

# ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL  
*The political voice of the SSAA*

## NSW: Handguns, Hotspots



**“Criminal justice needs to be based on solid research, not pious hopes.”**

*Dame Sian Elias, Chief Justice, New Zealand*

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# ASJ

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of the SSAA**

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# The New Zealand

# Arms Control regime

This paper provides an overview of the New Zealand arms control regime.<sup>2</sup> The writing of this paper is motivated both by a desire to share with others the strengths of that regime, and to address what appears to be misunderstandings arising from the much-publicised perspective of a very small group of commentators who hold a particular view on arms control.<sup>3</sup> The New Zealand regime is placed within an international context.

## The New Zealand arms control regime

Firearms in New Zealand are primarily controlled by the Arms Act 1983, Arms Regulations 1992 and the Arms (Restricted Weapons and Specially Dangerous Airguns) Order 1984 (see [www.legislation.govt.nz](http://www.legislation.govt.nz)). These are expanded by policy directions collated in the New Zealand Arms Manual 2002. These documents need to be read together for a more complete understanding of the New Zealand arms control regime (see [www.police.govt.nz](http://www.police.govt.nz) look under 'service units' and 'firearms').

Central to the New Zealand arms control regime is the licensing of individuals as fit and proper to possess firearms. Those who wish to possess pistols, restricted weapons or military-style semi-automatic firearms (MSSAs) may apply for an endorsement on their firearms licence. In order to have the endorsement granted they must demonstrate that they are both fit and proper and have cause to possess that firearm.<sup>4</sup> The issuing of any such endorsement is subject to the direction of the Commissioner.<sup>5</sup>

Pistols, restricted weapons and MSSAs may only be sold or supplied to a person holding a permit to procure issued by a member of

Police. Individuals are required to confirm having taken possession of these firearms where such a permit has been issued. Police use information from the permit to procure process to record the details of the pistol, restricted weapon or MSSA against the person's firearms licence.

Firearms licences and endorsements are renewable every 10 years.

This application is as for a new licence, with full vetting and security inspection being a requirement. Thus, in order to renew their firearms licence, the applicant must demonstrate that they continue to be fit and proper to possess firearms.

Individuals applying for a firearms licence are determined as being, or not being fit and proper by a vetting process that includes, but is not limited, to:

1. Information held on Police computer systems, including criminal records, intelligence data and Court Orders, such as Family Violence Protection Orders
2. Face-to-face interviews with the applicant's partner, spouse or next of kin (for both first-time applicants and applicants to renew)
3. For first-time applicants, face-to-face interviews with an unrelated referee. For renewals, this interview may be carried out by telephone
4. Face-to-face interview with the applicant
5. Physical inspection of security in place for firearms. Security requirements are set by regulation
6. The recording of information about sporting long arms (make, model, serial number, calibre). This is voluntary, with about 90% of firearms licence applicants providing this information<sup>6</sup>
7. Any other inquiry that the Arms Officer considers necessary. This may include obtaining a doctor's certificate



Joe Green has over 21 years experience as a police officer and has been responsible for the national coordination of firearms control since 1998, as the manager of NZ Licensing and Vetting Service centre.

# NEW ZEALAND ARMS CONTROL REGIME

The image shows a screenshot of a web-based form titled "New Zealand Firearms Licence Vetting Guide". The form is for "Applicant details" and includes fields for Name, Forename, and License applied for (Pistols, Dealers, Endorsements applied for, and Dealers/licences (MSSA)). It also has a summary statement section with a "Yes" or "No" radio button, and a signature section with fields for Signature, Date, Print name, and ID. A disclaimer at the bottom states: "This guide should be completed in full and verbatim copied out to the order processor. If you are unsure about any aspect of the information, please refer to your master guide."

**New Zealand Firearms Licence Vetting Guide helps to ensure that applicants for firearms are both fit and have proper cause to possess any firearms.**

restricted weapons or MSSAs, the requisite endorsement. Security and recording requirements for Dealers are set by Regulation. The Dealer's licence is renewable annually.

The New Zealand legislative framework establishes as offences the unlawful use or possession of firearms. These are included in both arms control legislation and the criminal code.

## **Actions of fit and proper persons**

Having been determined as fit and proper to use, possess or sell and manufacture firearms indicates that an individual is likely to possess and use firearms lawfully. Individuals who do not do so are no longer fit and proper.

A person is not considered fit and proper if:

1. They are subject to a protection order under domestic violence legislation. Protection orders have as a standard condition the 'deemed revocation' of the respondent's firearms licence. This standard condition may be discharged by a Judge on application from the respondent
2. In the opinion of a Commissioned Officer of Police there are grounds for making such an order
3. They have had their firearms licence revoked on the grounds they are not a fit and proper person
4. A person who is not fit and proper is likely to have access to their firearms
5. They fail to secure their firearms as required by the Arms Regulations 1992
6. They demonstrate any other behavioural-based problems, such as substance misuse, routine offending against the law, violence, attempted suicide and mental ill health such that it might cause concern

Those wishing to have an endorsement must further satisfy Police as to their fit and proper status and the reason they wish to possess a pistol, restricted weapon or MSSA. This process includes:

1. Evidence of bona fide interest in possessing that pistol, restricted weapon or MSSA
2. Interview of referees who already possess pistols, restricted weapons or MSSAs
3. For target pistol shooting, confirmation as being the member of a pistol shooting club recognised by the Commissioner of Police
4. Security commensurate with the type of firearm to be possessed. Security standards for pistols, restricted weapons and MSSAs are of a higher standard than for sporting longarms and are set by regulation
5. On renewal of the licence/endorsement, a physical audit of pistols, restricted weapons and MSSAs recorded against the applicant's licence
6. Any other inquiry the Arms Officer considers necessary

Arms Officers are directed in the vetting process by the Vetting Guide and the Vetting Master Guide.

Those wishing to sell or manufacture firearms by way of business are required to apply to Police for a dealers licence. The arms dealers licence is issued on the basis that a person demonstrates that they are fit and proper to carry out this business. Dealers and their employees are also required to hold a firearms licence and, if selling pistols,

Firearms licences, endorsements and dealers licences may be revoked where a person is considered no longer fit and proper to use or possess firearms, or as dealer they fail to exercise due control over their business.

Where Police have revoked a firearms licence they may, when the person has demonstrated themselves fit and proper, reinstate the licence. A revoked firearms licence may be reinstated on appeal to the Courts.

## **The development of legislation and policy - a consultative approach**

In setting the principles of modern policing in 1829 Peel stated that "the extent to which the cooperation of the public can be secured diminishes proportionally the necessity of the use of physical force and compulsion for achieving police objectives". One mechanism to gain public cooperation is to include them fully in the law and policy-making process.

The 1983 Arms Act and the 2005 Arms Amendment Bill were developed in a consultative approach before drafting that included the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council, representatives of firearm user groups, arms dealers and advisory bodies such as the Mental Health Commission.

The 1992 Arms Amendment Bill did not include this consultative process. The 1998 Arms Amendment Bill, seeking to introduce univer-

# NEW ZEALAND ARMS CONTROL REGIME

sal registration, met with massive public opposition. This opposition, including the submissions to the Select Committee considering the Bill from organisations such as the Mental Health Commission (that there were better ways to address mental health issues) and the Coalition for Gun Control (that had not consulted with its membership) was such that the Bill did not proceed into law.

The outcome of legislation developed in a consultative process is better law and enhanced public acceptance, and ultimately compliance with that law.

In the same way it is important to include these interested parties in the development of policy. The New Zealand Mountain Safety Council, as an independent organisation very focused on safety, is central to this consultative process. The Mountain Safety Council branch network of instructors is pivotal to explaining law and policy to the wider firearm-using public.

I think it is also important to acknowledge that firearm users tend to be the good people in the community. This is especially so in rural and small town communities. They will be the same people who support Neighbourhood Support, Victim Support, youth education and other policing initiatives. They will also be the people police officers rely on for support and back-up!

## Different states, different needs

Arms control internationally is agreed by instruments such as the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in All Its Aspects (referred to in what follows as the 'POA'). Commentators tend to compare jurisdictions such as New Zealand, with a well developed and long-standing arms control legislative framework, with other jurisdictions that have a history of armed insurrection, violence and terrorism. These jurisdictions are only just putting in place legislative frameworks to control access to and use of SALW, and thereby appear to be taking more action in relation to the POA. Such comparisons are not necessarily valid, as New Zealand does not face the same issues in relation to SALW.<sup>7</sup>

An arms control regime is likely to be more effective therefore if it takes into account the differing histories, cultures, environments and patterns of firearms possession and use that are apparent in different states. A 'one size fits all' approach is likely to be less effective than approaches that address these differences.

The POA itself appears to support this view, committing states to take steps that bear in mind the 'different situations, capacities and priorities of states and regions' (POA, II [1]).

Given this, states are more justified in putting energy into developing strategies that they consider are more likely to be effective, given their own particular circumstances.

New Zealand supports, and has implemented an arms control regime that places added controls on those firearms that are most likely to have military application. This includes maintaining a database recording the possession and transfer of these firearms.

## Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the New Zealand arms control, sharing with others the strengths of that regime. Arms control in New Zealand has been placed within an international context and the reason for the New Zealand view explained. ●

The New Zealand arms control regime can be more fully understood by referring to the following key documents:

- The Arms Act 1983
- The Arms (Restricted Weapons and Specially Dangerous Airguns) Order 1984
- The Arms Regulations 1992
- The Arms Code (Firearms Safety Manual issued by the New Zealand Police)
- The Arms Manual 2002
- The Vetting Guide
- The Vetting Master Guide ●

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Joe Green has been a Police officer for over 21 years, working at all ranks in both administrative and operational roles to his current rank of Inspector. Since November 1998 he has managed the Licensing and Vetting Service Centre. This Service Centre is responsible, among other things, for the national coordination of firearms control. He has advised a Parliamentary Select Committee on one Arms Amendment Bill, has developed policy which is within the Arms Manual 2002, and is advising on drafting a new Arms Amendment Bill. He is also the Deputy Chair of the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council, which is the civilian organisation responsible for the nationwide training of all firearms licence applicants. In practice this means that he has been associated with the design, administration and enforcement of firearms control systems on a full-time basis for six and a half years. This is backed by operational policing experience.

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand has a very low crime rate with firearms, being approximately 1.5% of all violent crime, a very low accidental injury and death rate, with 7 injuries and 1 death during 2004, and a reducing suicide rate with firearms as the choice of method (in the 15-24 age group for males, suicide by firearm decreased from 6.9 deaths per 100 000 in 1977 to 2.9 per 100,000 in 1996). The culture of firearm use in New Zealand is such that Police do not routinely carry firearms.

<sup>3</sup> In his paper *Global Deaths from Firearms* (2003: page 2) David Kopel comments on statements that take on a truth of their own as "factoids" that gain strength through repetition, often without any (or very slim) empirical basis. It could be argued that the repeated comment about New Zealand's 'permissive' firearms regime by certain commentators is such a 'factoid' - see for example Alpers and Twyford, 'Small Arms in the Pacific' (March 2003), page xvii.

<sup>4</sup> The cause to possess pistols and restricted weapons is determined by statute. The applicant must be a target pistol shooter (member of a club recognised by the Commissioner of Police), or a bona fide collector, or a person to whom the pistol or restricted weapon has special significance as an heirloom or memento, or the Director or Curator of a museum, or an approved employee or member of a bona fide theatre, film or television company or society. For MSSAs the applicant must satisfy Police they have reason to possess the MSSA. Most common reasons include pest destruction, competitive service rifle shooting and film production.

<sup>5</sup> Acting on the 'direction of the Commissioner (of Police)' is an aspect of New Zealand legislation that makes it important to include Police policy, collated in the Arms Manual, as part of the overall arms control regime. In this sense New Zealand legislation is less prescriptive than some other legislative frameworks. Being less prescriptive should not be interpreted as being less restrictive.

<sup>6</sup> New Zealand does not have a universal registration regime. In 1983 a decision was made to move from such a regime to a comprehensive licensing regime, as outlined in this paper. This change was made on the basis that the registration system suffered from inaccuracy, had indications of low compliance, did not assist crime prevention and detection, was of high cost with the money of maintaining such a system better spent on other essential police duties (Judge Thorp; 1997, pages 13-16 *Review of Firearms Control in New Zealand*). A licensing system with more intensive vetting was considered to provide effective arms control. This view has not changed. Despite recommending a universal registration regime in his 1997 *Review of Firearms Control in New Zealand* Judge Thorp noted that in order to be effective a threshold of 90% compliance was necessary. Judge Thorp (page 178) concluded that "at this time there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the assistance which registration would provide to crime prevention and detection would in itself support the costs involved in establishing it". The observation of the outcome of legislative changes in other common law jurisdictions has not encouraged New Zealand to change the 1983 decision.

<sup>7</sup> There seems to be some support for a view that the POA applies in the first instance to military firearms. The context set by the preamble to the POA arguably supports such a view, as does the more recent opinion of the UN Group of Governmental Experts' report that any instrument for the marking and tracing of SALW focus on weapons manufactured to military specifications for use as lethal instruments of war. It also makes sense when one considers that sporting longarms in civilian possession are generally unsuitable for use in armed conflict the POA seeks to address. Primary reasons for this include a multiplicity of calibres, often within the same make and model, and durability and general robustness of operation. The strength of firearms designed for military purposes is mass production with very limited calibres, durability and ease of handling. Limited calibres enables mass production of ammunition with reduced likelihood of mismatching of firearm and ammunition in the field. The small arms and light weapons (SALW) included in the POA are most likely to refer to pistols, and what are known in New Zealand as restricted weapons and military-style semi automatic firearms, these being the firearms with direct military application. This view is supported by the recent Pacific experience. The firearms of primary concern in the Pacific are those of military application that have originated from state stockpiles.



# Lee Rhiannon and firearms legislation: enough said?

by Samara McPhedran

**Station:** 2SM  
**Date:** 01/04/2005  
**Time:** 09:11am  
**Item:** NSW Greens MP Lee Rhiannon has called for an inquiry into gun ownership in NSW following a recent triple murder-suicide in the Hunter Valley.

**Interviewee:** Lee Rhiannon, NSW Greens MP

**Compere:** The Greens are calling for tougher gun laws to be implemented in New South Wales. The alternative party says a reform on firearm laws should be an urgent priority following a recent spate of murders involving illegal guns. *[Author's note: the compere clearly recognised that the majority of firearms used in homicides were illegally held.]* We do have New South Wales Greens MP Lee Rhiannon on the line. Good morning, Lee.

**Rhiannon:** Good morning, Grant.

**Compere:** You say in 2003 the state saw 23 murders and 25 attempted murders involving guns?

**Rhiannon:** Yes, they are the figures from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics *[Author's note: this is yet to be confirmed]* and the Greens are calling for there to be an inquiry following the Maitland tragic murder-suicide. We believe a full inquiry is needed into its current laws governing firearm suspension and apprehended violence orders are being enforced. And then we need to look at the wider issue of the gun laws in New South Wales and if they are adequate.

**Compere:** Yeah, the gun buy-back scheme was deemed a fairly big success, would you agree with that?

**Rhiannon:** Yes, there's certainly been some very positive measures in making our community safer. After the Port Arthur tragedy there was the important laws and they were uniform around the country...

**Compere:** It was a big financial success for some of my relatives who had dirty old beaten-up guns that they couldn't use any more; they got three hundred bucks for them so they were laughing.

**Rhiannon:** *[Laughs]* Right, but I think we now realise that that was a successful move on the part of state and territory governments around the country. But one of the loopholes that has been a flow-on from that tightening up of the laws is that while we banned semi-automatic longarms we didn't ban semi-automatic pistols. And that's a huge loophole in this - well, it's contributing to so many of the deaths, murders, suicides that are occurring.

**Compere:** Yeah. Lee, correct me if I'm wrong but guns aren't made in Australia, are they?

**Rhiannon:** I don't think - I think there used to be a place in Tasmania that used to make them, I've heard that it's gone out of operation, but certainly the majority of them - if not all - are imported from overseas. *[Author's note: why does Ms Rhiannon not discuss the issue of smuggling, given the recognition that firearms are imported?]*

**Compere:** Yeah, from what I understand it's a lot harder to buy a gun these days but people can still buy one for various reasons.

**Rhiannon:** Oh yes, absolutely, and as this situation in Maitland showed they actually had more than one gun in the house. Well, the Greens ask: is that necessary? Like, we're not saying you get rid of all guns but we have to tighten up on their availability.

**Compere:** Yeah. Guns have to be there for property owners, got to get rid of pests and keep them at bay that's for sure. But how do you differenti-

ate those from property owners to people who live in the city, for instance? I mean why would you need a gun living in the city?

**Rhiannon:** Well, why do you need a gun living in the city, the Greens would argue you don't. And particularly as we have, you know, this huge urban sprawl where many of much of our country areas have now - are more built-up - I think we need to look at the availability of guns in some regional and rural areas. Again the Greens aren't saying - because we're often accused of this - that we're trying to get rid of all guns.

**Compere:** Yes, I know, and I've heard that sweeping statement before and I know it not to be true.

**Rhiannon:** Yes, absolutely. But as a society we came to grips with it after the Port Arthur Massacre, let's hope we don't need another massacre to make us tighten up with semi-automatic shortarms, let's learn from this latest tragedy.

**Compere:** Yes. Okay. Of those 23 murders and 25 attempted murders involving guns, were they registered guns or were they guns that were illegally obtained?

**Rhiannon:** Good question, I'll have to check on that. My understanding is that they are - that these are legally acquired weapons, legally owned weapons, but I will confirm that. I do need to check on that.

**Compere:** Yeah. I mean you can have all the gun buy-back schemes you like but at the end of the day if people don't want to surrender their gun they won't, will they?

**Rhiannon:** Um, well that's often - the gun lobby uses that argument against the Greens saying they're responsible gun owners and we can't do anything about the criminals. But the figures actually show that the majority - most of the gun abuse in our society occurs in domestic situations. And like we all lose our temper at times and if there's a gun handy, if it's under the bed, on top of the cupboard, in the boot of the car, it can be more readily used and people regret it afterwards.

**Compere:** Yeah, I have trouble keeping my wife away from the knife drawer let alone having a gun in the house. That's something I've never wanted to do, to tell the truth. I mean I've fired guns in the past, shooting kangaroos; I'm not sure I enjoyed it all that much but I know that the farmers have to use it because kangaroos for instance are a pest, and there are other pests around so they have to do it, they have to have those guns.

**Rhiannon:** And the laws - and I certainly acknowledge there has been a gradual tightening up of the laws and it's much harder for the guns - you know, in most cases, the guns shouldn't be just lying around. But as we've seen again with this Maitland situation where four people - we've lost four people - that's happened because they were too readily available.

**Compere:** Very simple, isn't it, we'll get some calls on that. Thank you.

**Rhiannon:** Thank you.

Following a much publicised triple murder-suicide in New South Wales, NSW Greens MP Lee Rhiannon attempted to exploit the situation to further her ongoing opposition to private firearm ownership. This time with yet another call for a ban on all semi-automatic handguns.

The transcript on page 6 is from an interview on Sydney radio station 2SM in April 2005. During this interview Ms Rhiannon demonstrated disturbing ignorance of crucial statistics and current legislation regulating firearm ownership. The most notable misunderstandings and errors concern registration statistics, handgun use in suicide, community safety and current legislation.

**Registration statistics**

*“...these are legally acquired weapons, legally owned weapons...”*

Ms Rhiannon appears to be under the impression that the majority of firearms used in homicides were legally held. Statistics released by the Australian Institute of Criminology in three consecutive National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) Annual Reports demonstrate unequivocally that the bulk of firearms used in homicides in the periods 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 were not registered and that the majority of offenders were not licensed (see Figures 1a, 1b and 1c).

Unfortunately, Ms Rhiannon compounded her initial error via a media

release stating that “85 per cent of illegal handguns on the streets are stolen from licensed owners”. Based upon AIC registration status data, Ms Rhiannon’s release contradicts the available evidence. Ms Rhiannon’s website contains more than 20 press releases demanding tighter legislation and bans on semi-automatic handguns. Given such concern, it is unclear why Ms Rhiannon is not well acquainted with the relevant statistics, and constantly provides misleading material.

Theft from legitimate owners is an ongoing concern. Following the introduction of Safe Storage laws, however, firearms theft from private owners has fallen markedly<sup>1</sup> - testimony to the impact a piece of straightforward legislation can have on preventing criminal acquisition of firearms. Since the majority of firearms used in homicides are unregistered, the implication is that acquisition methods such as illicit import are the issue of primary urgency.

**Community safety and firearms**

*“...there’s certainly been some very positive measures in making our community safer”.*

The definition of ‘successful’ firearm legislation must be clearly stipulated. If success refers to a decrease in firearm homicides, for example, then examination of long-term trends shows that firearm homicides were declining well before the 1996 legislative changes (see Figure 2).

If the ‘success’ of legislation is defined as a contribution to public safety indexed by a decline in homicides and violent crime overall, then Ms Rhi-

**Figure 1a**  
Licence and registration status of firearms used in homicide 2000-2001

	Victims		Offenders			
	Licensed	Registered	Licensed	Registered	Unlicensed	Unregistered
New South Wales	0	0	4	2	24	26
Victoria	1	0	0	0	10	10
Queensland	1	0	5	3	5	7
Western Australia	0	0	0	0	2	2
South Australia	1	1	0	0	13	13
Tasmania	0	0	1	1	2	2
Northern Territory	0	0	0	0	2	2
Australia	3	1	10	6	58	62
Total n <sup>(a)</sup>	69	69	68	68	68	68
Total %	4.4	1.5	14.7	8.8	85.3	91.2

(a) Excludes one offender who was exempt from the requirement to possess a firearms licence due to his occupation (police officer).  
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, extracted from NMHP 2000-2001 (computer file)

**Figure 1b**  
Licence and registration status of firearms used in homicide 2001-2002

	Victims		Offenders			
	Licensed	Registered	Licensed	Registered	Unlicensed	Unregistered
New South Wales	0	0	2	1	21	22
Victoria	0	0	2	2	10	10
Queensland	1	1	0	0	3	3
Western Australia	0	0	1	1	5	5
South Australia	0	0	0	0	2	2
Tasmania	0	0	0	0	1	1
Northern Territory	0	0	0	0	1	1
Australia	1	1	5	4	43	44
Total n	52	52	48	48	48	48
Total %	1.9	1.9	10.4	8.3	89.6	91.7

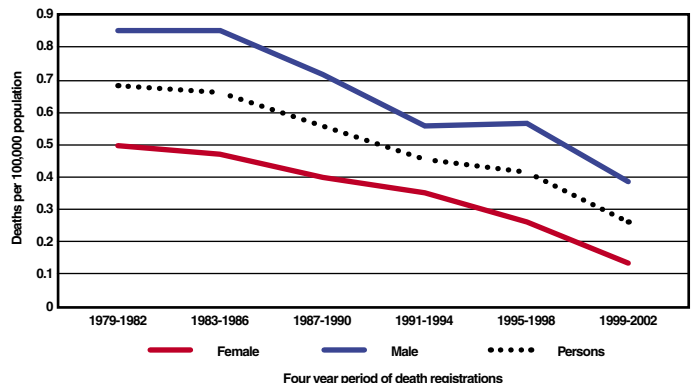
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, extracted from NMHP 2001-2002 (computer file)

**Figure 1c**  
Licence and registration status of firearms used in homicide 2002-2003

	Victims		Offenders			
	Licensed	Registered	Licensed	Registered	Unlicensed	Unregistered
New South Wales	1	1	3	3	15	15
Victoria	0	0	2	1	3	4
Queensland	0	0	1	1	11	11
Western Australia	0	0	0	0	1	1
South Australia	0	0	1	1	6	6
Tasmania	0	0	0	0	1	1
Australian Capital Territory	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Territory	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	1	1	7	6	37	38
Total n	53	53	44	44	44	44
Total %	2	2	16	14	84	86

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, extracted from NMHP 2002-2003 (computer file)

**Figure 2**  
Firearm related homicide, 1979-2002



Source: Kriesfeld, R 2005, ‘Firearm Deaths and Hospitalisations in Australia’. National Injury Surveillance Unit Briefing.

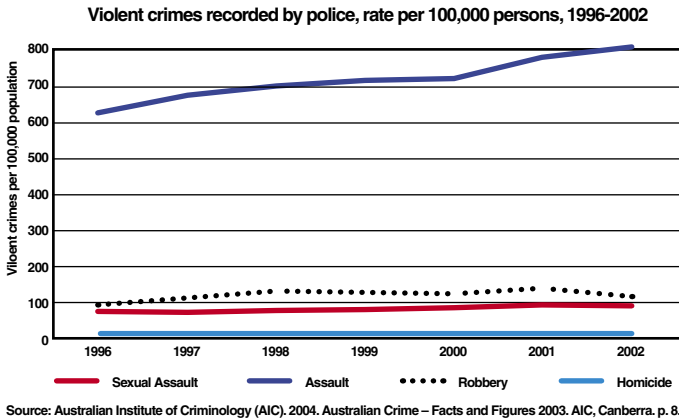
annon is also mistaken in her assertion that positive community safety outcomes have emerged. Rates of assault have risen steadily since 1996, while homicide rates overall have remained relatively stable. Also, the use of knives in homicides has increased.

In 2002, for example, knives were used in 35% of homicides, with physical force used in 25%, and firearms in 14% of homicides.<sup>2</sup> Knives are the most-frequently used weapon in armed robberies.<sup>3</sup> Assaults characteristically involve physical force, a knife, or some ‘other’ weapon.<sup>4</sup> The figures vary between states and fluctuate from year to year but, overall, Australia has not become a safer place as a result of firearm legislation. It is, therefore, difficult to understand the basis for Ms Rhiannon’s assertion that community safety has improved as a result of the 1996 National Firearms Agreement and its associated buy-back scheme (see Figure 3).

**Firearm deaths and handguns**

*“...it’s contributing to so many of the deaths, murders, suicides that are occurring”.*

Figure 3



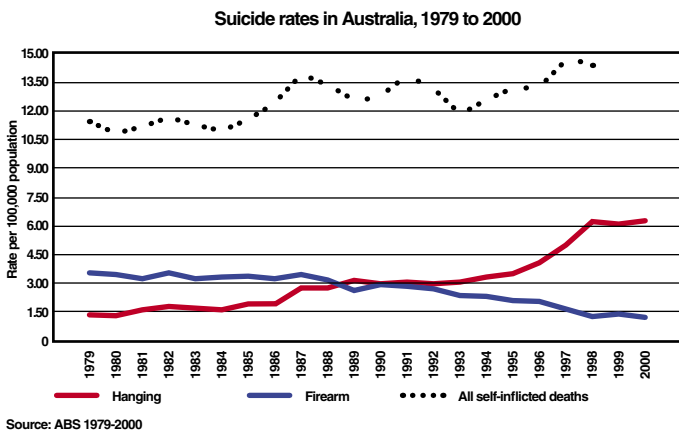
In terms of relative contribution to firearm-related deaths in the period 1979-2002, suicides accounted for 77% of all firearm-related deaths, with homicide representing 15%, accidents 6% and legal intervention 2%.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Yet, firearm suicides account for a very small percentage of suicides overall. Nonetheless, given that the majority of firearm-related deaths are suicides, it is important to assess the possible impact of legislation upon overall suicide rates in Australia to determine whether or not Ms Rhiannon can justify her claim of improved public safety.

In the US, for instance, handgun restrictions were associated with a decline in suicide rates overall. The areas where handgun restrictions were enacted, however, were also areas where the leading suicide method was handgun use, and where young males committing suicide with a handgun were the leading 'demographic' group in terms of suicide numbers.

In Australia, the situation is extremely different to the US. The leading Australian suicide method has, for many years, been asphyxiation (hanging, strangulation, suffocation). This method contributed substantially to a peak in suicide rates in the late 1990s, and in 2003 accounted for 45% of all suicides. In the same year, poisoning accounted for 31%, 'other' methods for 14%, and firearms (of all types) for 9% of all suicides.<sup>8</sup>

Using ABS data, the graph below shows the rates of firearm versus hanging suicides in Australia from 1979 to 2000. The ongoing decline in firearm suicides did not translate into a decline in overall suicide rates (see Figure 4).

Figure 4



Although the frequency of handgun use in suicide in Australia is extremely low, a slight increase was recorded over the period 1991-2001 - from 6% to 13% of all firearm suicides. However, handguns remain one of the least-used suicide methods in Australia, and it has been noted that "...the incomplete nature of data on type of firearm used for suicides and in accidents means definitive conclusions cannot be drawn on whether there has also been an increase in handgun use in these types of deaths. However, the available data suggest a trend towards a greater use of handguns in suicide and accidental deaths. To place this in perspective, it is important to note that in Australia handguns are one of the firearms least likely to be used to commit suicide or be involved in an accidental discharge resulting in death."

(Source: Mouzos, J & Rushforth, C 2003, 'Firearm Related Deaths in Australia - 1991-2001', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 269, p.5.)

Ms Rhiannon appears to believe that handguns feature in many Australian suicides, thus implying that further firearm restrictions will reduce suicide rates overall. However, since existing firearm restrictions did not produce a significant decline in overall suicide rates, it is doubtful that further legislation could achieve overall public health benefits. Based on the relative infrequency of handgun use in suicide, and taking into account issues of method substitution and demographics, the available evidence suggests that suicide prevention efforts emphasising early intervention and warning sign recognition are the most promising ways to tackle Australia's suicide rate.

Firearm homicides have been declining since the late 1960s. In terms of handgun homicides, in 2001/02 handguns were used in 29 homicides. This equates to 56% of the 52 firearm homicides. Firearm homicides, in turn, accounted for 14% of homicides overall.<sup>9</sup> In 2002-2003, handguns were again used in 29 homicides - 55% of the 53 firearm homicides recorded. In 2002/03, firearms (in general) accounted for 16% of overall homicides.<sup>10</sup>

The occurrence of homicide in Australia is infrequent, and it has been pointed out that -

"It is imperative that yearly fluctuations and the frequency of rare events are not misconstrued, but are examined in the wider context of long-term homicide patterns. It is through the systematic long-term monitoring of homicide in Australia that it is possible to make the observation that, while the number of homicides varies from year to year, both the occurrence and the dynamics of homicide in Australia have remained relatively stable over the past 14 years."

(Source: Mouzos, J & Segrave, M 2004, 'Homicide in Australia: National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) Annual Report 2002-2003', Australian Institute of Criminology, *Research and Public Policy Series*, 55, p.2.)

When referenced to appropriate contextualising information and examined over time, handguns and firearms account for a relatively small percentage of all Australian homicides. It is, therefore, difficult to understand how Ms Rhiannon conceptualises handguns as contributing to a substantial proportion of homicides overall.

**Guns under the bed?**

"...we all lose our temper at times and if there's a gun handy, if it's under the bed, on top of the cupboard, in the boot of the car, it can be more readily used and people regret it afterwards".

Unfortunately, it appears that Ms Rhiannon may be unfamiliar with laws governing the safe storage of firearms in an approved receptacle. Interestingly, Ms Rhiannon alluded to safe storage by saying "...you know in most cases the guns shouldn't be just lying around". This contrasts with her apparent



belief that firearms are likely to be “under the bed” and may indicate that Ms Rhiannon simply preferred not to acknowledge safe storage requirements and the time expended by police in conducting compliance inspections. So, it is possible that Ms Rhiannon is familiar with safe storage requirements but believes that even under lock and key, firearms remain “too readily available”. The endpoint of this argument is that the only way to ensure that firearms are not “readily available” would be to remove all firearms from private owners. This would, by implication, equate to an outright ban - which Ms Rhiannon stated is not the intention of the Greens. Her comments, therefore, are contradictory and indicate significant confusion.

### Urban firearm ownership

*“Well, why do you need a gun living in the city, the Greens would argue you don’t.”*

An analogy is useful in understanding the fallacy of this argument. Using Ms Rhiannon’s reasoning, one could also argue that people in cities do not ‘need’ hiking boots, mountain bikes, or skiing equipment. To state that city dwellers do not ‘need’ firearms casts the matter in terms irrelevant to the wider debate, and overlooks the legitimacy of the many legally recognised ‘genuine reasons’ for firearm ownership.

Again, it appears Ms Rhiannon misunderstood current legislation. Alternatively, ideological opposition to a genuine reason - dislike of hunting, for example - does not justify overlooking the fact that many urban dwellers enjoy hunting trips far from cities, or participate in shooting sports within approved facilities close to urban areas.

It seems, therefore, that Ms Rhiannon may have confused issues of legitimate ownership by urban dwellers with figures pertaining to firearm crime within urban areas. This is particularly relevant for NSW, given the concentration of handgun misuse in ‘crime hotspots’. Urban crime in NSW is discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this edition of *ASJ*, and should again be interpreted in conjunction with statistics concerning the licensing and registration status of firearms.

### Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) vs. general firearm legislation

*“We believe a full inquiry is needed into its current laws governing firearm suspension and apprehended violence orders are being enforced. And then we need to look at the wider issue of the gun laws in New South Wales and if they are adequate.”*

Unfortunately, Ms Rhiannon confused ‘high risk’ and ‘low risk’ populations. Discussion of firearms and AVOs relates to a ‘high risk’ group. Regarding this matter, the importance of ensuring adequate firearm control measures relating to persons involved in domestic violence situations represents an appropriate and commonsense approach towards preventing potential firearm misuse between intimate partners.

However, Ms Rhiannon’s comments relating to the ‘wider issue’ of NSW firearm legislation are an extrapolation from the principles of managing ‘high risk’ situations to all cases of firearm ownership. This error of logic implies that all firearm owners are a ‘high risk’ population. Such a belief is simply not supported by objective information. Indeed, based upon trends in violent crime and homicide rates following 1996, regulating a ‘low risk’ group is unlikely to produce overall public safety benefits.

### Women and firearms

*“But the figures actually show that the majority - most of the gun abuse in our*

*society occurs in domestic situations.”*

The majority of instances of firearm misuse are suicides, and most suicides - irrespective of the method used - occur in the home. It appears, however, that Ms Rhiannon may have misunderstood figures about the *location* of death as indicating that the majority of firearm misuse occurs in ‘domestic situations’ (implying an ongoing interpersonal situation). Males consistently account for the bulk of firearm-related deaths - both suicides and homicides. Homicide between intimate partners represents a small percentage of all firearm-related deaths and, in turn, strongly relates to the management of ‘high risk’ situations. While it is understandable that the designation of ‘home’ could be misinterpreted as a ‘domestic situation’, stating that the majority of firearm abuse occurs in domestic situations, is a substantial deviation from the available statistics.

Similarly, it is possible that Ms Rhiannon misunderstood the issue of firearm legislation as it relates to the overall safety of women in Australia. The incidence of sexual assault continued to increase after 1996. Around 98% of sexual assaults do not involve the use of a weapon, and in cases where a weapon is present it is likely to be a knife.<sup>11</sup> Physical force is the primary means used to carry out sexual assault. In domestic situations, physical force again accounts for the majority of violence against women. It is extremely difficult, therefore, to argue that firearm legislation has improved the overall safety of women in Australia.

### Summary and conclusions

Ms Rhiannon’s statements are not supported by data. Given that Ms Rhiannon has demonstrated unfamiliarity with reputable statistics, and lack of knowledge regarding current legislation, her demands for further legislation are not evidence based.

The available statistics show that the majority of firearms used in homicides are unregistered firearms, rather than legitimately held by licensed owners. Australia does not manufacture firearms - as Ms Rhiannon acknowledged - and smuggling is an issue of major concern. The leading suicide method in Australia is hanging, and existing firearm legislation did not impact significantly upon overall suicide rates.

Despite all evidence to the contrary, Ms Rhiannon appears to blame legitimate firearm owners for crime, theft as a major supply source for criminals, and firearms for suicide rates. It is of particular concern that personal beliefs may form the basis for calls to implement costly law and order measures, especially when such measures have negligible likelihood of reducing violent crime, homicide and suicide. A more socially responsible and informed approach to policy development would be desirable for the future. ●

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Mouzos, J 2002, ‘Firearms Theft in Australia’, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, 230.
- <sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) 2004, ‘Australian Crime - Facts and Figures 2003’, AIC, Canberra.
- <sup>3</sup> Borzycki, M, Sakurai, Y, & Mouzos, J 2004, ‘Armed Robbery in Australia: 2003 National Armed Robbery Monitoring Program Annual Report’, AIC, Canberra.
- <sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004, ‘Recorded Crime - Victims Australia 2003’, Cat. No. 4510.0. ABS, Canberra.
- <sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1997, ‘Firearms Deaths Australia’, Cat. No. 4397.0. ABS, Canberra.
- <sup>6</sup> Mouzos, J & Rushforth, C 2003, ‘Firearm Related Deaths in Australia 1991-2001’, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, 269.
- <sup>7</sup> Kriesfeld, R 2005, ‘Firearm Deaths and Hospitalisations in Australia’, National Injury Surveillance Unit Briefing, National Injury Surveillance Unit (NISU).
- <sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004, ‘Suicides: Recent Trends, Australia’, Cat. No. 3309.0.55.001. ABS, Canberra.
- <sup>9</sup> Mouzos, J 2003, ‘Homicide in Australia: National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) Annual Report 2001-2002’, Australian Institute of Criminology, *Research and Public Policy Series*, 46.
- <sup>10</sup> Mouzos, J, & Segrave, M 2004, ‘Homicide in Australia: National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) Annual Report 2002-2003’, Australian Institute of Criminology, *Research and Public Policy Series*, 55, p.2.
- <sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004, ‘Recorded Crime - Victims Australia 2003’, Cat. No. 4510.0. ABS, Canberra.



# New South Wales: handguns, hotspots

by Samara McPhedran

There's an old saying that if you repeat a lie often and loud enough, people will begin to accept it as truth. A so-called 'spate' of handgun homicides in Sydney has led to predictable calls for national handgun bans and further restrictions on licensed firearm owners.

Gun prohibitionists have done their best to scare the public into believing that handgun shootings are a frequent, Australia-wide phenomenon with no relationship to any social or related problems, and that a purely 'law and order' approach - namely, banning handguns - will have a significant impact on reducing serious crimes. Is any of this true, or simply a series of loudly repeated lies?

In such a debate, there are three questions to consider:

1. Is handgun crime equally distributed throughout Australia or concentrated in particular regions?
2. Is there evidence for a relationship between handgun crime and social problems?
3. Are there indicators that handgun misuse is specific to a particular demographic group, or are all ages and sexes equally likely to misuse handguns?

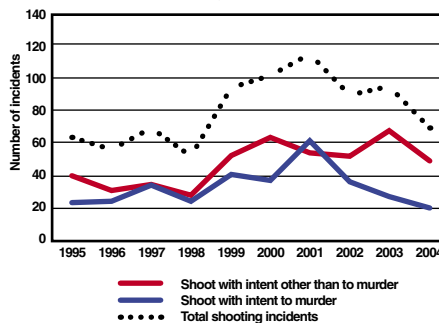
The first question is relatively simple to address. Handgun shootings are not evenly dis-

tributed Australia-wide. They are primarily concentrated in New South Wales. In 2002/2003, for example, 16 out of 29 handgun homicides occurred in NSW. Although the data presented below (Figure 1) deals with handgun homicides rather than handgun abuse in all violent crimes, the statistics nonetheless provide strong evidence that handgun abuse is geographically specific.

Reproduced from: Mouzos, J, & Segrave, M 2004, 'Homicide in Australia: National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) Annual Report 2002-2003', Australian Institute of Criminology, *Research and Public Policy Series*, 55.

Within New South Wales, shooting incidents overall (involving all types of firearms) peaked in 2001 (see Figure 2). It is important to note that the handgun buy-back did not begin until 2003, by which time shooting incidents were already declining.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the years 2000 and 2001 had

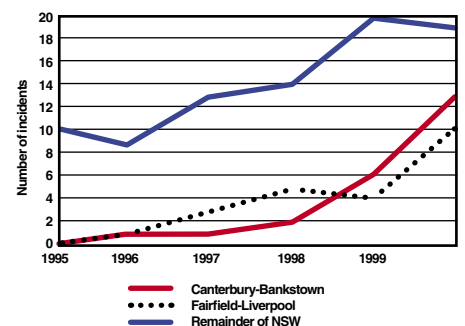
**Figure 2**  
New South Wales shooting incidents 1995-2004



Bankstown.

In the year 2000, 55% of all NSW shooting incidents occurred in those two regions.<sup>3</sup> It has also been noted that those regions have experienced significant problems with drug trafficking, and that the typical handgun offender is likely to be a male in the 18 to 19 age bracket.<sup>4</sup> Although there is no direct evidence linking these factors, the strong implication is that handgun misuse generally occurs in the context of urban drug-related activity among young adult males. It is

**Figure 3**  
Trends in shootings with handguns, Fairfield-Liverpool, Canterbury-Bankstown, Remainder of NSW, 1995-2000



equally important to note that after the year 2001, there has not been any upwards trend in shootings in NSW, or in those specific areas.

Reproduced from: Fitzgerald, J, Briscoe, S, & Weatherburn, D 2001, 'Firearms and Violent Crime in New South Wales', *Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, 57, p.4-5.

One of the great scare tactics used by prohibitionists is to promote the view that Australia will 'end up like the US', and to ignore the numerous social, economic and legislative differences between the two countries. The one legitimate parallel between Australia and the US, however, is invariably overlooked. In the US, handgun abuse is most common among young, socially disadvantaged males in urban areas, with associated drug-related activity. In the US, this complex network has been recognised, and steps are being taken to address the causal factors contributing to handgun abuse.

**Figure 1**  
Percentage and number of victims killed with handguns versus other firearms

State/Territory	Percentage (%)		Number	
	Handgun	Other firearm	Handgun	Other firearm
NSW	15	8	16	8
Vic	9	4	6	3
QLD	6	11	4	11
WA	3	0	1	0
SA	9	18	2	4
Tas	0	17	0	1
ACT	0	0	0	0
NT	0	0	0	0
Australia	9	7	29	24

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, NHMP 2002-2003 (computer file)

higher-than-usual rates of violent crime across the board. The decreases in certain types of offences since that time have been attributed primarily to a heroin shortage beginning late in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

Reproduced from: New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) 2005, *NSW Shooting Incidents 1995-2004*.

The question of whether handgun crime is associated with social and other problems can be partially addressed. Research suggests that handgun misuse is most common in two Sydney subdivisions - Fairfield-Liverpool and Canterbury-

## FISHING ALSO UNDER THE HAMMER

I refer to the letter 'Duck hunting vs. fishing' in the *May Australian Shooter*. The animal righters and their radical mates are not content with having duck hunts outlawed, because banning fishing is also on their agenda. In fact their inroads into the minds of our legislators are already placing considerable pressure on recreational fishing. If any example of this situation is needed, then a deep look into the Representative Areas Program fostered by The Great Barrier Reef Marine Parks Authority, and endorsed by our polities, should suffice. The excuse to close off 30 per cent of the park to fishing doesn't wash, and the close relationship the Authority has with these radicals only adds to the doubt.

As one who has been actively involved in recreational fishing for most of my 66 years, I have real concerns that once the wowsers have killed off duck hunting, their full focus will be on trying to ban fishing. To get an idea check out the web site [www.nofishing.com](http://www.nofishing.com) and any others endorsed by animal righters and their supporters. Contrary to the comments of your letter writer, fishing isn't all that safe after all.

Don Porter, via email

## AN AMAZING THING...

In these days of over-regulation and stonewalling, I would like to express my gratitude to two members of the Licensing Services Branch here in Melbourne. I am in the military and was posted out of Victoria for two years and was returned to Melbourne at the beginning of this year. Of course when I left Melbourne for Darwin I was required to go through the process of getting an NT licence for my handguns. There was no such thing as national gun laws at that time, and I was forced to go through the time-consuming process as if I were a new shooter. It was helped by the NT laws at that time which allowed for an easier transition, but it was certainly not as simple as changing my driver's licence. Of course while I was away the laws were changed but, despite the rhetoric, 'national' laws do not exist and I was faced with having to reapply for my licence from scratch including probation, application fees and confiscation of my firearms.

Vanessa and Nicola from the Licensing Services Branch listened to my situation and were quickly able to realise that, although my situation is apparently rare, I am not a criminal or a novice and they were able to smooth and minimise my transition back to a Victorian licence. Of course there were still fees to be paid and paperwork to be completed, but these fine people assisted me and removed all obstacles that were unreasonable. Thank you Vanessa and Nicola, and should I ever get the opportunity I shall shout you a drink in the best Aussie tradition.

Gideon Rann, Vic

## PROMOTE OUR SPORT

In the May 2005 *Shooter* Letters to the Editor I read Mr Trevor Barnes' letter and your reply. This is what I have done over the last year or two:

1. I did not hand in my licence
2. I added to my licence both H and Collector
3. I subscribed to a number of hunting and shooting magazines
4. I purchased a rifle
5. I purchased cleaning gear, ammo and so on from different gunshops in Sydney
6. I talked to people to try to get them interested in shooting as a sport
7. I joined shooting clubs

I would like to have the spare money to buy new equipment every week, but that is not the case. But where I can, I support and promote my sport, because if I (and all of us) don't, the anti-gun lobby and the Government will take our sport away.

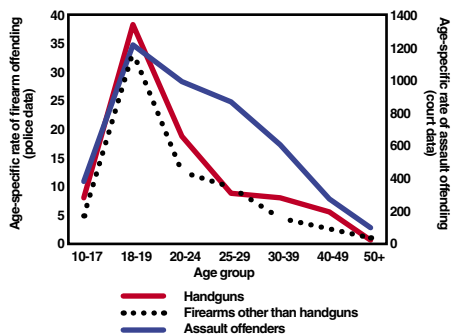
K B Dobinson, NSW

Police investigate a drive-by shooting at the Norton Hotel, Leichart, August 29, 2003. Photo by Bill Hearne, Newspix.

Although there are gaps in knowledge, it is impossible to argue that handgun misuse in Australia is occurring in a vacuum. Handgun abuse is just one aspect of wider social prob-

Figure 4

Age-specific rate of offending per 100,000 population of male alleged offenders in firearm incidents, 2000<sup>1</sup>, and males convicted of assaults, 1999<sup>2</sup>, NSW



lems facing specific geographical regions, such as the south-western areas of Sydney. Consequently, any approach to curbing handgun abuse in those regions must take social factors, economic and employment trends, and wider crime patterns into account. Ultimately, it is highly unlikely that further restrictions on legitimate owners will prevent the acquisition of firearms by young men involved in ongoing criminal activity in urban crime 'hotspots'. A comprehensive social strategy with carefully targeted legislative and policing initiatives is far more likely to produce favourable outcomes. This approach will be much more effective than a loudly repeated lie. ●

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR). 2005. NSW Shooting Incidents 1995-2004.

<sup>2</sup> Weatherburn, D 2004. Media release - Recorded Crime New South Wales 2003. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzgerald, J, Briscoe, S, & Weatherburn, D 2001. Firearms and Violent Crime in New South Wales. Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.





# Hunters and

There has been a lot of community debate about the relevance of hunting in modern western society. Where the discussion becomes polarised, this debate becomes emotional, with claims that hunting either equates to violent, outdated, Neanderthal behaviour, or that it satisfies a deep-seated evolutionary need, uniting the human species with nature. Deciding whether to hunt or not is a personal moral issue and, far from being the easiest aspect of human-animal interaction about which to make a judgement, is one of the most difficult.

The reality is, however, that hunting means many things to different people, but whether you support it or not, participate in it as a recreation or management strategy or not, it is a legitimate part of land management and the conservation of wild habitat. Unfortunately, in modern westernised societies, the role of the hunter as both land manager and protector of natural ecosystems is deliberately overlooked or mistakenly ignored.

Hunters were among the first community groups to argue for the habitat protection required for the conservation of wild species. As the first naturalists, hunters understood the need for large-scale preservation of ecosystems, not just single species or tiny, fragmented parcels of land. Hunters saw, and still see, the bigger picture. It is, and was, hunting that provides the means for the conservation of species, which would otherwise have become victims of uncontrolled poaching and of the loss of their habitat.

Animal rights extremists are only just beginning to acknowledge, because it is politically expedient to do so, that species extinction was not caused by hunting or hunters but by large-scale commercial enterprises (such as the Passenger Pigeon in the Americas), political decisions (moral or immoral, such as the destruction of the buffalo to decimate American Indian Tribes) and from habitat fragmentation and degradation caused by expanding human settlement and the agriculture required to support this settlement. All the causes of species extinction were, and are, well understood by the hunter prior to ecologists embracing the principles of ecosys-

tem management or habitat fragmentation, and certainly well before animal rights extremists began to think that protecting wetlands was 'sexy'.<sup>1</sup>

As an aside (and food for thought), in the Natural History Museum, in Paris, they have an 'extinction room'. It is an exceedingly large hall filled with taxidermy samples of just about every mammal that has become extinct in the past 150 years. Australia, to our shame, has been accorded pride of place. It is pointed out in explicit terms that we have had more animals become extinct in the last two centuries than any other country in the world. Possible recordkeeping inaccuracies aside, when one thinks of how many people pass through that museum each year, Australia is not winning any friends with our record on conservation.

A cursory examination of the recent history of westernised societies indicates that, as far back as the 11th century, England's hunters were moving to create large reserves capable of sustaining species by conserving not only the immediate needs of a particular species, but also all other species that inhabited the same environment. Agreed, William the Conqueror did not create the New Forest for the good of all of England, but rather for the good of a few elitists. However, it was evident that observations made as a hunter cemented recognition of the need to conserve wild habitat with minimum human management in order to conserve healthy populations of game species. It was through the intervention of the US President, Theodore Roosevelt (a keen and enthusiastic hunter), that one of the most well-known and loved National Parks, Yellowstone, was created for the enjoyment of all future Americans. We certainly could not improve on Theodore Roosevelt's observation that an important principle of conservation is the utilisation of natural resources for the benefit of mankind, nor his definition of conservation as "preservation through wise use". This principle is soundly embraced by the vast majority of our modern wildlife organisations.<sup>2</sup>

Hunters were again among the early advocates of conservation as a specialist scientific discipline. For instance (and this is a relatively-



# wildlife

## advocacy

by Jeanine Baker

Pic by Leon Wright



recent example, given the dedication to the principles of conservation made by game keepers in rural Europe over the centuries, by game wardens in what was, at the time, the Colonies, and by hunter-naturalists in the 18th and 19th centuries), in a shooting journal titled *Game and Gun and the Angler's Monthly* dated March 1936 there is an article written by a gentleman named Theodore Hubback entitled 'Principles of Wildlife Conservation'. In this article he voices the very same concerns that modern ecologists and hunters are still voicing. These are that:

1. careful research on the population dynamics of the species to be conserved must be undertaken by dedicated people with adequate financial support to do so
2. adequate areas such as permanent sanctuaries or refuge for species in their known habitat must be created
3. adequate organisation to administer and protect these areas must be put in place

Most telling was Mr Hubback's observation that "unfortunately, it is a fact that those principles of conservation, which it is imperative should be applied to wildlife preservation, are seldom understood by those who have the power to further or retard the measures desired". How many of us have voiced the very same comment, be it in different and more frustrated wording?

It is an intrinsic part of the moral framework voiced by hunters that it is important they be skilled naturalists. In all conversations I have had with hunters the drive to understand wildlife, and the habitats in which they live, form an overriding and intrinsic principle of hunting. This does not detract from another, obviously important moral principle voiced by all hunters: the agreement and commitment that one must be 'a good shot', because it is paramount that the quarry be killed with the absolute minimum of suffering.

Australian hunters are not only outspoken about the ethics required of the hunter, but are also aware of the many Codes of Animal Practices regulating hunting within Australia.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that, like previous generations, conservation and sustainable use of

wildlife is the central tenet and concern of the modern hunter. The hunter of today also follows other important principles of previous generations - these being both the duty and the joy in sharing something special by making every effort to introduce future generations to the wonder of the natural environment, teaching them appreciation, understanding and the need for strong conservation ethics.

In closing, I return to the words of Theodore Hubback, hunter and naturalist, who, in 1936, wrote "You can replace trees; you can sustain domestic animals by private breeding; but wildlife must have an environment of its own in which to thrive and increase in a natural and normal fashion." However, in today's modern world, where wild places are few and far between, and where many of the large natural predators that once maintained healthy wild populations because they too could hunt, no longer exist because they cannot survive in the small fragments of natural habitat we have left or alongside human settlements. I also have to add that the only way to conserve wild places is to use them wisely. This includes incorporating hunting as a land management and conservation tool. As hunters, we must continue to take on the role of advocates for wildlife and its sustainable use. The price to pay if hunters fail to set aside the emotive polarisation urged by animal rights extremists and fail to embrace our hunting heritage, together with its moral code as wildlife advocates, will be the continued disappearance of species after species. ●

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Geoff Russell, Animal Liberation "it has now become, dare I say it, a sexy activity" ABC Radio Interview, January 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> Resolution 1.39 Sustainable Use Initiative adopted by the First Session of the World Conservation Congress; Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Ramsar, Iran (1971); The 7th Conference of Contracting Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2004)
- <sup>3</sup> These are for the most part State Acts and Regulations or Federal Codes. For example: Acts relating to Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, The Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Health Committee Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals, The Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos.



# Churchill... Trust

by Samara McPhedran

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust was established in Australia in 1965 with the aim of funding travel-oriented research designed to contribute positively to the community. The Churchill Trust is a respected institution directed by eminent Australian citizens, and has funded a broad spectrum of research projects.

In particular, the Trust funds overseas travel; on average, each Churchill Fellow receives \$20,000 to cover travel-related expenses such as airfare and accommodation. In return, the Trust requires that: "The applicant agrees to actively promote the knowledge of the aims and ideals of the Trust and to be as supportive as possible of the Trust before, during and after completion of the Fellowship."

This is a small condition in return for what is provided by the Trust.

In 2003, Samantha Lee of the National Coalition for Gun Control (NCGC) was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to visit the UK, Canada, and the US. The culmination of her research was a report entitled 'Handguns: laws, violence and crime in Australia'. The report can be obtained by emailing [churchilltrust@bigpond.com](mailto:churchilltrust@bigpond.com)

The report was filled with errors, oversight, misunderstandings, and statistical inaccuracies. Two short examples are given at the end of this article. Accordingly, a summary of the major flaws in Ms Lee's report was forwarded to the Churchill Trust, so that the Trust could bring the errors to Ms Lee's attention. The summary is available at: [www.ssaa.org.au/ChurchillReportFinal.pdf](http://www.ssaa.org.au/ChurchillReportFinal.pdf)

The Trust in turn provided written confirmation that they had notified the author about the concerns raised, and had forwarded her

the summary of errors. However, the Trust also revealed that they had no power to do anything beyond notifying the author that errors had been detected; they did not have the authority to insist that the necessary corrections be made.

It would be reasonable to assume that Ms Lee would act honourably and make the necessary corrections before proceeding with media involvement. This did not take place.

The NCGC used the report as the basis for yet another misdirected prohibitionist campaign, with the full knowledge that there were serious inaccuracies in the research they were relying upon and citing. Their claims received national coverage. So too did the SSAA's response. From the far reaches of the Northern Territory through to metropolitan Sydney, the public now know that the NCGC has not provided accurate information.

It is positive that both the media and the public are unwilling to accept at face value statements made by the NCGC. Clearly, careful scrutiny of their claims is every bit as necessary now as it has been in previous years.

However, the downside is that the reputation of the Churchill Trust has been treated with utter disregard by the NCGC. Given ample time and opportunity to rectify the substantial mistakes in her work, Ms Lee's failure to do so and the NCGC's very public actions, reflect poorly on the Churchill Trust. It is saddening that the NCGC knowingly linked the good name of the Trust with inaccurate and misleading research. It is sadder still that this disrespect was what the Trust received in thanks for their considerable financial support.



## Examples of errors in Ms Lee's Churchill Report

### It is stated that:

"The study found that within this period more than 25,000 firearms were stolen with an average of 4,000 firearms annually. Twenty-one per cent of these firearms were handguns." (p.26)

However, the figure of 21% should in fact be 14%. The reference cited with regard to handgun theft reads as follows:

"...it appears that rifles are the most common type of gun stolen in Australia, accounting for just over half of the firearms stolen (52%) (Figure 3). The second most common type of firearm stolen is shotguns (21%). While handguns were the most common type of firearm stolen in the United States, only 14 per cent of firearms stolen in Australia during the six-year period were handguns"

(Mouzos, J 2002, 'Firearms Theft in Australia', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 230, pp.3-4)

### It is further stated that:

"Research has found that the major source for the movement of handguns into the illegal market is via theft" (p.8 and p.26)

However, no evidence is cited to support the applicability of this assertion to the Australian situation. Indeed, both Australian and international research supports the theory of multiple sources of illegal handguns. There is no comment from the author regarding why theft has been selected as the major source of illegal firearms, when evidence suggests a far broader perspective is crucial for understanding illegal handgun supply.


### It is stated in Mouzos (2002), for instance, that:

"In theory, there are three major illegal sources of firearms: theft, smuggling, and illicit manufacturing."

(Mouzos, J 2002, 'Firearms Theft in Australia', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 230, p.1)

See also: Dandurand, Y 1998, *Firearms. Accidental Deaths, Suicides and Violent Crime: An Updated Review of the Literature with Special Reference to the Canadian Situation*, Canadian Firearms Centre, Department of Justice, Ottawa. ●

MEDIA RELEASE



## SPORTING SHOOTERS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

### Gun Report Poses Risk to Health and Safety

The SSAA is concerned with a Tasmanian report, which undermines the importance of suicide-prevention programs and policing initiatives. The report claims that gun laws have created declines in firearm suicides and firearm crime, but it has been revealed that the results were produced by flawed analysis methods.

SSAA National Research Coordinator, Dr Jeanine Baker, explained that "the apparent drops in firearm misuse after legislation occurred purely because averaged 'groups', rather than continuous time series, were analysed. Firearm misuse, whether in suicide or homicide, has been decreasing steadily for decades, but the statistical influence of this decline was overlooked. This has produced very misleading results."

Firearms suicides throughout Australia have declined consistently since the 1980s, but Tasmanian suicide rates, overall, did not decrease following the 1996 National Firearms Agreement. The report also neglected to discuss why, although the number of firearms owned in Tasmania kept increasing after 1996, the firearm suicide rate continued its pre-existing decline.

Dr Baker emphasised that this demonstrates "the complexity of the issues. Suggestions that the laws 'caused' declines in Tasmanian firearm suicides or firearm crime are based on unsuitable, oversimplified analysis methods. Troublingly, whenever legislation is promoted as a solution to suicide or crime, the public miss out. Every dollar misdirected into buyback schemes is a dollar that could have gone towards suicide prevention, health services, or police numbers."

"Sadly, legislation has not made the Tasmanian community safer, and in fact the report admits to a 90% increase in crime since 1994. The research confirms SSAA's long held view that safe storage reduces firearms theft, but that finding provides scant justification for the \$63,000 expended in data collection," said Dr Baker.

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## Ethics, advocacy, and accuracy...or, consistency, thou art a jewel!

If "...advocacy that is ethical must never promote claims that are known to be incorrect"<sup>1</sup>, and if it is claimed that "Handguns have become the weapon of choice for most crime"<sup>2</sup> then, when easily obtained Australian Bureau of Statistics data<sup>3</sup> proves that knives are the weapon of choice (right)...

...using definitions put forward by a staunch anti-gun lobbyist, the National Coalition for Gun Control is engaging in unethical advocacy.

Visit [www.ssaa.org.au](http://www.ssaa.org.au) for a critique of the many errors in Lee's report.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Chapman, S 2001. Advocacy in public health: roles and challenges. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 30, 1226-1232, p.4. [Chapman is a former convenor of the Coalition for Gun Control].

<sup>2</sup> Lee, S 2004. Handguns: laws, violence, and crime in Australia. Churchill Memorial Trust Research Report, p.7. [Lee is the current chair of the National Coalition for Gun Control].

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Recorded Crime - Victims Australia 2003. Cat. No. 4510.0. ABS, Canberra. p.17.

	Murder	Attempted murder	Assault	Sexual assault	Kidnapping/abduction	Robbery
<b>NUMBER</b>						
<b>Weapon used</b>						
Firearm	38	71	657	9	22	1 108
Knife	86	115	5 568	121	61	3 759
Syringe	1	-	154	6	1	361
Other weapon	41	59	12 961	104	18	1 217
Total weapon used (b)	175	266	20 203	247	117	7 162
No weapon used (c)	127	86	138 426	17 990	599	12 557
<b>Total</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>158 629</b>	<b>18 237</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>19 719</b>
<b>PROPORTION (%)</b>						
<b>Weapon used</b>						
Firearm	12.6	20.2	.4	np	3.1	5.6
Knife	28.5	32.7	3.5	0.7	8.5	19.1
Syringe	np	-	0.1	np	np	1.8
Other weapon	13.6	16.8	8.2	0.6	2.5	6.2
Total weapon used (b)	57.9	75.6	12.7	1.4	16.3	36.3
No weapon used (c)	42.1	24.4	87.3	98.6	83.7	63.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# 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

<b>ACT</b> 02 6245 7405 actfirearmsregistry@afp.gov.au www.afp.gov.au	<b>SA</b> 08 8204 2495 sapol.firearmsbranch@police.sa.gov.au www.sapolice.sa.gov.au
<b>NSW</b> 1 300 362 562 (local callers only) interstate callers: 02 6670 8590 firearmsenq@police.nsw.gov.au www.police.nsw.gov.au	<b>TAS</b> 03 6230 2720 firearms@police.tas.gov.au www.police.tas.gov.au
<b>NT</b> 08 8922 3543 pfes.firearms@pfes.nt.gov.au www.nt.gov.au/pfes	<b>VIC</b> 03 9247 3227 licensing@police.vic.gov.au www.police.vic.gov.au
<b>QLD</b> 07 3364 4416 weaponslicensing@police.qld.gov.au www.police.qld.gov.au/pr/default.htm	<b>WA</b> 08 9223 7000 firearms.branch@police.wa.gov.au www.police.wa.gov.au/firearms

# SSAA



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The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc.



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