degree of legitimacy that rivals the most educated and sensitive of animal welfare experts." Mr Marshall said, "Our experience over several decades is that shooting organisations pretend to be concerned with public safety as a diversion from their real aim which is to ensure as great an access to guns as possible. We point out that this Bill is likely to lead to an increase in the NSW gun inventory. The NSW gun problem is serious enough already and one wonders why more power is being placed into the hands of a segment of the community who have opposed every important gun law in Australia's history." ABS figures for 2000 show that almost half the gun homicides in Australia occur in NSW (26 out of 57).

Mr Marshall said, "Generally, gun groups have opposed restrictions on private use of military weapons, the post-Port Arthur National Agreement on Gun Laws and the 2001 improvements to safety training proposed by the Federal Government. Gun groups in Australia have a history of wanting to weaken proper gun controls and a desire to have as many guns as possible in the community. The results are that in 2000 no less than 45 Australians died in gun accidents. The Australian Institute of Criminology showed that in 1998-9 over 70 NSW people were hospitalised because of incompetent gun use." A responsible government or opposition would abandon the concept of the Game Council in favour of a special standing committee of the Animal Welfare Advisory Council which might contain representatives of no more than two of the most reputable shooting organisations. Surely it is irresponsible to give representation on a government body to gun hunting organisations which support trophy hunting - this is nothing to do with sport. Mr Marshall concluded that, "The grovelling to the gun lobby nature of this Bill reminds one that a decade ago the NSW Coalition Government under Premier Greiner introduced frightful legislation which was exactly what the gun lobby wanted. Within a few weeks seven people died in the Strathfield Mall gun massacre and soon stricter gun laws followed. The 2001 Game Bill is copycat grovelling by a subsequent government of a different colour."

If you thought Gun Control Australia's musings on firearms and firearm owners were confined to offensive slurs and hysterical overstatements, you'd better think again. Their web site sets out the organisation's blueprint for what could only be described as the eventual elimination of private firearms ownership:

Our Policy: The laws we need in place

Gun Regulation Authority

- In each jurisdiction
- To control guns and make gun laws
- A Federal authority, to take over within five years and establish uniform gun laws, based on criminologists/specialised lawyers and seconded senior police

Shooter's Licence

A rigorous training and testing program over a six month period - requiring a three part 1-1/2 hour written test set by police, shooters and community groups. License valid for three years only at cost of at least \$100, which will cover third party insurance & research development.

Special Hunting Licence

Only declared vermin may be hunted; provided an appropriate hunting course has been taken. Such a course to be conducted by the Gun Control Authority and selected hunters of long experience and high repute. Such a course will require at least three one-day trips in the field under supervision. A written examination which will cover hunting ethics, ethnology and hunting malpractices must be passed.

Guarantors

After passing the shooters licence, an applicant must gain support from two guarantors who are of known repute and not involved in shooting activities. Guarantors must re-support if licence is extended.

Permit to Purchase

Application to own a gun must give good justification. Self defence not acceptable. Hunting acceptable only with yearly written approval of accredited primary producer or Head Ranger of State parklands. No person shall own more than four long guns.

Semi-Auto Centrefire Rifles, Shotguns & Pump Action Shotguns

To be no longer imported and to be bought back by government over next five years.

Registration

All guns to be registered to a specific person and responsibility for any misuse to be on that person. All guns transfers to have Regulatory Authority approval.

Storage

1. All guns and ammunition to be stored separately in 5mm thick steel storage safes securely bolted to a wall or floor of house. All guns must be stored and transported with the gun lock operative.
2. Within 10 years all guns to be removed from urban homes and held at 48 hours' notice in selected police stations which are adapted for gun storage purposes. No guns to be kept in gun clubs. Bona fide primary producers outside of urban areas to maintain conditions set in 8.1

Age

No shooting licence to be issued below 18 years of age. No gun usage permissible under 17 years of age.

Handguns

Handguns of any nature can only be obtained for shooting at approved handgun ranges. Except for special permission granted by the Gun Regulatory Authority, a person will own a maximum of four handguns. A special handgun licence will be required for handgun ownership and will not be granted until the gun control authority has ensured that the applicant has justified reason, is of excellent repute and has passed a strict regime of training and testing over a period of not less than six months. The Gun Control Authority will have full responsibility for maintaining standards and records of handgun ownership.

Security Industry

The Gun Regulatory Authority will be responsible for developing a new set of credentialisation, training and testing procedures for all security guards. These will be cohesive and strict. All existing security services will be revoked and applicants will have to reapply to meet the new set of demands.

Collectors

A collector's licence will require that:

1. Only antique guns are collected (defined as manufactured prior to 1920).
2. The guns are disabled.
3. Yearly inspection and strong demands on storage facilities.
4. Members, on leaving bona fide collectors' groups, must give guns to the Gun Control Authority for sale.

Orders Against Gun Owner

If a Domestic Violence Order is taken out against a gun owner, the police must confiscate all guns immediately.

While it's tempting to dismiss Gun Control Australia as the lunatic fringe of the firearms debate, to do so would be a dangerous mistake. The group may represent a narrow, ill-liberal philosophy, but all too often it's the sort of dogma that enjoys the ear of policymakers casting about for cheap political points. The most effective countermeasure is for shooters to constantly lobby their local representatives, both state and federal, pointing out the facts and demanding that gun-owners receive a fair go.

You can check out Gun Control Australia's web site at www.guncontrol.org.au ●

Wilbur Smith and the WFSA Sport Shooting Ambassador Award

by Keith Tidswell

In the early 1990s, the SSAA joined a number of pro-firearm groups overseas that were concerned about the rise in bureaucratic activity directed against lawful gun ownership and formed the World Forum on the Future of Sports Shooting Activities (WSFA). What once had been taken for granted was suddenly coming under attack. What was once seen as good, suddenly became bad. Young men and women in Switzerland continued to be encouraged to shoot military rifles in competition on the weekends for the good of their character, but in England, at the same time, this activity was suddenly declared a social outrage. Gun registration, previously thrown out in New Zealand as a waste of time and money, suddenly came to the fore in Canada and was rammed through government there in what has turned out to be a costly failure.

It has become obvious that much anti-gun feeling has been thanks to the mainstream media. High-profile people have been encouraged by activists to speak out against guns, but all too few equally high-profile identities have spoken in favour of them. The World Forum has set out to acknowledge good proponents of legal gun ownership. The World Forum now hosts a wide variety of associations. There are manufacturing groups, national shooting bodies and groups representing a wide variety of shooting people across different countries.

The World Forum decided to recognise those who have portrayed recreational shooting and hunting in a positive light and created the WSFA Sport Shooting Ambassador Award. The first person chosen for this honor is the renowned author Wilbur Smith. There are few readers of modern novels who haven't heard of him. His adventure stories, set in Africa, have generated a rare degree of public following. There are a staggering 80 million of his books in print. The unusual thing about them is that they present a realistic and intelligent understanding of hunting, conservation and of the way things really are in nature.

The animals in the Smith novels are not described as having human qualities. The Smith approach involves sustainable use of animals and their products. It accepts and encourages sporting use, with managed hunting and solid research being called for to underpin decisions about management. Lions, buffalo, elephants and plains game, the romance of Africa, all lie in a diminishing frame of reference. Callous politics, immoral decision-making of governments and ignorance lead to loss of natural resources such as



Wilbur Smith left, receives the award from SSAA's Keith Tidswell.

water and forest. As the habitat diminishes, so do the animals.

In presenting the WFSA Sport Shooting Ambassador Award to Wilbur Smith at the Forum AGM held at the International Trade Fair for Hunting and Sporting Arms (IWA) in Germany, I said this:

I don't know what Mr Smith is going to say to us today, but I do know one thing: whatever he chooses to say is going to be understood by everyone here, because we are law-abiding gun owners, drawn from many nations. His subjects resonate with us. They go to our roots, to the heart of our connection with the land and beyond that to planet Earth itself. We will recognise the values that his words convey. And we hope that these words will be picked up and used by the media in countries on every continent. Wilbur Smith's writing supports and underscores our understanding of conservation, and, in passing, the right to enjoy responsible gun ownership in a legal environment. We of the Forum wish to promote exactly that.

Wilbur Smith has 28 published books. It's interesting to note that from the very beginning of his career the subject of his work involved that same drive to connect with the pulse of the earth that continues today to draw people into the natural world, fishing and hunting all over the globe. This is not a man who became famous and turned to hunting and fishing afterwards. This is a man who knew hunting and fishing and then became famous. And it shows in the integrity of his books, which is why we're all here today. We want to publicly recognise that integrity.

Wilbur Smith said he received the award with great satisfaction. He described the age-old call that we all answer when we set out to hunt and to fish. It goes back to those who first chipped a flint or cut wood to make an arrow.

The World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting has carefully selected its inaugural ambassador. Perhaps the words of Wilbur Smith himself should finish this article. There would be few gun owners who do not understand his sentiments:

I've developed a deep feeling for firearms from the time I was given my first .22 Long Rifle, a little pump action Winchester. It came down to me from my grandfather and then my father. I remember on the ranch up in Rhodesia, where I did most of my growing up, it was like an extension of my body. I carried it around with me and slept with it under my bed. Since then I have had a passion for firearms. ●



by Jeanine Baker - A SSAA member of many years, Jeanine has a PhD in Natural Resources and Agriculture. She is currently working on a post-doctorate position with CRC-Weeds on a project that examines the potential of genetically modified crops to escape and cause detriment to the environment. She is an active member of the Conservation and Pest Management Group and the Yellow-Footed Rock Wallaby Preservation Association.

The National Wild Dog Summit was held at the Civic and Convention Centre in Wodonga on February 22, 2002. In her opening address Dr Sharman Stone, Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment and Heritage, outlined the problem facing graziers by painting a vivid picture of wild dogs marauding across the rangelands and grazing country of Victoria and New South Wales. The farmers, who organised the summit, feel they are close to losing the battle against the wild dog and believe there is a need to find better solutions to the problem.

Dr Stone pointed out that the Bureau of Rural Sciences has estimated the economic losses to the rural industry at more than \$20 million per annum. In addition to these losses, there are severe social effects on many families in rural areas. There is also evidence that wild dogs kill endangered native animals, such as the long footed potoroo.

A well-organised series of presentations from academics highlighted the ecology and biology of the wild dog. Those involved at the coalface of control programs and on rural properties outlined what was currently happening in various Australian states. The conclusion of the summit was a series of recommendations that will be forwarded to the relevant authorities for consideration.

So, what is all the fuss about? Are wild dogs causing an unacceptable economic loss and threatening native animals? By

ignoring the wild dog problem, will the dingo become extinct? And what control programs would, or should, assist in minimising any risks caused by increasing wild dog numbers?

The argument as to whether the dingo is a native dog still rages. Some researchers support the notion that dingoes have evolved with Australian animals since *Homo sapiens* introduced the species and are therefore native (Corbett 1995). Certainly, the dingo is thought to have arrived in Australia from Asia about 5000 years ago and it has been implicated in the extinction of the thylacine from the Australian mainland (Low 1999). Others would argue that, despite 5000 years in Australia, the dingo was introduced by man and is therefore as much a feral invader as the feral cat. Yet the argument about the dingo being native versus feral may soon be nothing more than an academic hypothetical, because the dingo itself may be extinct in 100 years (Corbett 2002).

If farmers are facing wild dog problems how can the dingo be under threat of extinction? Simply, the dingo is currently in danger because of interbreeding with domestic dogs. Several morphological, behavioural and reproductive characteristics distinguish dingoes from domestic dog. For example, the dingo has one breeding cycle per annum with few pups. Domestic dogs have two breeding cycles and can have many pups. The hybrid mix of dingo and domestic dogs combines the fecundity of the domestic dog with the survivor

WILD DOGS, DINGOES AND GRAZIERS

skills of the dingo. Other differences used in classifying dingo, domestic and hybrid animals are skull morphometrics and molecular techniques based on diagnostic DNA differences (Wilton *et al.* 1999), but these are a little difficult to apply in the field when stock is being maimed or killed.

Whatever the final outcome of the debate of what constitutes a pure dingo, a feral dog or a hybrid, the situation was made starkly clear by Laurie Corbett at the Summit. Unless active management for the preservation of the dingo is introduced, then the dingo, as a species, will be extinct within 100 years, except for a few small enclaves on offshore islands or in very remote and isolated areas of mainland Australia. All other Australian wild dogs will be hybrids of dingoes and domestic dogs or domestic dogs gone wild. These 'new' wild dogs will probably be more fecund, larger and more aggressive than the dingo.

As wild dog numbers increase on both sides of the dog fence, another issue is becoming important. The positive association between the transmission of hydatid disease and wild dog numbers has been documented by David Jenkins (Grainger and Jenkins 1996, Jenkins 2002). Hydatid can occur in many animal species, including wombats, kangaroos and wallabies. The disease can also be transmitted to humans and, if untreated, forms huge hydatid cysts in various organs of the body. As wild dogs form breeding enclaves in national parks and more and more tourists want to get off the beaten track and experience the 'real Australia', hydatid disease becomes a public health issue, not only an issue for farmers.

The risk of disease transmission becomes more of a concern in light of damage caused by the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease in the United Kingdom. Currently, Australia does not have endemic rabies in canid species, but the potential for a national disaster exists should it appear. If rabies should find its way into Australia it will probably enter via the northern regions, as rabies is now believed to be present in Papua New Guinea. This means that one of the first primary hosts for transmission across the nation will be the wild dog.

Wild dogs are highly social animals in which pack members are in constant physical contact with each other, but in which inter-pack interactions are rare. I am not sure that it is any consolation that rabies transmission within wild dog packs would be rapid, but rare between packs just because of the social behaviour of wild dogs. Rabies is well known to alter the behaviour of infected animals and cause them to act aggressively and uncharacteristically. It is entirely possible that rabies would spread rapidly throughout the wild dog population into foxes and domestic dogs.

One of the issues that raised heated debate between conservationists and farmers was the use of the wild dog as a biological control agent. The classic example cited by those in favour of using the wild dog as a natural control of rabbit and kangaroo populations is the frequently cited use of 16 dingoes on Townshead Island (Central Queensland) to control a plague of 1700 goats in 1993. By 1997, only four goats remained and these were shot by the Defence Department. However, the dingoes will be deported before



photo courtesy of Peter Bird

they exterminate the native birds (Low 1999). In other words, the use of the dingo as a control agent was strictly managed for a specific case and in an island situation.

Another consideration is that the wild dog has a specialised diet. They are recorded to prefer rabbits, only switching to larger prey when rabbit populations are decimated through disease or environmental factors. Under such conditions sheep or cattle also become 'fair game'. Even the control of kangaroo populations by wild dogs relies on severe environmental conditions interacting with predation to keep kangaroo numbers down. At best, wild dog predation only slows down population increase once breeding conditions for prey species improve.

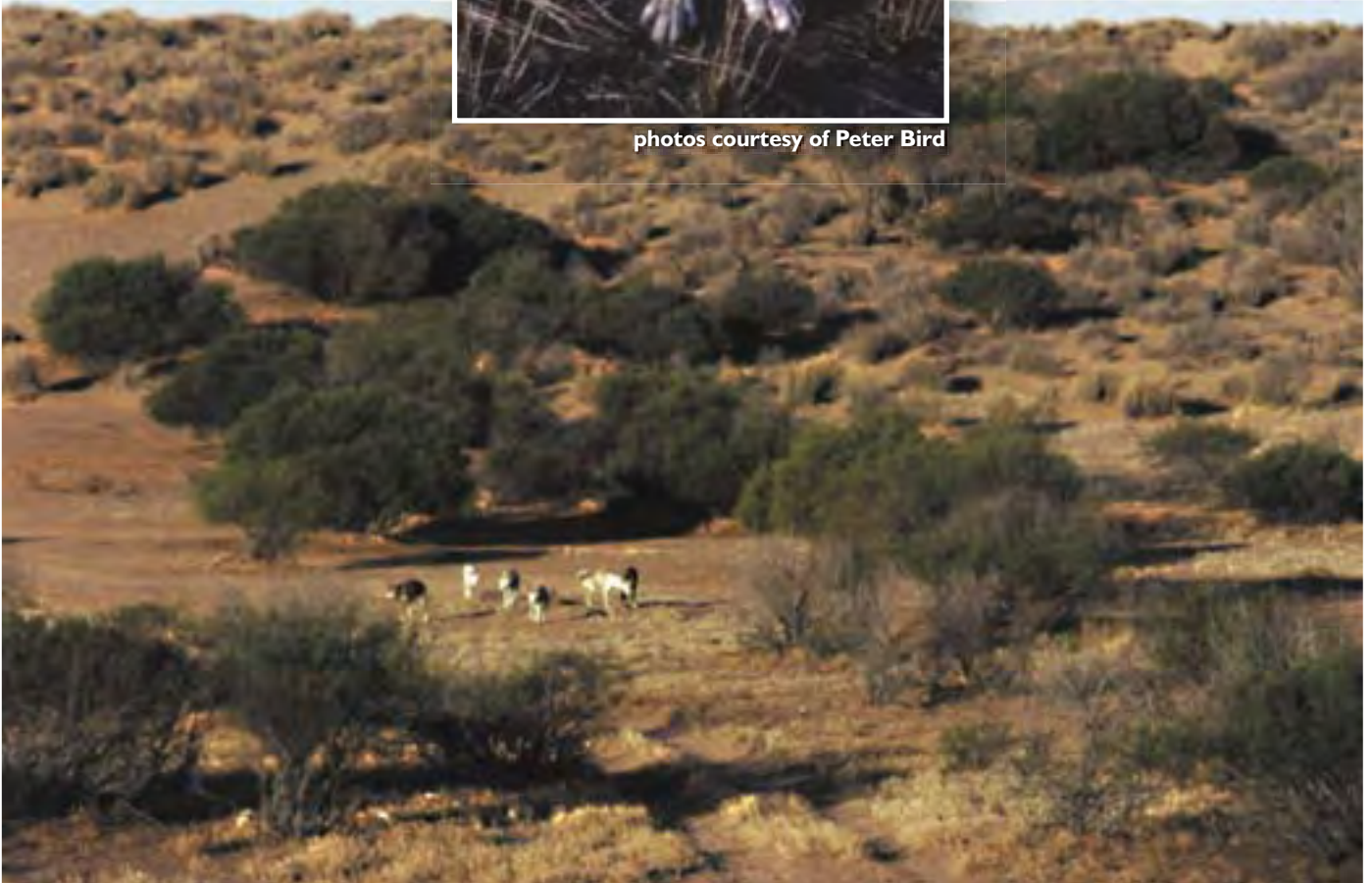
Wild dogs indirectly affect the numbers of other feral predators, such as foxes and cats. There is evidence fox numbers are kept low by the presence of wild dogs, but the effect on feral cats is less clear, with some data indicating no effect on cat populations at all (Allen 2002). However, if trapping, shooting, ground-baiting and

bounty payments continue, then fox and cat populations, along with wild dog populations, will also be reduced. One field trial quotes the proportion of sampled adult foxes taking bait to be an average of 79.5 per cent (Thomson and Algar 2000). Bait uptake at the levels recorded in these trials would result in effective reductions in fox populations exposed to toxic baits. The take-up of baits in a trial using wild dogs showed population reductions of between 66.3 to 83.5 per cent, according to the method of measuring populations used (Fleming *et al.* 1996). Cats are more reluctant to take baits, but will take them. On the other hand, if wild dogs do not affect cat numbers, then the idea that using wild dogs as a biological control agent against cats is an even worse solution.

When taken in isolation the actual numbers of stock losses to farmers are serious enough. Then think about one lady recounting how her 12-year-old daughter will no longer go out into the



photos courtesy of Peter Bird



WILD DOGS, DINGOES AND GRAZIERS

paddocks because she is terrified of finding another maimed lamb or sheep. Alan Newsome (CSIRO Sustainable Industries) made the following statements in a presentation at the 'Symposium on the Dingo' (2001):

Dingoes and sheep do not mix and that the presence of dingoes basically determines whether sheep or cattle are run throughout Australia.

Presumably the same comments can be extrapolated to the wild dog. A group representing graziers from the North East Graziers and the RLP Board quoted regional stock losses of 778 cattle killed and 500 maimed, with total estimated losses (including sheep, horses, etc) at 3100 during 2001. Obviously, it was more than sheep being affected by high numbers of wild dogs. This group presented data indicating that during the 1996 to 2000 time period, the increase in killings and maimings was about 50 per cent. They also said that only an estimated 30 per cent of actual losses are reported because many newborn calves or lambs went unreported or when stock were found it was too late to determine the actual cause of death.

Several farmers felt that overly restrictive gun legislation meant the only winners after the 1996 gun laws were the wild dogs. The majority felt that reserve managers need to take more responsibilities for dogs on their land. The community, particularly the urban community, should be made aware of the need to control wild dogs via public education and awareness programs. One point should be clearly made to groups who feel farmers have it out for the dingo: all graziers who spoke publicly made it clear they did not want to see the dingo disappear from the Australian landscape, but they do want effective control of their numbers.

Dr Stone stated, "We have moved on from a reliance on trapping, shooting, ground-baiting, bounty payments and even the construction of the world's longest dog-proof fence to using new techniques like livestock guarding dogs, poison ejecting devices and

toxic collars." But there are still many problems. Too many control methods are reactive, not proactive.

In south-eastern NSW, the use of 1080 is a problem on stations because of working dogs. Here the only options are trapping and shooting. However, these two methods have been made more difficult and future trappers are not being trained or recruited while part-time trappers are being phased out. Shooting is more difficult because graziers lack time to devote to protecting stock at night and work during the day. Also, there are few professional shooters willing to cull wild dogs because it is not profitable. This leaves control methods very light on.

The current debate over whether the use of 1080 should be restricted because of possible impacts to non-target species such as the quoll or reptile species was of major concern. Many felt that strategic aerial baiting of buffer zones or breeding areas was one of the most economical, non-intrusive and effective control methods available. While research continues as to how much of an impact 1080 baiting has on non-target species, there is evidence that quoll numbers increased where aerial baiting was instigated (Croft 2002), presumably because fox and wild dogs were no longer in competition with the quoll. This is despite Belcher's (1998) study, which indicated that quolls would take baits in the field. In Western Australia, a trial using 1080 in egg baits showed that goannas would take baits at a very low rate in summer, but not in winter (Twigg *et al.* 2001). Very few other non-target species took baits during this trial.

There are several studies yet to be published on the likelihood of bait uptake by non-target species. The indications are that while a few individual animals will take baits, the numbers may be lower than previously estimated. In the meantime, evidence shows that the presence of feral predators does have a negative impact on native predators like the quoll. How else does the western quoll continue to survive in areas where fox numbers are low (Low 1999)?



Wild dog control requires a strategic approach because prevention is better than cure. There is more than one method of control and programs should be integrated and consider potential impacts on other species. These strategic controls include fencing, buffer zones, baiting, shooting and trapping combinations. Control programs often need to be combined with other techniques in order to include rabbit, fox, cat control, so that they are effective across a range of interacting species. Aerial baiting with 1080 was used in the 1960s to good effect and graziers may be right in their calls that aerial baiting in key strategic areas should be re-introduced.

While Newsome (2001) felt that there was no easy compromise between the two imperatives to eradicate or conserve the dingo, it seems that the two are converging. The future of the pure dingo is already bleak because of hybridisation with domestic dogs. The answer is now becoming simple - active management has to be instigated as soon as possible. Whether this means the remaining pure dingoes be fenced in or areas where dogs (of any heritage) are protected are prescribed while co-ordinated control programs against wild dogs are undertaken elsewhere is a minor point because the outcome of the National Wild Dog Summit is plain. The scope and impact of wild dog activity on the environment, their economic and social impact on landholders, the threat to human health and safety posed by infection and the protection of pure dingo breeds from extinction has to be addressed now. I look forward to the Federal and state governments responding to the recommendations that emerged from the National Wild Dog Summit. ●

Recommendations passed at the National Wild Dog Summit, February 22, 2002.

1. Continued use of 1080 and the re-introduction of aerial baiting across wild dog breeding areas of all states.
2. That this Summit call on all state governments to enforce that all public land

managers be responsible, transparent and publicly accountable for the control of wild dogs and vermin that breed on that land.

3. This Summit request the formation of a Federal Ministerial Committee to ensure the consistency of wild dog programs between states and that the federal government share financial responsibility for wild dog control on national parks/public lands on a dollar-for-dollar basis with the states.
4. That the Wild Dog Summit requests the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council to improve the uniformity of state/territory government legislation relating to pest animal control and that this should particularly relate to the use of 1080 with a view to standardising policy and practices.
5. That dogs, wild or dingo crosses, used for experimental purposes not be released onto Crown land at the completion of studies.
6. Executive committee for the Summit co-ordinate with the relevant state bodies to produce a National Conservation Policy on the status of the threatened and pest species.

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The Myth of Uniform National Gun Laws

Despite the proclamation that the Federal Government implemented 'national' gun laws in 1996, the reality is that firearm owners are bound by the varying sets of rules and regulations set forth by their state or territory.

While people with a driver's licence can travel interstate without having to worry if their licence is valid once they cross state lines, those with a firearms licence cannot because of the variations in regulations.

Genuine Reason

In all states/territories, those seeking a firearms licence must demonstrate a 'genuine reason' for the possession and use of a firearm. While the purposes accepted as a 'genuine reason' are more or less the same in each jurisdiction, there are a few variances. For instance, throughout Australia, sport/target shooting, recreational hunting/vermin control, primary production, vertebrate pest animal control, business or employment and occupational requirements (relating to rural purposes and/or security guard or prison guard duty) are considered genuine reasons for owning a firearm. However, unlike in other states, South Australian firearm collectors need to have a separate collector's licence altogether. And in Victoria anyone wishing to collect firearms has to have been a "member of an organisation of firearms collectors approved by the Chief Commissioner" for at least six months.

The Northern Territory, New South Wales and Tasmania are the only jurisdictions where 'animal welfare' is accepted as a 'genuine reason' for owning a firearm.

Training Courses

Whether a training course is required to get a firearms licence or not, most law-abiding firearm owners pride themselves in their knowledge of safe firearm handling techniques. The SSAA strongly promotes

the use of training for those new to the shooting sports.

In the ACT, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania, new licensees are required to take a training course. Victorians must pass a written test in order to get a licence for a long arm and both a test and a practical course for a pistol licence. New licensees in Western Australia will soon be required to take a safety questionnaire before a licence is issued, which will be based on the current training system in New South Wales.

Waiting Periods

The notion of a waiting period in order to obtain a firearm is a topic that instigates debate. Many believe the waiting period is appropriate for new licensees but feel it is pointless for those who already own a firearm, while others feel the length of the waiting period is the problem.

A 28-day waiting period applies to all permits to acquire a firearm in Tasmania, the ACT, New South Wales and South Australia. In November 2001, the Liberal Government of South Australia introduced a bill to remove the 28-day waiting period for the acquisition of second and subsequent firearms, but the second reading debate was adjourned before the elections. South Australians are hopeful that the new Labor Government will not let the bill lapse, as there is support for it from within the Registry as well as the 1314 firearm fraternity.

In Queensland, the 28-day waiting period does not apply to existing licence holders who already have one firearm registered in the particular category and it may be waived for other applicants. In Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the 28-day waiting period applies for first-time applications only.

Club Participation

Throughout the country, firearm owners are required to take part in a certain number of firearm club activities a year. However, the

number varies from one area to the next.

For instance, in New South Wales, pistol club members must take part in club activities six times per year while rifle and shotgun shooters must have four club attendances a year. Hunting club members must participate at least two times per year and collectors must attend at least one meeting every year.

In the Northern Territory, all Category H class licence holders must attend 12 club activities per year and at least one per calendar month.

Moving Between States

One area in which most states/territories seem to agree is the temporary recognition of interstate licences. Except for Western Australia, firearm licences issued in other states/territories - for one 'genuine reason' or another - are recognised for a short period when moving to a new state. In the case of Category A and B firearms, licensees have three months in which to obtain a new licence. Licences for Category C, D or H firearms are valid only for seven days.

Western Australia does not automatically recognise firearm licences issued in other states. As opposed to merely abiding by the rules and regulations of the state/territory being visited, which is the case in other states, those entering Western Australia with a firearm must apply for a temporary permit.

Juniors

The age at which a junior may obtain a firearms licence varies between states/territories. In the ACT, New South Wales and Tasmania, in order to get a licence you must be at least 12 years old. However, since 1996, Tasmania shooters 18 years and younger have not been permitted to hunt. Queensland will issue a licence to juniors as young as 11.

Juniors as young as ten in South Australia can use a Category A firearm while under

supervision and all other categories when they are 14. However, they may not obtain a licence before 18 years, hence independent ownership or possession is denied until then.

Category C and D Firearms

Recently, the *Australian Shooter* received some raised eyebrows for publishing a photo of a gentleman carrying a semi-automatic shotgun on the cover of the January/February issue, because it was thought that we were promoting the use of an illegal firearm. The fact is, semi-automatic shotguns and rifles, which the SSAA refers to as self-loaders, are not illegal. The media would like you to believe they are but the truth is that these firearms, as opposed to Category A, B and H firearms, are restricted, not illegal. Most people are restricted from using self-loaders but there are a few exceptions.

Self-loaders are firearms that fire, extract, eject and reload only once for each pull and release of the trigger. A Category C firearm is described as a self-loading rimfire with a magazine capacity of ten or fewer and a shotgun or pump action shotgun with a magazine capacity of five or fewer. Category D firearms are self-loading centrefire rifles, self-loading shotguns and pump action shotguns with a magazine capacity of more than five rounds and rimfire rifles with a magazine capacity of more than ten rounds.

You may have noticed that the Jan/Feb cover was run in conjunction with John Robinson's story 'Reflections on the Golden Age of Guns' in the *ASJ*. In that article, John laments the loss of selfloaders and many other guns that are now restricted. He points out that many shooters these days will never know the joy of using a Browning BAR or a Ruger 10-22.

If you have been led to believe these guns are completely out of reach, then John's summation is correct; however, if you examine the restrictions, you may find you can actually experience the precision and practicality these firearms exhibit.

Restrictions

In 1996, the Federal Government recommended the restriction of Category C and D firearms. While the regulations on these types of firearms vary in each state or territory, the general idea was to limit their use to people with a special physical or occupational need, or members of, or affiliated with, a specific association.

Rules regarding the storage and transportation of these firearms are slightly more rigorous than those for other category firearms - except in Western Australia, where the rules for storage and transportation are the same across the board.

In most states, Category C firearms are restricted to those who require this type of firearm for occupational purposes, such as professional shooters, and, on a limited basis, to members of the Australian Clay Target Association (ACTA). In New South Wales, you must be a member of the ACTA to own a Category C firearm. South Australian clay target shooters must be members of SACTA or ACTA (SSAA membership will not do) and must have a medical certificate to back up their 'genuine reason'. Queenslanders face similar restrictions but SSAA membership will help open up the doors to this category of firearm.

Category D firearms are available to an even smaller group of people, such as those who will use them in an official capacity. In most areas, government officials, professional shooters and persons in a specific geographical location (ie, a licensee's property) fall into this select group.

Special restrictions also apply to those interested in merely collecting a Category C or D firearm. Basically, you must have proof that you are a bona fide collector and, in most states/territories, the firearm must be made inoperable and must not be sold or transferred without authority.

Collectors in New South Wales may collect Category C firearms but they must be made temporarily inoperable. Category D firearms may also be collected but must be made permanently inoperable.

Residents in the ACT cannot register a Category D firearm without the written authority of the Minister and both Category C and D firearms will only be permitted in a collection if they have been rendered permanently inoperable. (For a detailed explanation of the regulations in the ACT, visit:

ACT Legislation Registrar: <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/default.asp>)

Persons in New South Wales carrying out vertebrate pest control will be considered for a Category C firearm if they can prove that there is a special need for this type of gun. Category C licences may also be issued for participation in clay target competitions, but they must not be loaded at any one time with more than two rounds.

You must be a professional contract shooter, be employed or authorised by a government body, be a primary producer or fit one of the other requirements to be considered for a Category D licence in New South Wales.

Shooters in the Northern Territory are completely prohibited from using Category D firearms for private, sporting or recreational use but Category C firearms are permitted for use by certain sectors of the government

and, on a limited basis, for sporting groups. While the CLP was in control in the Northern Territory, it looked as though the SSAA was going to get permission to use 12 gauge pump action shotguns for official SSAA feral pig control operations. However, now that Labor is in power, the progress in that area is up in the air.

In Queensland, members of a club that takes part in national and international clay target shooting competitions may apply for a Category C licence, whereas in South Australian membership or affiliation with such a club does not constitute a 'genuine reason' for possession or use of a Category C or D firearm.

Persons in Victoria interested in obtaining a Category D (or E) must provide a complete set of fingerprints. Exemptions for Category C firearms extend to all clay target clubs approved by the Chief Commissioner.

Exemptions are made for Western Australians requiring a Category C shotgun for "the purpose of training for, and participating in, an approved national or international shooting discipline". Affiliation with the ACTA is not required to license a Category C firearm. Approval for a Category D firearm can only be given by an Assistant Commissioner or higher and it can only be granted to a state or Commonwealth department. You cannot collect Category D firearms or have private possession of this type of firearm in Western Australia.

Know the Law

If you fit one of the restrictions in your jurisdiction, it is possible to get a licence for a Category C, and possibly D, firearm. When doing so, it pays to know the law. Simply calling the police station may not be enough, as they have been known to provide only partially correct information. Whether this is out of ignorance or part of a police campaign can be debated.

It has been said that ignorance is bliss, but in this case, it can mean missed opportunities. Knowing the law may open up new avenues for you.

The SSAA will continue to promote the sensible use of all firearms within the law. We will also continue to review all categories of firearms and feature them within our magazines.

If you have concerns about the licensing process, please contact your state SSAA office for assistance or consult one of the following:

- SSAA National Licensing Guide
- <http://www.austlii.edu.au> (web site for downloading state legislation)
- Your state's/territory's firearms registry
- Your state's/territory's SSAA office ●

CareFlight Fundraiser

In order to raise money for the NRMA CareFlight helicopter service, SSAA stalwart Peter Whelan organised a charity dinner at the CareFlight headquarters on March 12 of this year. A number of SSAA members attended the fundraiser, which raised nearly \$1600 for the community service. The funds were bolstered by the energetic auction of an autographed print of Pro Hart's *Safer Australia*, thanks to the generosity of Mrs Margaret Shelton.

NRMA CareFlight is a not-for-profit company and a registered charity. It is classed as a public benevolent institution and was started in 1986 to provide a rapid-response medical/rescue service to Sydney's western suburbs and adjacent regions. Based at, but independent of, Westmead Hospital at the virtual geographic centre of Sydney, CareFlight is staffed 24 hours a day. Its role is to provide a teaching hospital standard of medicine to patients who require this level of care, irrespective of where they may be. This involves missions where CareFlight is requested to assist at rescue or accident sites. At such sites, CareFlight staff, in co-operation with other emergency personnel, stabilise the patients before transferring them to an appropriate hospital.

CareFlight's helicopter and medical services are provided to patients without cost, thanks to sponsorship from the NRMA and community supporters and funding from the NSW Government.



Some of the SSAA members who attended the fundraiser for the CareFlight helicopter service.



Duck Opener turns Political

Pre-duck season meeting in Canberra between the SSAA and the Federal Member for Indi (Vic), Ms Sophie Panopoulos, resulted in a visit to the swamps on opening day. Rod Drew from Field and Game (Australia) arranged for Sophie to meet with duck hunters from her electorate. With the assistance of Gary and Margaret Ashmead (land owners joining Lake Mokoan), Sophie met with hunters as well as helped deploy decoys before this year's opening. "I was glad to have had the opportunity to meet hunters face to face and hear their side of the sometimes emotional debate over duck hunting. I have come away more informed about the issue," Sophie told the SSAA. Local hunters found Sophie to be far more knowledgeable about duck hunting issues than they had expected and were pleased to see that she displayed a balanced view of the role that hunting plays in maintaining biodiversity.

Sophie also clearly understands the lunacy of the Victorian Government's current plans to drain Lake Mokoan in order to cover water rights being diverted down the Snowy River. This topic is especially sensitive among landowners neighbouring Lake Mokoan.

Members of both the SSAA and Field and Game express their thanks to a politician who was prepared to come and see for herself the tradition that is duck season opening.



Federal Member for Indi (Vic) Ms Sophie Panopoulos MP enjoying duck opening eve at Lake Mokoan in NE Victoria.

Rally for Your Rights



A crowd of about 3000 protesters gathered in Bendigo, Victoria on March 23 to rally for their rights of access to Victoria's forests. Victorian Labor Minister for Environment and Conservation, Sherryl Garbutt, announced on February 27 that the government was to adopt the recommendations of the Environment Conservation Council's (ECC) report in relation to the Box-Ironbark forests of Central Victoria.

The recommendations mean the creation of four new national parks, a network of five new state parks and additional new reserves spanning 120,000 hectares of forest. The rationale is that the new parks will 'save the Box Ironbark forests'. In reality, it means that traditional user groups will be locked out and, due to the already acute shortage of funding for park management, the new parks will be left to become infested with weeds and vermin.

Many interest groups turned out for the march, including apiarists, eucalyptus distillers, prospectors and miners, timber (saw log, fence post and firewood) workers, members of the Country Fire Authority, four-wheel drivers, trail bike riders and, thankfully, many shooters and hunters, who made up about 60 per cent of the protest.

The shooting sports organisations have a lot to offer other land user groups from their experience in the world of media management and government and bureaucratic regulation. We must be sure to assist our fellow bush users to protect themselves from the noisy extremist groups that are affecting our activities, lifestyle, culture and traditions.

Once again, the mainstream media downplayed the event, saying there were only 500 to 1000 protesters in attendance. News coverage was minimal. At the conclusion of the march many speakers addressed

the meeting, including Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria President, Rita Bentley; Bush User's Group President Robin Taylor; Timber Communities Australia's Kersten Gentle and Gamecon (Vic) Chairman David Sumbler. Representatives of the Liberal and National parties also addressed the meeting, as did Ms Garbutt's Parliamentary Secretary, Geoff Howard, who was clearly on a hiding to nothing as he attempted to justify the Labor Party's flawed 'environmentalist' stance on the Box-Ironbark issue.

Most recreational pursuits will be prevented in the new parks regime if the Labor Government presses ahead with the ECC's recommendations. User groups have repeatedly asked the government to provide scientific proof that their activities are having any negative effect on the environment, but no response has been received.

There has been considerable criticism of the management levels of current parks and it is questionable whether the state can afford adequate management. It was noted at the rally that the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) and Parks Victoria cannot even look after the parks they currently have, let alone establish any more. Nobody denies the need to protect Victoria's woodlands and forests from degradation, but locking them away as exclusive parks for no-one to use is not the way to do it.

The rally was viewed as a great success by all, but now the hard follow-up work needs to be done. One of the great benefits of the day was the way that all of the user groups were able to come together and present a united front to government. This augers well for the future, as more and more groups come to realise that 'united we stand, but divided we fall'.

Muzzleloading Championships

The 2002 SSAA Muzzleloading Championships were held over Easter at Batemans Bay in New South Wales. Gary Nairn, local Federal Member for Eden-Monaro, took time out from family commitments to open the competition on Good Friday. Impressed by the array of both modern and original firearms being used, Gary said, "It is pleasing to see relics of Australia's past still being used by people who obviously care for our history. The event is a credit to those who have travelled from all over Australia to take part in a competition that reflects what being a sporting shooter is all about. I see families participating in an obviously safe and enjoyable pastime."

Gary Nairn inspects a .58 cal Pattern 1853 Enfield owned by South Australian competitor Charles Toohey.



In the Media

2BL ABC Radio 702 6/4/2002

Last night, rugby league players in Sydney ran onto the field wearing blue armbands in memory of a police officer who died this week after being shot in a suburban car chase. It was around the same time figures were released from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics, which showed the number of armed robberies in the state has grown by more than a third in two years. Despite the national gun buy-back scheme five years ago and tough new gun laws introduced in New South Wales last year, experts say there are more illegal handguns in circulation.

Press Release Don Kilgour National Party Victoria 1/1/2002 on Victorian Firearm Registry under staffing.

“Something is drastically wrong when an organisation takes between eight and ten weeks to process new firearm licence applications and six to eight weeks to process a Permit to Acquire.”

Too much TV linked to aggression 30/3/2002

The Age **Victoria**

Watching more than one hour of television a day may make adolescents more aggressive in adulthood, a world-first investigation into the long-term effects of television viewing has found. The 17-year study tracked more than 700 North American children from adolescence to adulthood. Researchers from the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University found that adolescents who watched one hour or more of television each day were more likely in their late teens and early 20s to behave aggressively. This was particularly true for boys.

Roo boot protest 30/3/2002

The Sydney Morning Herald

Animal activists picketing soccer matches in Britain this long weekend - protesting about the use of kangaroo hide to make football boots - claim to be at the vanguard of an international campaign to protect the kangaroo. Organisers of an International Kangaroo Protection Coalition, formed in Australia six months ago, have said this is just an opening shot in a campaign which will include posters in Australia and public support by such figures as The Crocodile Hunter on TV, Steve Irwin.

Mass slaying puts spotlight on French gun laws 28/3/2002

PARIS, March 28 (Reuters) - France's gun laws came under scrutiny on Thursday after it emerged they may not have been correctly applied to the gunman who shot dead eight local councillors in one of France's worst massacres of recent times. With candidates applying for gun licences required to provide medical records, authorities were unable to explain how Durn managed to get a licence in 1997 despite a longstanding record of psychological problems and treatment as a chronic depressive.

It was also unclear why his local Hauts-de-Seine prefecture did not ask him to give back his guns in 2000, as they are required to do, when he did not renew his licence.

Michigan Gun Permits on Rise, Violence on Decline 21/3/2002

From Join Together Online

Since Michigan relaxed its concealed-carry law on July 1, 2001, the state has seen a jump in gun-permit applications, but a decline in gun violence, the Detroit News reported March 21. With the new law, applicants no longer have to demonstrate a need for carrying a concealed weapon. Instead, anyone 21 or older with no felony convictions or history of mental illness can obtain a permit. In the months since the new law went into effect, concealed weapons permits rose 39 percent statewide, from 58,280 to 81,033. According to law-enforcement officials, the increase in the number of people carrying concealed weapons has not led to a rise in gun violence, mishaps, or vigilante justice. “That’s really the surprise,” said Wayne County Sheriff Robert Ficano. “There are no altercations or incidents I’ve seen that are at all attributable to the law change. We thought there might be some.” A recent poll of Michiganders shows that 58 percent support the law, while 38 percent are against it.

Boston Drops Gun Industry Lawsuit 12/3/2002

The Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) - The city of Boston, citing financial concerns and improved weapon safety measures, dropped its lawsuit against the gun industry Wednesday. The city sued gun manufacturers, distributors and trade

groups in June 1999, alleging they were responsible for gun violence.

The suit sought to recover the costs of gun-related violence. Sixteen similar suits are pending involving 25 other cities. Boston's case was expected to be the first to go to trial, in September. Mayor Thomas M. Menino said the suit was withdrawn after both sides agreed to a resolution that calls for the industry to devote more resources to combating gun violence in Boston. He also said going to trial was too expensive.

The Washington Times 12/3/2002

PETA officials collide with deer

There's plenty of laughter and a little sadness in the hunting community over an incident involving a deer that collided with an automobile driven by two animal rights campaigners who belong to the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. The folks who worship at the altar of animals now want to sue a New Jersey game department over the incident, claiming it's the state's fault that it happened.

Herald Sun **Victoria** 11/3/02

Police gun and radio found

Police have recovered a Glock pistol and police radio stolen from Melbourne Airport on the eve of CHOGM. The hunt for the missing items began when a briefcase was allegedly stolen when it was mistakenly off-loaded onto a public baggage carousel by Qantas baggage handlers on February 25.

The Times **UK** 11/3/2002

London poaches top detectives to combat gun crime

Scotland Yard is trying to poach murder squad detectives from other forces as violent crime rockets on London streets. Last year teams targeting 'black on black' shootings investigated 21 murders and 135 shooting incidents. In the first seven weeks of this year there were another five murders, two attempted murders and 14 other shootings.

West Australian 9/3/2002

Police recover gun snatched by thieves

Police have recovered a pistol, ammunition and police identification stolen from an unmarked police car on Monday, but are still looking for a grey Toshiba laptop computer that was taken at the same time.