

Nationals get behind electronic licensing plan



Nadia Isa

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia supports the move to an electronic database

THE NATIONAL PARTY has renewed its focus on an electronic firearms licensing system, standing by Australia's community of more than a million law-abiding firearms owners. Despite having some of the most stringent gun regulations in the world, licensing is currently spread across our states and territories and The Nats have highlighted the fact that inconsistencies across some 30 different registers and databases fuels the illegal gun-trade, tarnishing the reputation of licensed and law-abiding firearms owners.

Recently the Morrison Government announced it is working with states and territories to move from paper-based licensing systems to electronic versions so information can be shared between states and the Commonwealth in real time. Federal Assistant Minister for Community Safety, Jason Wood, said the states and territories have agreed to review their firearm management systems and identify a baseline level of functionality which should be nationally consistent.

Mr Wood, who has been talking with states, territories, the shooting industry (including SSAA) and gun control groups on the plan, said "making sure our firearms systems talk to each other is essential for effective firearms management".

"The Australian community expects that access to firearms is limited to fit and proper people and that relevant information is readily available to those who are making decisions about whether people should have access to firearms," he said. "Gaps in the current system mean criminals could divert legal firearms into the illegal market without immediate detection by law enforcement agencies and this can have grave consequences for public safety."

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia supports the move to an electronic database with the aim of fewer human errors and allowing police resources to be redirected towards detection of criminal misuse of firearms. SSAA National President Geoff Jones said every state should use the same electronic system for firearms licensing records, firearms descriptions and permits to purchase. "This is not a difficult concept to implement," he said. "The only hurdles would be bureaucratic impost for its own sake and parochial division between the states."

Leader of The Nationals in the Senate, Bridget McKenzie, said the technology will also provide hard data to demonstrate to the government and law-enforcement authorities in no uncertain terms what The Nationals already know - guns

used in crime do not originate from licensed firearm owners.

The facts were made abundantly clear in the 2015 Senate inquiry into the Ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community, in which the Greens attempted to connect law-abiding firearm owners with the illicit gun trade. The hypothesis that illegal guns are mainly stolen

from registered gun owners was not supported by any evidence.

Senator McKenzie said the national database must also prioritise the security of personal information. “Many licensed and law-abiding firearm owners have been the subject of multiple breaches of privacy, with their safety and that of their families put at risk by state governments and law enforcement,” she said.

Proposed laws aimed to boost firearms businesses



THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has proposed reforms which aim to reduce the regulatory burden on Australian firearms businesses. The reforms will streamline the import and export requirements for firearms, particularly for Australian Defence and Law Enforcement agencies.

Federal member for Bonner and SSAA member Ross Vasta will co-chair a reforms stakeholder meeting with the Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs, Jason Wood. Mr Vasta said the reforms would also progress the Australian Government’s goal of developing and maintaining a sovereign Defence industry.

“In order to achieve a fully functioning sovereign Defence industry, we need more Australian businesses researching and developing firearms and weapons technology,” Mr Vasta said. “By

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Geoff Jones National President

making a minor adjustment to the regulations we can encourage new businesses as well as allowing existing businesses to diversify, grow and become competitors in the Australian manufacturing industry.”

SSAA National President Geoff Jones said our Association will continue to consult with Government on all firearms matters. “Despite the difficulty of dealing with these issues, our Federal consultation processes have ensured the interests of our SSAA members have been protected,” Mr Jones said. “SSAA is always happy to consult in a process where only legitimate firearms owners have access to firearms.”

The proposed reforms will also include measures to combat those who seek to use firearms unlawfully.

Any excuse to target law-abiding shooters



FIREARMS OWNERS IN VICTORIA have been threatened yet again by Victoria Police. This time the Licensing and Regulation Division emailed Victorian firearms owners to say they will “reprimand, suspend or cancel” licences of registered firearms owners who blatantly and deliberately breach the current directives of the state’s Chief Health Officer.

But what does COVID-19 have to do with firearms? Why target firearm licences as opposed to fishing licences, drivers’ licences or any other professional or recreational licence? SSAA Victoria is already challenging the legal principle of this new policy and the implications it will have for Victorian law. On the face of it this seems like an over-reach from police and, what’s worse, it’s not the first time.

Earlier in the pandemic we had to lobby to have the Queensland Government re-open gun shops after a knee-jerk reaction to close them resulted in dire consequences for the many licenced firearms owners who rely on them. Thankfully, common sense and our lobbying eventually prevailed.

But there’s more. Back in March, firearms were unfairly targeted in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia when those State Governments chose to add additional restrictions on firearm sales for sporting and recreational purposes. On March 31, Victorian police minister Lisa Neville said the measures were to “keep the community safe”, saying there had been a doubling of attempts to access certain firearms and ammunition.

The Association is ready, willing and able to fight unjust treatment of shooters.

But as SSAA National CEO Tim Bannister pointed out: “Again we’ve been made a cheap scapegoat to be kicked in the guts. We of all people are probably the most legally and socially responsible in Australia - we have to be by law.”

So again we’re left wondering what COVID-19 has to do with firearms and firearm licences? “No other segment of society is facing additional punitive measures for breaching current COVID-19 restrictions. Yet again it would appear legally licensed firearms owners are being singled out and being treated unfairly,” said a SSAA Victoria spokesperson. “Why are the same standards and demands not made of Victorians in other sports or recreational pursuits?”

Already some firearms owners have had their licences challenged after receiving fines for breaching Stage 4 COVID-19 restrictions and SSAA Victoria is looking into these cases at this very moment. Don’t get us wrong, we support the directives issued by the Victorian CHO, we’re just baffled by why firearms are constantly being targeted. It seems like an emotional response when all we’ve ever asked for is logical and fact-based policy making.

If you’re a SSAA Victoria member who has lost or been threatened with losing your firearms licence due to breaching COVID-19 restrictions, please contact SSAA Victoria. The Association is ready, willing and able to fight unjust treatment of shooters.

Ferals in focus: SSAA submits to feral cat inquiry



SSAA NATIONAL HAS MADE a submission to The Standing Committee on the Environment for the Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia. The submission referred to a number of matters, including regulatory impediments to effective feral cat control such as the Victorian hunters' inability to legally cull feral cats on public land open to hunting, while they are targeting other species such as wild deer. Among other key points, our submission also suggested that restrictions to the availability and use of suppressors in all states and territories removes access to a tool that could increase the efficiency of current and future volunteer feral cat control operations.