

ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

**Victorian
Duck
season
2004**

NT on Crocodile Hunting



National animal welfare bill

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In this issue

ASJ

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National animal welfare bill



by Paul Peake
SSAA Head Researcher

Most shooters would be aware that the Australian Democrats are no friends of gun owners. A fact clearly spelt out in the Party's 'Law and Justice' policy platform back in 1998:

"The Democrats do not believe that Australia's current gun laws go nearly far enough. We are still strongly committed to handing the power over gun control laws to the Commonwealth via a referendum of the people of Australia and we would like to see all firearms in houses in urban areas banned."

It appears that little has changed and that gun laws are not the only thing the Democrats would like to see handed over to Canberra. Disgraced Australian Democrats leader Andrew Bartlett recently tabled a Bill in the Senate designed to introduce a National Animal Welfare Act which would effectively override a good deal of state and territory legislation. Dot-point (ii) under Section (3) 'Purposes of Act' makes it very clear what the statute is intended to do:

"i prohibit the killing and capture of wild animals for the purpose of entertainment or sport;"

The Bill proposes the establishment of a National Animal Welfare Authority comprising representatives from the scientific community and animal liberation groups among others. Suffice to say that shooters are not mentioned. The Authority would have the power to decide what species could be hunted (if at all), where, when and by

whom. The Bill also proposes that officers acting on behalf of the Authority should be given the power to stop and search without a warrant and seize equipment (including vehicles) whether they have proof that an offence has been committed or not.

Under the proposals it would be entirely possible for a person to be innocently crossing Crown land in their four-wheel-drive with their old .22 on the back seat and to suddenly find themselves stopped by the animal welfare police who promptly seize the vehicle and their rifle without the owner ever having fired a shot. More troubling is the provision that would allow the chairperson of the Authority to order that the equipment be forfeited to the state if an inspector believes it is necessary, in order:

"to prevent it from being used in committing, or becoming the subject of, an animal welfare offence."

While the Bill appears to have little backing at this stage, there is a federal election in the wind and we all know how politicians like to horse trade when their seats on the gravy train are up for review.

The SSAA is monitoring the situation closely and we will keep members informed as things develop. In the meantime, it wouldn't hurt to contact your local Federal MP and let them know you are aware of the legislation and would be very unhappy if they were to support it. ●

WE WANT YOUR GUNS

Don't hand in or sell off your special firearms to just anyone. Help preserve Australia's firearms heritage and donate them to the SSAA National Firearms Museum for all firearm enthusiasts to see. Contact the SSAA National Secretary Roy Smith on 02 9833 9444.



Review and Critique of Ms G Davis's Thesis:

“Firearms - a global problem from an Australian perspective”

by Samara McPhedran
B A (Hons I Psychology) University of Sydney

The stated goal of Gayle Davis's thesis *Firearms: a global problem from an Australian perspective* was to examine the viability of, and the need for, reducing access to firearms in Australia via increased gun control measures. It was claimed that decreased firearm numbers and access restrictions would lead to corresponding decreases in suicide, homicide and violence. Gun control was treated as a public health issue and firearm use was conceptualised as a 'global problem'.

The thesis had the potential to explore extremely important topics such as firearm misuse, suicide and violence in society, sadly, the thesis was poorly researched with many substantial flaws. The opening sentence asserted "...the issue of gun control does not easily lend itself to the application of scientific method". This statement demonstrated the author's unwillingness to allow any objectivity to enter the debate. Sound experimental methodology can be applied to almost any situation and there is no reason for it not to be applied to the gun-control debate.

Despite rejecting scientific method, Ms Davis's thesis relies on research that supported her point of view. Contradictory research (of which a substantial amount exists) was overlooked, misinterpreted or dismissed as 'unsound'. A valid, scholarly undertaking should be based on careful review of all relevant material, but the thesis failed to carry this out. This negated any claim that a considered and serious account of the topic at hand had been given. The thesis is best regarded as little more than an 'opinion piece', written without due consideration of all the facts at hand.

Anti-firearm arguments were frequently based on newspaper articles, which were treated as serious reference material. This diminished the credibility of the thesis. In terms of other research cited, critical examination of the original reports reveals many misunderstandings and misinterpretations. A great deal of apparently 'objective' support for highly restrictive gun control arose from taking statements out of context. While this may not have been a deliberate ploy, it was an example of poor scholarship and inadequate knowledge of the issues at hand.

The thesis exhibited numerous logical errors and flaws in reasoning. Anti-firearm claims were based heavily upon 'argument *ad hominem*' - building one's own argument by attacking *proponents*

of opposing points of view, rather than the opposing *arguments*. For example, various Australian 'pro-gun activists' were described as "offensive" and those who do not support increased legislative restrictions or who own firearms, were characterised as poorly educated and "lower class".

A similar flaw was the 'appeal to authority'. The proponents of favourable views were described as credible and believable experts on the subject, but their claims were not evaluated. For example, arguments by pro-control activists were described as "incisive" or said to be published in "highly reputable" journals. No critical evaluation of the actual arguments, or factual supporting evidence, was given.

While 'argument *ad hominem*' and the 'appeal to authority' are tools for influencing people's emotions, they are not an acceptable or credible means of establishing legitimate support for the topic at hand. Hence, gun control arguments formulated using such methods are invalid.

The thesis was largely concerned with establishing that most firearm deaths are suicides and firearm control can reduce suicide. However, the complex factors contributing to suicide were dramatically oversimplified and the assertion that firearm control will lower suicide rates was based upon misunderstanding. Once again, despite Ms Davis's rejection of scientific method, her claims about the 'suicide prevention' angle of gun control were based upon numbers.

It was acknowledged that in Australia, during the period 1980 -1995, firearms accounted for 0.5 per cent of the total number of deaths (from all causes). Suicides represented 78 per cent of this 0.5 per cent. This means that firearm-related suicide accounted for 0.39 per cent of all deaths. However, although suicides may represent a large percentage of firearms-related deaths, in terms of *suicides overall*, about 75 per cent of suicides did *not* involve firearms. The author presented these figures briefly, obscured them with unrelated data and cast firearm-related suicide as a major public health issue. Yet it was claimed that of methods used for suicide, "...firearms run second (18 per cent) to hanging, strangulation or suffocation (24.6 per cent)...gassing (20.8 per cent), poisoning (19.8 per cent), and other...(16.8 per cent)". From these percentages, firearms were in

"...it has been shown that following much touted Canadian law reform in the late 1970s, a decrease in firearm suicides was matched by a corresponding increase in 'jumping' suicides."

fact the fourth most common suicide method. It would thus be far more appropriate to focus on *suicide overall* as a public health issue, rather than concentrate on firearms.

Correlating males, suicide and firearms attempted to strengthen suggested links between males, firearms and firearm misuse. However, what was never clarified was that premature death rates for males are higher, overall, than female rates - regardless of firearm use or suicide. It is correct that males are more likely to actually kill themselves than females, but females are the most common suicide 'attempters'. The distinction between suicide attempts and actual suicides, unpleasant though it may be to discuss, is an important point, but was dismissed by Ms Davis. The distinction is crucial because it highlights the importance of *specific* psychological factors in suicide.

The assertion that firearms are generally lethal if used in a suicide implied that if firearms were not available, a person would be less likely to kill themselves. This ignored the probability that lethal means are used *because* they are lethal. It was claimed by Ms Davis that theories of 'substitution' (of one suicide method for another) are anti-gun control "rhetoric". However, it has been shown that following much touted Canadian law reform in the late 1970s, a *decrease* in firearm suicides was matched by a corresponding *increase* in 'jumping' suicides. Similar findings have emerged from recent Australian studies.

Another misunderstanding was with the percentage of people likely to develop mental illness. The cited figure was that 15-20 per cent of the general population would develop a mental illness at some point. This estimate is well-supported by research. The problem lies in an apparent ignorance of concepts of 'subdivisions' within the general population and the statistical ramifications of establishing *specific* as opposed to *general* population groupings. An example makes this clearer. Let us say that one per cent of the general population will develop schizophrenia in the course of their lifetime. However, let us imagine that the children of schizophrenics are at a 15 per cent risk of developing the illness. In taking a subset ('children of schizophrenics') out of the general population, the statistical estimates change.

Although the estimate that 15-20 per cent of the general population

will develop a mental illness is not problematic, to then assume that 15-20 per cent of firearm owners/users (a subset of the general population) will develop a mental illness is inappropriate - no figures exist to support this assertion and it is therefore an unsubstantiated opinion. Also, there are many different types of mental illness, with very few being associated with suicide or violence. The author failed to recognise that mental illness does not invariably lead to suicide or violence. Nor was it acknowledged that there exist different types of mental illness, many of which are not generally associated with suicide or violence. These concepts should play an important role in any argument pertaining to mental illness and potential suicide (firearm-related or otherwise), but once again the author negated any possible merit of the thesis by dramatically oversimplifying the situation.

The thesis briefly mentioned that economic and social factors contributed to suicide (more realistically, they contribute to the development of conditions that increase the risk of suicide). However, the thesis did not acknowledge the importance of placing suicides in their wider context. It is well-established that there exist strong inter-relationships between suicide, unemployment, economic hardship and lack of healthcare facilities. This complex network of relationships was hinted at; the author suggested that rural areas may benefit from better mental health services. Rather than casting firearms as the primary 'causal' factor in rural suicide, a consideration of suicide (firearm-related or otherwise) with reference to the wider social and economic issues facing Australia's rural communities may have enabled the thesis to provide a genuine contribution to the public health sphere.

Misleading and misinterpreted figures were used to support claims that firearm numbers and firearm misuse in Australia continue to increase. The thesis used (almost exclusively) frequency or percentage data. Both frequencies and percentages can be easily distorted. Frequencies can be made to seem more impressive than they are by omission of data such as total population and percentages can be misrepresented by neglecting the details regarding calculation.

It may sound impressive to say "...567 firearms injuries cases were admitted to hospital...", but this figure was not given with

Letters

A policeman's respect

I have been a member of the SSAA for some years now and look forward to when the monthly magazine arrives in the mail. I have been shooting for about 15 years, but still consider myself a novice when I read the regular specialist columns. The current magazine layout, by the way, is outstanding.

I joined the NSW Police some years ago. Work commitments aside, I still attempted to maintain an active interest in the shooting sports. Along with the rest of the shooting fraternity, I watched the coverage of the Port Arthur massacre on television and the comments made regarding the need for private ownership of firearms.

The gun buy-back was announced and I watched many a family heirloom and old rabbit gun being handed over the police inquiry counter to be sent for destruction. It was heartbreaking to see large parts of Australian history being discarded because people who had been shooters all their lives could no longer comply with the amended reasons for having a licence or firearm.

I'm sure there is a need to protect the public from the misuse of firearms, and the buy-back seemed well-intentioned. I felt safer myself, knowing there may be a reduced chance of facing a loaded gun when I was called to attend a domestic dispute or other such job. But as discussed so many times in this forum, I only ever saw honest, law-abiding individuals come into the police station to hand in their firearms. It's a bit like having good locks on your windows at home. They only keep out the honest people.

I, like many other police, enjoy the benefits of owning a firearm and being involved in firearm-related activities, and respect the rights of the average citizen to do the same. I enjoy a shoot at the local SSAA range, but often have to withhold details of my occupation after overhearing some very negative comments regarding police and gun ownership. I can understand where this negative feeling comes from, but this sort of talk does nothing to improve the status of our sport. As Ted Mitchell states (Letters, AS September 2003) "we as ethical hunters must stick together...must recruit new members to our chosen sport"

We can't change the system we live under and have to make the most of it. However, we can try to explain to anyone who is interested in shooting how the difficult licencing process can be tackled, step by step, and we can offer help regarding how to purchase a firearm. The more we work together to promote our sport and gain new members, the stronger and better off we will all be.

Just as a side issue, I recently came across a small firearms safety booklet which appears to have been printed in the 60s by the government of the day. There is an introduction inside the front cover which I feel is worth revisiting: "The ownership of a firearm and the skill to properly use it are part of our Australian heritage. The desire to shoot a gun is one of the strongest instincts of a man's nature."

Further on in the booklet, "...Guns are tools which may be used to build healthy minds and bodies and to develop self-discipline, initiative and team spirit in order to mould better sportsmen and better citizens."

Maybe I was born 30 years or so too late.

Murray Thornthwaite, NSW

reference to total numbers of injury-related hospital admissions (which would make it appear far less substantial). Another statement was that (in a 12-month period) "...1441 firearms were seized in 21,394 domestic violence incidents...510 were...illegally possessed and 836 were described as legally possessed". If these figures are placed into context, it is seen that firearms were seized in 6.74 per cent of *all* domestic violence incidents and that only 3.9 per cent of *all* domestic violence offenders legally possessed a firearm - figures which demonstrate that seemingly impressive frequencies do not necessarily translate into equally impressive percentages. This observation is not made to lessen the seriousness of domestic violence or the possible use of firearms in such incidents. It simply underscores the fact that the figures are not always as compelling as they may initially appear.

Data was included to show apparent increases in firearm use in crime or of trends in firearms usage (the implication being that firearms use in violent crimes increased steadily over the years 1993-1995). The 'increases' and 'trends' were not supported by statistics. It was not admitted that figures naturally fluctuate over time and short time periods do not always indicate long-term patterns. No actual 'statistical' methods were used to analyse the available data, despite over-reaching assertions that statistics were provided.

It was contended that the number of firearms in Australia is unknown but increasing. One 'support' for this claim was that illegal firearm imports are increasing, because of an increased number of Customs seizures. The author would, however, have been wise to consider the possibility that Customs services continued to increase their vigilance and that greater vigilance, rather than increases in illegal imports, led to more seizures. The seriousness of illegal importation must not be disregarded, but Ms Davis's claims were not adequately supported.

The above examples illustrate the thesis's general failure to provide adequate support for its claims. Although the thesis purported to review the gun-control debate and, indeed, argues for gun control measures to be tightened at all levels (individual, state, national, international), it was structured to lead to the conclusion that there should be no firearm ownership in society, whether by individuals or collectives. However, its arguments were unsupported and based on misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Disappointingly, despite the promising title, the thesis failed to provide any meaningful analysis of firearm use and misuse in Australia or overseas.

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International developments

by Keith Tidswell
Executive Director of
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In the UN's Global Development Briefing of February 5, 2004, there is information of a sort that is increasingly common. Calling hunger 'a weapon of mass destruction', the presidents of Brazil and France issued a joint statement calling for changes in the methods of funding the international drive against poverty. What is proposed are international taxes on arms sales and financial transactions.

As is often the case, the bemused bystander who owns a gun can only look on and wonder: is this statement intended to be inclusive of sporting firearms, or is it another case of politicians trying to divert attention away from domestic issues? Again and again, sporting shooters have had their activities and their rights infringed through being caught in a net that has been cast to try to achieve other ends.

This kind of activity coming from prominent people at national level provides a backdrop to the serious work likely to affect us here in Australia.

The UN Secretary General's latest report to the security council initiated some new moves. General Assembly Resolution 58/241 begins a new process. First, there has been discussion and investigation on the need to trace gun manufacture by the markings placed on them. The next step is to put into place an instrument that will legally bind countries to carry out whatever processes are agreed. The first meeting of the group took place in New York on February 3 and 4, 2004.

A further change is the increasing involvement of Interpol. Study of a scheme known as the Interpol Weapons and Explosives Tracking System has recently been undertaken. Terrorist activity has brought the public's attention to explosives. Once again there is potential for this to affect the Australians who keep a few tins of smokeless reloading propellant at home.

Another change is the increasing involvement of different sections of the UN. A major initiative of the UN was the 2001 conference on small arms and light weapons, administered by the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) - www.disarmament.un.org:8080.

There has been increasing discussion in the DDA, on a group known as the Small Arms Advisory Service, which may become a permanent feature of the body. The Secretary-General's report also refers to "modalities of support for the establishment of the service". The group needs continuing finance and methods are being sought to keep it established.

Much of the activity at the UN continues to stem from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - civil bodies that form as special interest groups and take their concerns to the UN to be aired.

The SSAA is involved in The World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities, which is one of very few NGOs in favour of sustainable utilisation and sport shooting. Its associations now represent more than 55 million hunters and shooters worldwide.

In the international setting, there is still a lack of recognition of our activities and this comes back to affect us nationally through the exchange of information at upper governmental level.

It is difficult to grasp how powerful and large our opposition is. Beyond that, it is more difficult to convey this to the associations of gun owners who have always confidently gone about their club business. These anti-gun groups, particularly the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), are very serious in their intent. IANSA, for instance, is heavily financed not only by wealthy individual patrons but by whole governments. Their resources are huge. At international conferences they have numerous full-time employees. The IANSA give away well-made DVDs, posters and book-length publications. Look at IANSA's web site www.iansa.org to see the extent of their involvement in anti-gun work. The web site boasts: "IANSA's work has been supported by funders including the governments of UK, Belgium, Sweden and Norway, as well as the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Compton Foundation, Ploughshares Fund, John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Institute, Samuel Rubin Foundation and Christian Aid."

In addition, there is the small arms survey, located at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. The institute has at least ten full-time employees. It is also funded by several governments and produces an annual glossy publication, under the imprint of Oxford University Press. The third of these reports emerged recently and drew considerable media interest.

The 2003 edition puts forward the view that the presence of small arms in a country at risk is enough to delay or subvert the development of a backward or undeveloped country. This argument underpins the statement by the presidents of France and Brazil, above.

The survey figures say civilians lawfully own 59 per cent of guns, yet in the survey documentation there is little sign that civilians have the right to own their guns in peace. The UN still fails to acknowledge hunting as a legitimate activity. Concentrating on the control of small arms going into Africa, it does not show any concern for the interests of hunters. For example, a committee was set up to monitor small arms issues in Tanzania, but there was no representation on the committee offered to the hunting community there.

Anti-firearm agencies dislike hunting because it is a central part of gun ownership. The international shooting community remains in danger, not so much because of specific attacks against it, but because it is being caught up as the innocent victim of badly conceived laws. An example is how difficult travelling by aircraft with a longarm can be. Hunters are not dangerous. Hunters are not terrorists. Hunters have simply been caught up in security concerns.

This is typical of the way in which the procedures of the UN can represent a threat to the lawful activities of hunters. There are numerous initiatives underway on controversial issues. For the 2006 Small Arms and Light Weapons Conference, there will be a strong, well-funded and carefully organised faction present. The faction will have one aim only - influencing the UN to set up a binding instrument for a total ban on the ownership of guns by anyone other than the military and the police. ●



Victorian Duck Season 2004

by Mike Billing, Operations Manager SSAA (Vic)

The Victorian SSAA echoes the recent sentiments of Field and Game Australia and other hunting groups that the announcement of the 2004 duck season by minister Thwaites is a huge disappointment to all recreational hunters and rural communities around Victoria.

The Victorian SSAA believes that the economic impact of this decision will be felt hardest by rural Victorians who are still struggling to recover from the drought. A 1995 Department of Natural Resources and Environment survey showed expenditure in excess of \$30 million a year by duck hunters alone. Such economic activity will not be seen in 2004 with a drastically reduced season.

SSAA (Vic) president Sebastian Ziccone said, "It's ironic that at the December Labor Party state conference, a motion to 'permanently ban duck hunting', was overwhelmingly defeated by the 600 members present, yet the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) now significantly diminishes the 2004 duck season with flawed science. The parliamentary country caucus had a large influence on the December vote and rejected the motion to 'permanently ban duck hunting', which showed that they were in touch with rural Victorian communities. They obviously understand the impact duck hunting has on their local economies and more importantly, on the people of these regions."

The Victorian SSAA believes the shortened season is a double whammy for businesses that rely on revenue from recreational hunters participating in the duck season. Shop owners, hoteliers, caravan park owners, outdoor camping and clothing suppliers, petrol station owners, restaurants and other small rural retailers will all be affected by the government's decision to reduce the duck season this year. Not to mention the gun dealers and other firearm industry groups that will be the hardest hit. All major hunting organisations and industry groups in Victoria have withdrawn planned advertising in this year's hunting guide in response to the decision to significantly reduce the bag limit and duration of the 2004 duck season.

"Enough is enough," Mr Ziccone said. "This decision wasn't only in response to the reduction of the 2004 duck season, but also the DSE's treatment of recreational hunters on a number of issues over some time."

This adds to a growing number of issues adversely affecting Victorians including the recent decision to scrap the fox bounty and replace this with indiscriminate poisoning of not only foxes, but also native species. Other issues include access for hunters and high country enforcement, which the Australian Deer Association has been prominent in addressing.

"It is about time that the government started to acknowledge the impact of some of their decisions on *all* Victorians. Mr Ziccone said, "the Bracks Government so often tries to remind us that they are working for *all* Victorians and we would like to see this reflected in some of their decisions."

The SSAA (Vic) and other hunting groups have been calling on the Victorian Government to catch up with 'world's best practice' methods of achieving sustainable game management. NSW and Tasmania have taken the lead in Australia by adopting first-class game management systems similar to that of the New Zealand Government.

"Licence fees and other associated costs that hunters pay to become accredited in this state should be used for game species research, habitat improvements and development of hunter and community education programs," said Mr Ziccone.

Thousands of hunters in Victoria pay licence fees to the State Government, but these fees are not used to gather important information on the game species that hunt. The data that the DSE has relied upon to make decisions on duck seasons is not complete and has been refuted by scientific peers in this field of expertise.

"Certainly the information that the DSE is currently using to make seasonal management decisions cannot be correlated or tested scientifically," said Mr Ziccone.

"A number of highly-credited scientists in this area have refuted the data in the past, yet it is still relied upon to make decisions. We need an open and transparent system to address these and other issues affecting recreational hunters."

Mr Ziccone concluded by saying, "I would urge all hunters to abide by the restrictive regulations and to go out and enjoy their hunting with their families and friends. More importantly hunters should start to become active in speaking to their local Member of Parliament and let them know how important the culture and tradition of hunting is to them and their families." ●

Comparing Australian crime rates with the United States

by Dr Alex Robson, BA (Hons) JCU MA, PhD U Cal.
Currently he is a Lecturer at the School of Economics at The Australian National University.



As the Prime Minister and state premier's continue to try to sell their ban on about 500 types of handguns, a frequent justification offered is the higher rates of murder in the United States and the need to prevent an American-style 'gun culture' from emerging in Australia.

Indeed, during the police ministers' meeting in November 2002, and in similar remarks at the COAG meeting, the Prime Minister said, "There's a lot about America I admire, but one thing I don't admire about America is the worship of guns in that country. It's brought untold misery and harm and also delivered to America a very high murder rate for a stable, open, Western society."

Numerous columnists and gun-control supporters have echoed these sentiments - higher rates of gun ownership in the United States are the cause of the higher murder rates and provide evidence in support of Australian gun control.

The Prime Minister does begin with a solid grounding in fact. According to the December 2002 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, a US news and commentary magazine, one-third of the entire world's stock of guns are in the hands of private US citizens. With estimates of private gun ownership rates generally in the range of 35 to 40 per cent in the US, gun ownership is more widespread than in Australia. And murder rates are higher. In 2001, the murder rate in the US was 5.6 per 100,000 people while the murder rate in Australia was about 1.8 per 100,000 people.

But there are many significant problems with using this to support gun control measures. Perhaps the most important problem is that the evidence directly contradicts the claim that higher rates of gun ownership cause higher murder rates. This can be seen both within the US and when looking across countries.

Within the US, gun ownership is concentrated in rural areas. Some major cities, like Chicago and the capital city Washington, ban handgun ownership and many others discourage it. Gun ownership rates in these cities are quite low - most likely lower than the average Australian rate - but these cities contribute to the bulk of US murders. Chicago's murder rate in 2001 was 23.0 per 100,000 people and Washington's was 40.6.

The rural areas of the United States with gun ownership rates often more than 50 per cent, generally have the same or lower murder rates than the Australian average. Indeed, looking at US counties in the year 2000 (the latest year for which the data is available), of the counties which reported their murder rates to the federal government, 55 per cent had murder rates less than or equal to Australia's. These (largely rural) counties contained more than 70 million Americans and probably contained the bulk of privately-held American guns.

It is a fact that within the US, regions with higher gun ownership rates generally have lower murder rates. There is also some evidence

that more restrictive gun control laws across countries are associated with higher murder rates. This was revealed in a study by Jeff Miron, which constitutes the most complete cross-country empirical study of gun control and murder yet completed. Although the results were not conclusive and more work needs to be done, the suggestive evidence from his study was that "greater prohibition of guns is associated with higher homicide rates".

Even if we were to ignore all of the evidence and assume that the Prime Minister's assumption about causation is correct, significant problems would remain. Higher rates of gun ownership may indeed make guns more available to criminals, causing gun crime, and murder in particular, to increase. But high rates of gun ownership by law-abiding citizens may provide an offsetting deterrent effect on all forms of violent crime by making it easier for potential victims to defend themselves against criminals, particularly benefiting physically weaker people such as women and the elderly.

Once this simple fact is acknowledged, the Prime Minister's argument becomes much more complicated because violent crime rates (a total measure of murder, rape, robbery and assault) are actually higher in Australia (and in Britain) than in the United States. In fact, Australia had the highest rate of violent crime victimisation among the 17 developed nations included in the 2000 International Crime Victims Survey published by the Dutch Ministry of Justice.

Our own government-collected data (the Australian Bureau of Statistics for Australia and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the US) reveal a sharp difference in assault and sexual assault. In 2001, US rape rates were 31.8 per 100,000 people while Australian sexual assault rates were 86.4. Assault rates were 318.5 in the US versus 782.9 in Australia.

Differences in definition and reporting across the two countries mean that the numbers may overstate the differences somewhat. But the relative differences revealed in the government data are in line with the Dutch survey data and there is little question of a sharp difference in rates between the two countries.

Thus, even if the Prime Minister's assumption about higher rates of gun ownership causing differences in violent crime rates is correct, his argument boils down to a trade-off of 3.8 fewer murders in exchange for dozens more rapes and hundreds more assaults. Although there are attempts in the academic literature to quantify these types of trade-offs, it is clear from the numbers alone that the argument is more complex than the Prime Minister is claiming.

The Prime Minister and state premiers were winners on December 6, 2002 and on July 1, 2003 the ban on handguns commenced. Unfortunately, the evidence is that the Australian sporting shooters are the losers. ●

Hunting as a sport is ethical - fighting words

by Ray Manning - 1964

This is an extract from the August, 1964 *Australian Shooters Journal*. We found it while organising the library at the SSAA Publications' office in Adelaide and thought it was worthy of a reprint. Forty years later the debates continue but the SSAA's position has never wavered.

- Tim Bannister, Managing Editor

One unfortunate aspect of this sport is the fact that it is a wholly participant sport with no spectator appeal. It must be experienced to be enjoyed. This puts it into the category of being of little interest to the mass mediums of education on which any activity is dependant to get universal acceptance.

Oh yes, there is plenty read, heard and seen about shooting but have you considered how little of it is favourable to our cause? The only news value is in those items which will interest the majority of readers, etc, or stir up controversy, and what a delightfully meaty subject 'misuse of firearms' is in the hands of reporters.

The 'Letters to the Editor' column in the daily press is often used by the opponents to firearms to spread a philosophy far and wide and on occasions the letters fortunately condemn the writer as a 'nut'.

A SSAA letter was published in the *Melbourne Age*. It was intended to distinguish between members and some other shooters whose actions are heaping disrepute on the whole shooting movement. An unexpected development from the letter was an offer (or was it a challenge) from Crawford Productions, who offered an opportunity to present a case on their controversial television program - 'Fighting Words' on Channel 7 on May 16, 1964, with the subject 'Hunting as a sport is ethical'.

The first reaction was to 'chicken-out'. But as one subscribing to the belief that you should be prepared to defend your actions in any company, if it is felt that the motives are right, I sensed that this was an opportunity worth taking to present the other side of the case.

As a background to the show, it may help the reader to know that the audience is made up of three debating teams, plus any other parties that may be interested in opposing the Speaker (ie, Animal Welfare, RSPCA, Bird Observers, etc). The Speaker's case is rehearsed in front of a spokesman from each of the debating teams, two days before the program is taped. This allows them an opportunity to prepare their questions.

A transcript of the show is printed below for a twofold purpose.

1. It may provide the answer to questions that could arise in the future.

2. At your leisure, deeper thought could provide more satisfactory answers to these questions that have come from people opposed to hunting.

Compere:

Our first speaker is really looking for trouble I imagine, he is Mr R A Manning, Vice President of the Victorian division of the Sporting Shooters' of Australia Association, his subject is 'Hunting as a sport is ethical'. Ladies and gentleman - Mr Manning.

Compere:

All right, enough of that hissing at the back please. Three minutes in which to state your case, and then it's question time.

Manning:

Mr Kurtz, ladies and gentleman. This subject, as has been said, is a controversial issue. Man as a species is a hunter by nature. Under normal circumstances this question is heard from the sentimental side. The male of the species is normally the one who provides the food, the female is normally the one opposed to the way it is obtained. The method by which it is obtained is what is normally controversial.

Now, when we go back through history you will find that hunting has been in existence since man began to eat meat, it was only with the development of farming and the taming of animals that hunting was no longer necessary to some people. The point here is that some people were prepared to give the task of providing food to others, while they went about jobs they found more to their liking. Fortunately not all people are hunters.

In this present day and age of soft living, without dehydrated food coming out of quick-freeze cabinets, there are many who feel that we should get back to the fundamentals of life. The present growth of interest in camping is something which illustrates this point. Psychologically, I believe it does a man good to prove to himself that he is still able to match his wits with animals in their own environment and if necessary, get a meal.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia has looked into this question and feels there has been much going on which is not ethical. They have examined this with a conscience and they have come forward in the firm belief that there are three motives for which hunting is ethical:

1. That the proceeds of the hunt be used. That the quarry be put to some human use by way of either meat or skins.

2. Where it is known that by the destruction of particular vermin there will accrue benefit to the hunter. This particularly

relates to the vermin.

3. Whereby the taking of these animals and mounting as trophies, it is put into the position of having appeal to many people. It is an honouring of the game.

Compere:

Mr Manning, your time is up, I'm afraid. It's question time and on this subject there should be plenty of them.

Question:

Who are you to speak about ethics?

Compere: That is not really a question. Please re-phrase.

Question:

You were supposed to come here and talk about the ethics of hunting, you haven't even talked about it. You haven't defined what you meant.

Manning:

I have said that there are only three bases for hunting - where it is done for a particular purpose.

Question:

We could gather from your talk, Sir, that a healthy vegetarian in a nudist camp would have no need for meat? (Laughter)

Manning:

This question is perhaps meant in a joking fashion but unfortunately many people are opposed to hunting. If some of those opposed to hunting took a good look at their diet, they would discover they are meat eaters. They feel we should not hunt for food and yet they still eat meat. They relieve their conscience by paying someone else to do it for them.

Question:

Don't you agree that the manner of killing is the whole point? I mean for instance, the hunting of foxes - do you consider the way people hunt foxes as ethical? Sometimes you hear stories of blood hounds tearing the foxes to pieces. Is that ethical

Manning:

That is a question beyond my sphere; I am talking only of man against the animal, not animal against animal. I would rather not be drawn into that one; I could make a lot of enemies.

(Audience disagrees)

Well, if you feel I should be able to answer the question - I don't believe it is ethical?

Question:

Mr Manning, you said this hunting of yours is ethical and is satisfying a primeval need of man; would you be prepared to go out with a bow and arrow against a beast that you would normally shoot with modern arms?

Manning:

The use of spears, bows and arrows against game is not a more humane method, though it is often mistaken to be. The use of these implements is far less humane than actually hunting with a firearm.

Question:

Do you believe that hunting can cause extinction in animals?

Manning:

I believe that under ethical methods this will never happen.

Question:

You're ethical hunters and yet a few years ago, your friends the

shooters, were opposing like mad the attempt to stop live-bird trap shooting. Do you consider you were ethical then?

Manning:

I don't think live-bird trap shooting fits into either category of using the take for human-use or matching wits against the animal in its own environment, so my answer is that it is unethical.

Question:

Mr Manning, do you believe that by teaching young people to handle guns correctly it could lower the juvenile delinquency rate even slightly?

Manning:

I believe it can. I think that hunting is a sphere where father and son can go out together; I have no doubt about this.

Question:

You said you had to try or were trying to outwit animals. Do you have to prove to yourself that you are as smart as a rabbit?

Manning:

Rabbits are put into the vermin category in this country. Many people think that animals in their own environment are dumb animals. The only dumb thing about them is that they can't speak. In their own environment they have the advantage over man.

Question:

Sir, why do you think it is ethical to use these animals as trophies or plaques on the wall?

Manning:

I feel that the trophy hunter is a man much maligned, when it is understood that the trophy is considered a measure of the man, his skills and everything else. A trophy hunter will not take anything that is not worthy of him.

Question:

Sir, what pleasure can you derive from getting up at five o'clock in the morning and standing in the cold river for hours just to bag a handful of poor defenceless ducks?

Manning:

Some people would go to the same lengths to watch the Beatles.

Question:

Do you notice that all meat eating animals are savage, fighting types and the vegetarian animals are strong and patient types? Do you think that has a bearing on future wartime activity?

Manning:

I enjoy meat myself and I don't want to talk others into becoming vegetarians when I won't do it myself.

Question:

You are talking about hunting, but if you go out hunting in Victoria, there are signs on fences and notices saying 'no hunting here'. Where can we hunt in this state as it seems it is banned almost everywhere?

Manning:

This is a good question. The people responsible for the current state of affairs in the field have no allegiance to the sport. I feel they don't consider their effect on game or anything of this nature. They measure their success in quantity rather than quality and this is what we are trying to stop in the interests of wildlife and hunting in the future.



Rotaries hear about firearms

Peter Whelan, managing director of Uniserve Pty Limited, has recently been giving gun talks at various Rotary clubs in NSW. The talks are based on his recent publication, *Gun Prohibition in Australia: An Expensive Mistake!* (ISBN0-9750361-0-6), which explains how \$500 million has been wasted as crime in all categories has continued to increase. According to Peter, many people don't realise that this past year murder increased by 20 per cent (Australian Institute of Criminology) and that the increase wasn't due to guns.

To illustrate his talks, Peter has several of his semi-automatic guns, rifles and pistols on display and describes which sports and other activities they are used for. Another section of Peter's presentation includes explaining which shooting clubs are in the area and handing out bundles of SSAA 'Shooting Sports' leaflets.

He concludes the presentation by asking the question: What good work could Rotary have achieved with \$500 million? Peter believes this is particularly relevant when one considers that another (approximately) \$250 million has been wasted on taking handguns, which are fully and legally registered by owners who are fully licenced.

If you have contacts in Rotary Clubs or similar who would be interested to hear Peter speak, contact Peter Whelan on (office phone) 02 8853 4200 or fax 02 8853 4260. You can also visit his web site: www.uniserve.com.au

Question:

Sir, what's your definition of ethical?

Manning:

Ethical is conducting a method of hunting in which the conscience is clear.

Question:

Mr Manning, do you consider that you have the right to shoot defenceless animals?

Manning:

I believe if the animal will be put to good use - yes.

Question:

Mr Manning, what number of hunters do you represent in Victoria?

Manning:

There are, at the present time, 500 in Victoria.

Question:

How many people would be interested in shooting outside your association?

Manning:

I would say there are probably in the vicinity of about 100,000 shooters.

Question:

Would your shooters have the same reaction if they used cameras just as bird watchers do? Would they get the same response if they used blanks in their rifles? They would still do the hunting but not the killing.

Manning:

I believe that ethical hunting would never reduce wildlife to the level that field naturalists imagine.

Question:

Mr Manning, as a good many newcomers to Australia don't recognise which birds are protected and which are not, do you think more should be done to educate on this subject?

Manning:

Definitely. There is not enough educating in this area. There are many people who don't want to learn, but again there are many migrants, they are much maligned too, from whom the Australian can learn.

Compere:

Mr Manning, on that note we must wind it up. Mr Manning is Vice President of the Victorian division of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia. Well put, Mr Manning. Thank you for appearing on 'Fighting Words'.

It will be obvious that time ran out before the case was completed, but nevertheless it has had the effect of quietening the opponents temporarily - no anti-firearm letters have appeared in the local press since the viewing.

As a sidelight to the program, two very sincere anti-hunting opponents in the audience confronted George Timbrell, Neil Kenworthy and myself after the show, to continue the discussion. While we can't claim that they are converts, they did concede 'that they could see the difference between our aims and the image that they did earlier hold of shooters'. ●

New Victorian firearms lobby group formed

by SSAA Victorian President Sebastian Ziccone

Most shooters are aware that the shooting sports had a major political problem well before the tragic events at Monash University. For the second time in seven years, we saw how quickly governments were prepared to seize upon this. They wanted the media and broader community to see them addressing 'problems' which they believed existed.

The result has been snappy headlines at our expense. It is difficult to recall another example of where policy development occurs in an information and consultation vacuum. Nor can I recall another example where the right to be treated with trust and dignity, is met with such contempt.

Shooting groups have lobbied governments in the past. Much of this has been televised - but failed to have any lasting political impact.

We were fortunate that at the time of the tragic circumstances surrounding the shooting at Monash University a state election was looming. It was an opportunity to turn our fight into a political issue.

In late October 2002, several major shooting organisations met at the Austrian Club and resolved that a unified single political voice was needed. For the first time that I can recall, differences between the various groups were put behind them as they formed the Combined Firearms Council of Victoria.

A few days later, the remaining major shooting organisations joined the CFCV, effectively covering all of the major shooting disciplines in the state.

All organisations had realised this fight was more than just about handguns. It could just as easily been about shotguns, centrefire rifles or the ability of juniors to participate in the shooting sports. It was about how firearm policies are developed. The lessons of 1996 were not lost on the shooting organisations.

It is important to point out that the CFCV is only involved in political aspects relating to shooting. Its activities do not intrude into the day-to-day management roles of the various member organisations, such as the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, Field and Game Australia, Victorian Amateur Pistol Association, Target Rifle Victoria, Victorian Clay Target Association, Victorian Rifle Association, Council of Muzzleloading and Blackpowder Shooters, Firearm Traders Association, Independent Pistol Clubs, IPSC, and Vintagers (Order of Edwardian Gunners) Inc.

As agreed at its inaugural meeting, political campaigns, activities, press releases and media responses would be handled by the CFCV to ensure a coordinated approach. This would eliminate the 'divide and conquer' approach that has been used against us in the past.

The CFCV went into the 2002 Victorian State Election with more than \$200,000 collected from shooters and shooting organisations, and an election strategy to support those candidates who supported the shooting sports, and oppose those who did not.

We ran full-page ads in all major newspapers two days before the election, advising Victoria's 200,000 shooters on how to vote. As you can imagine, this attracted considerable media attention - and even more attention from those candidates affected and their opponents.

Other activities included a mass mail-out in key electorates and utilising about 200 shooters to help man polling booths for independents.

The election result was a landslide to Labor. While this can be largely attributed to the ineptness of the campaign run by the Liberals, it is clear that the CFCV had a noticeable impact.

An independent analysis has confirmed that the strategy had a net impact of about 2.5 per cent. This did not take into account the fact that the campaign was candidate rather than party specific and the true impact is therefore likely to be significantly greater. In a closer contest, the impact of such a campaign could help change government.

At the very least, our campaign ended a number of political careers and won some deals by delivering seats to both the ALP and LP. It also ensured that the National Party remained a viable political force in the Victorian Parliament.

By tapping into the skill-base provided by the various shooting organisations since the election, we have been able to achieve significant coverage in the press through newspaper, radio and television.

We have also built workable relationships with politicians and the major parties - who want to keep us onside in the lead-up to future elections.

The fact the CFCV has worked so effectively is due, in a big part, to the personalities involved. Historical territorial differences have virtually disappeared. It has also helped that 'small' members have equal standing with the 'big' members so that we are all treated equally.

Confidentiality prevents me from explaining the true extent of help we have received from within the political parties. This help has been a major asset and a key reason why our campaigns and subsequent efforts have been effective.

I would encourage every state shooting organisation to discuss the formation of similar political bodies with their peers and other groups with a political interest in shooting. It is vital to ensure that no organisation is overlooked as suspicions can lead to them torpedoing your efforts - and overlooking valuable pools of experience and expertise.

The formation of the CFCV was years overdue. However, it is never too late to turn the tables on those who continue to attack us, if we put our minds to it in intelligent ways. It is not too late to promote the sport in the same light as all other sports. Before we can achieve this effectively, we need to stop the haemorrhaging of the political and media fronts.

Making and breaking political careers and working with select journalists are necessary ways to do this. This takes time and a lot of effort. Sometimes the results are obvious, sometimes they are not. However, it is necessary work, which I am glad to say we are undertaking in Victoria.

Information on the CFCV's ongoing activities can be seen on our web site at www.cfcv.org.au ●



Cheree Beach interviews SSAA Northern Territory President - Col Mellon

ABC 8DDD drive-time interview with Col Mellon

Cheree:

The Northern Territory Government has received a number of submissions from individuals after announcing it plans to have about 25 crocodiles earmarked each year for crocodile safari hunters - who would pay a few thousand dollars for the privilege to go out and bag a croc head. I presume to have it stuffed and mounted on their wall back in Texas or wherever they've come from. The RSPCA is concerned that no incentives are in place to ensure the crocodiles are killed humanely. Is the quota of 25 crocodiles just the beginning? Will the number rise as the money comes in? Col Mellon, President of the Sporting Shooters' Association of the Northern Territory and the National Coordinator for the Conservation and Pest Management is with us to discuss the issue. Hi Col.

Col:

Good afternoon Cheree.

Cheree:

You have seen the Northern Territory Government's report on crocodile hunting, what do you think?

Col:

I don't think there is much to be concerned about at all. The numbers of crocodiles to be removed will not exceed the numbers that are presently removed. In all safari operations, irrespective of whether the target is a croc or a wild pig, there are various model codes of practice that everyone must follow. The RSPCA was instrumental in the implementation of those model codes of practice. They either have little faith in their own objectives or they are very naïve.

Cheree:

We heard from someone who survived a crocodile attack a couple of weeks ago. Her argument was we don't want to have this kind of thing happening in Australia, it's not very good for tourism and if you go out shooting crocodiles and you leave one out there wounded - you're potentially causing safety problems for other people in that area.

Col:

That is yet to be seen and certainly has not been proven. Safari hunting for crocodiles is no different than going to Africa and safari hunting any of the animals there. Even though I am opposed to shooting elephants, lions or tigers - there is a place in the world for safari operations. The crocodiles have been protected in the Northern Territory since about 1967 and the Northern Territory Government and the conservation commission have done an excellent job protecting and preserving the species.

I think it is important that we are not misled. The crocodiles being taken by safari hunters are not going to reduce the potential for people being attacked by crocodiles. That is certainly not the intent.

Cheree:

Okay, so 25 crocodiles - do you think that is just a starting point? Might we see more?

Col:

I have no idea, but it is reasonable to assume that the conservation commission and the Northern Territory Government are using this as a trial horse. Testing the waters to see if they can attract wealthy tourists to the Northern Territory - to take part in the safaris. Now, if one of these safari hunters visits the Territory, sure, he/she will pay a trophy fee for the hunt, however, there is money coming into the state in other ways as well - in the form of tourism - such as accommodation, sightseeing, etc.

Cheree:

What do you think of the price that is being suggested?

Col:

I have heard several stories. I believe the cost should be quite high. A hell of a lot more than \$6000 - which was a charge that was bandied about.

A portion of the money should go back into the government to assist with their crocodile management programs.

Cheree:
What would you say a reasonable charge would be? Considering the aim is at the wealthy?

Col:
I wouldn't say they were multi-millionaires, but most of them are cashed up. I would think \$20,000 would not be unreasonable.

Cheree:
\$20,000 for a hunt?

Col:
Yes.

Cheree:
Would the people the safaris attract, would they be experienced hunters?

Col:
Definitely. It would be the responsibility of the safari organisation to make sure their clients have the necessary skills, experience and licences. The safari operators also have a responsibility to ensure that the model codes of practice and animal rights are followed.

Cheree:
What about general safety for people in the vicinity of where the hunt is taking place?

Col:
That would be a concern if they were going to start shooting off around Darwin Harbour, but I don't think that is the intent. The areas where the activity will take place would be concentrated and remote - that would be one of the things that would be set in stone before the operation could take place - in my view anyway.

Cheree:
Now the federal government so far indicated that it is not really into the idea. Are you, as an organisation, trying to convince them it is a good idea?

Col:
We have had discussions with Dr Graeme Webb, owner of Crocodylus Park, a crocodile breeding farm and tourist facility who is regarded as one of the world's foremost authorities on saltwater crocodiles. We have also spoken to the South Australian President of SSAA - Dr Jeanine Baker, who has prepared a submission to send to government.

Cheree:
To the federal government?

Col:
To both governments - Northern Territory and the federal government.

Cheree:
Urging them to go ahead?

Col:
I have seen a draft of the submission, its content certainly heads towards that direction, but it also sights the reasons and there are quite a few of those. I don't have the document in front of me to quote from.

Cheree:
All right Col. Thanks very much for your time this afternoon.

Col:
No problem Cheree.

Cheree:
Col Mellon is the President of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia's Northern Territory branch. ●

Secure your gun Secure your sport



The security of your firearm is your responsibility.

Failure to secure your firearm in accordance with the law attracts heavy financial penalties and possible loss of licence.

Stolen firearms could result in death or injury to members of the public.

Be responsible.

Secure that gun.

For information on correct firearm storage contact your local SSAA organisation or local police.

Police firearm registry contact details

0875 35 3535
Australian Firearms Registry
in NSW only

0800 000 000
Australian Firearms Registry
in Queensland only

0800 000 000
Australian Firearms Registry
in Victoria only

0800 000 000
Australian Firearms Registry
in Western Australia only

0800 000 000
Australian Firearms Registry
in South Coast NSW only

0800 000 000
Australian Firearms Registry
in Tasmania only

0800 000 000
Australian Firearms Registry
in Northern Territory only

0800 000 000
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