

# National report finds firearms owners safe and responsible

by Nadia Isa



SSAA members have continued to be responsible law-abiding firearms owners and understand the necessity of thorough safety efforts.

THE SPORTING SHOOTERS' ASSOCIATION of Australia has welcomed the release of a Federal Government report into firearm theft in Australia. The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) statistical report has collated data from each state and territory to produce the Firearm theft in Australia 2018 report released this month.

While SSAA was glad to see the release of an evidenced-based report by seasoned author Dr Samantha Bricknell, the Association remains cautious about certain assumptions in the report as well as references to anti-gun lobby group Gun Control Australia. "It's simply outlandish to quote Gun Control Australia in a government report," SSAA National President Geoff Jones said. "They're a lobby group with a targeted agenda - certainly the group has biases which have made their way into the report."

A federal and state operation targeting trafficking and illicit firearms, Operation Athena, commissioned the AIC to examine firearm theft data for 2018 to establish the rate of change of firearm theft in Australia. Dr Bricknell used data from state and territory police on incidents of stolen or lost/mislaid firearms reported be-

tween January 1 and December 31 2018. SSAA was pleased to note Dr Bricknell then discarded reports of lost firearms.

The report found there were 847 incidents of reported firearms theft in 2018 and the distribution of incidents reflected the population size of states and territories. One quarter of incidents were reported in Queensland and Victoria followed by one fifth in both New South Wales and Western Australia.

The number of reported incidents of firearm theft increased by 15 per cent in the 10-year period between 2008-09 and 2018, however SSAA would like to note a parallel increase in Australia's population during this same period according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Similarly, Dr Bricknell stated the national firearm theft rate was almost on par when comparing the two time periods at 3.4 incidents per 100,000 in 2018 and 3.3 incidents per 100,000 in 2008-09. This would discount the claim there has been a significant increase in national firearms theft across the previous decade to 2018.

The proportion of thefts occurring in major cities has decreased substantially, with a cor-

responding increase in theft in inner regional, outer regional and/or remote locations depending on jurisdiction. Data showed most thefts occurred in inner and outer regional areas at 61 per cent of all thefts as well as an increase in outer regional (23 v 34 per cent) and remote (3 v 8 per cent) theft incidents.

However, the report noted the locations of theft incidents were classified by remoteness status using postcode data. Geoff Jones said this method could be flawed, particularly in areas such as Queensland where postcodes extend many kilometres from inner to outer regional areas.

The report stated that “most incidents resulted in the theft of multiple firearms” as well as one incident where 27 handguns were stolen from a retail location. SSAA would like this highlighted as it disproves the theory from anti-gun groups that firearms owners should store their firearms in one location, such as a gun club. “SSAA has always argued against firearms being stored in one honeypot location and now we have the stats to back it up,” Mr Jones said.

The data used in the report indicated most stolen firearms were being stored in a safe or a similar device at the time of theft, dispelling the myth that firearms owners are careless with storage of firearms. In fact, the report found storage compliance had increased 13 per cent from the previous study which ended in 2009. “Most stolen firearms were stored in firearm safes or similar receptacles at the time of the theft. Force was applied or tools used to cut the locking device in 18 per cent and 13 per cent of incidents respectively,” Dr Bricknell said in the report.

“The entire receptacle was stolen in 14 per cent of incidents. Most of these cases required offenders to force the safe bolted to the floor and/or wall from its mooring and haul or drag it to a vehicle. Of note is that firearms were reportedly secured in 15 per cent of incidents but it was not evident how the receptacle was accessed.”

While the Association is pleased with an evidence-based report being published on firearms thefts, it advises caution when referencing certain assumptions in the study as well as strongly disagreeing with the inclusion of an anti-gun lobby group. Further, if firearm safety is to be treated as a public health concern as some commentators wish then, like seatbelt safety campaigns, it needs to be funded. The Association has seen the success of such campaigns like its Secure Your Gun, Secure Your Sport campaign and is convinced of the value in investing in such messages.

**“SSAA has always argued against firearms being stored in one honeypot location and now we have the stats to back it up,”**

Because of this campaign and other education efforts, SSAA members have continued to be responsible law-abiding firearms owners and understand the necessity of thorough safety efforts. The Association’s insurance brokerage has received almost two-and-a-half times the amount of damage claims compared with theft claims in the 12 months to date, as members are smart and conscientious firearms owners. Only 0.04 per cent of SSAA Insurance Brokerage customers have made theft claims in the past 12 months as well as just 0.09 per cent of members claiming damages.

Because of its demonstrated knowledge, SSAA has developed a rural firearm security campaign which it plans to discuss with the Federal Government. The initiative would continue to improve the safe storage of firearms and aid in reducing the amount of firearms thefts in regional and rural communities. ●

# Senator condemns “outrageous” behaviour



“State Labor governments have backtracked and reversed their shifty, outrageous attempts to ban the sale of firearms and ammunition...

THE NATIONALS IN THE Senate have condemned state Labor governments for using a global health crisis to enforce outrageous bans on the sale of firearms and ammunition. Gun shops were shut down and hunting banned in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic but today the Australian Senate supported Nationals Senate Leader and Victorian Senator

Bridget McKenzie’s motion, despite Labor and The Greens voting against it. “State Labor governments have backtracked and reversed their shifty, outrageous attempts to ban the sale of firearms and ammunition. This is thanks to strong fact-based advocacy from our shooting and hunting groups and National Party MPs and Senators,” said Senator McKenzie.

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# Hunters and shooters

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**\*584 Senators McKenzie, McMahon, Canavan, McDonald and Davey: To move—That the Senate—**

a. notes that:

- i. Australia’s hunters and shooters contributed 2.4 billion to our economy in 2018, while recreational hunting made a net contribution of \$335 million, adding 3,300 jobs,
- ii. game hunting expenditure has created 2,383 jobs in the State of Victoria, 1,115 as a direct result of hunting expenditure and 1,268 of which were a result of flow-on effects (2013),
- iii. the economic impact of all hunting by game licence holders in Victoria is \$177 million, with a flow-on impact of \$262 million and a total impact of \$439 million,
- iv. regional communities have missed out on considerable revenue from hunting as a result of the summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic, and
- v. hunters and shooters are more likely to meet sufficient physical activity requirements than the average Australian adult; and

f. condemns state Labor Governments for:

- i. Failing to recognise and respect the considerable social, economic and environmental benefits of hunting and shooting to communities across regional Australia, and
- ii. their bias and discriminatory decision to restrict firearm and ammunition sales using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse.

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| <b>Chamber</b> | <b>Notice Given</b> |
| Senate         | 13/05/2020          |



# NZ buyback was no roaring success

by John Maxwell



It appears New Zealand has done no better than capture half the banned guns in the community...

NEW ZEALAND'S GUN BUYBACK ended on December 20 with more than 56,000 now banned firearms surrendered for destruction, their owners compensated almost NZ\$100 million. Some 31,650 New Zealand firearms owners handed in guns which were overwhelmingly semi-automatics, including sporting and military-pattern rifles.

About 188,000 assorted parts were also handed in and police seized a further 1800 guns from gangs, while 2700 guns were modified to comply with the new laws. Another 5000 guns were surrendered under a parallel amnesty which allowed owners to hand in any non-banned firearms without compensation.

The amnesty followed the Christchurch massacre in March of last year when an Australian man shot and killed 51 people in attacks on two mosques. The New Zealand Government moved swiftly to ban semi-automatic and other firearms and launch a buyback scheme to remove them from the community. The approach was similar to the Australian Government's response following the 1996 Port Arthur tragedy.

Now a second round of legislation is being introduced, changing registration requirements and tightening the country's firearms licensing regime. Unsurprisingly, the Government declared the buyback a great success but the Council of Licensed Firearms Owners (COLFO) - New Zealand's equivalent of SSAA - branded it a complete failure which alienated many shooters. "We are loath to call it a buyback, rather a

confiscation compensation scheme," COLFO spokeswoman Nicole McKee told the SSAA.

Guns in New Zealand were not registered other than handguns and military-style semi-automatic rifles - it was unclear just how many now banned guns were in the community. The NZ Government commissioned consulting group KPMG to produce an estimate and it could do no better than somewhere between 50,000 and 170,000. COLFO made its own assessment based on import information from NZ Customs and data from 11 major firearms importers and estimated a figure of 170,000.

Even if the true number was around the median, it appears New Zealand has done no better than capture half the banned guns in the community and may have done a lot worse - and that's before national registration begins. Compliance wasn't helped by ill-will between shooters and police.

"Unfortunately there's not much trust with New Zealand Police and the way they've behaved towards firearms owners," Ms McKee said. "It's really sad because it shouldn't be that way, it does need to change but it's not going to happen overnight."

New Zealand is a nation with a strong hunting and shooting culture, a high level of gun ownership, traditionally low rates of gun violence and, by Australian standards, permissive firearms laws. Like Port Arthur, the Christchurch massacre produced a backlash against gun owners and

even former PM John Howard acknowledged Australian shooters felt aggrieved they were being penalised because of “the behaviour of a madman.”

Ms McKee said the Christchurch attacks shook everyone to the core. “And we had a government which singled out licensed gun owners. We had people turning against people in the workplace when they found out they were gun owners,” she said. “Firearm owners were being vilified and it was a constant tirade of abuse. I had my tyres slashed.”

Ms McKee said New Zealand was now set to follow Australia’s experience with banned guns disappearing into an enlarged grey market, with some likely to find their way to the criminal black market. The grey market in Australia is defined as banned firearms not surrendered in the 1996-97 buyback or otherwise legal guns which were never registered. Such guns aren’t necessarily retained for criminal purposes but if stolen or on-sold, can enter the black market.

No-one knows how many banned or unregistered guns remained in the Australian community following the buyback. In 2016 the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) estimated the entire Australian illicit market comprised perhaps 250,000 long-arms and 10,000 handguns. One indication of the size of the Australian grey market has come from firearms amnesties, with 57,000 guns handed in or registered during the national amnesty in 2017.

The federal, state and territory governments have now agreed to a permanent ongoing amnesty starting later this year so anyone can hand in any gun at any time, no questions asked. But it would follow it’s not criminals handing in their guns. With a large number of banned rifles remaining in the New Zealand community and more likely to follow as registration is rolled out, the country will likely end up with a significant stockpile of undocumented firearms. Considering well-established trans-Tasman criminal ties,

could it be some of those guns will find their way to Australia?

Unlike Australia post-Port Arthur, New Zealand has launched an inquiry to determine exactly what happened at Christchurch, how it happened and whether it could have been prevented. The Royal Commission findings are to be handed in by the end July. COLFO and others have suggested the NZ Government should hold off on the next round of firearms legislation until it has seen the Royal Commission findings.

The findings will likely provide better answers to key questions: How did a newcomer to New Zealand so readily attain a firearms licence then buy five guns including the AR-15 pattern rifle he used to murder 51 people? New Zealand’s gun laws pre-Christchurch dated from 1983 with further changes after the 1990 massacre in which a man used military and other rifles to murder 13 people in the town of Aramoana near Dunedin.

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Among the changes were more rigorous licensing and greater restrictions on military-style semi-automatic (MSSA) firearms for which the Category E licence endorsement was introduced. However, an AR-pattern semi-automatic rifle with thumbhole fixed stock, low capacity magazine and no flash hider fell into the least restricted Category A along with most everything else including bolt action, lever action and single-shot rifles, shotguns and air rifles.

It appears the Christchurch gunman caused most or all of this carnage with a legally acquired Cat A firearm, to which he added readily available high capacity magazines. That was a recognised loophole exploited by others such as the man who murdered two women in 2017. Ms McKee said COLFO had been urging the government to restrict high capacity magazines to those with a Category E endorsement. “We were told basically the horse had bolted,” she said. “That’s what the Christchurch gunman ended up doing and straight away the government pointed the finger at licensed firearms owners.”

Ms McKee said questions had been raised as to how he managed to obtain a licence so soon after arriving in New Zealand and whether or not there were face-to-face interviews with the two referees he was required to nominate. He was issued a 10-year licence in September 2017, as little as four to six weeks after arriving in the country. At the time he had no job and few community ties but was assessed as being a fit and proper person to receive a firearms licence.

“One of the referees should have been a family member and our understanding is that no family members were interviewed,” Ms McKee said. “We’ve suggested you need to go back and have a look at the robustness of the process of licensing, we don’t believe registration is going to be the answer. Registration is not going to stop a massacre from happening, what will stop a massacre is looking at the people we licence and whether they’re fit and proper to have or maintain a licence.”

The NZ Government appears intent on creating a national firearms registration system akin to a system the country tried once before but abandoned in the 1980s on grounds it was costly, inaccurate and provided no actual community

benefit. Legislation to create registration, tighten licensing and much more is before the NZ parliament.

How the registration will be rolled out hasn’t been explained yet, other than that it will take around five years to implement. The process will certainly involve recording data on every previously unregistered firearm including make, model, calibre and serial number. In order to track firearm transfers, some sort of permit-to-acquire system would also need to be introduced along with penalties for non-compliance and a substantially expanded bureaucracy to administer the new arrangements.

Ms McKee said one suggestion was for owners to register their guns online, however there was a data breach on the NZ Police website last December where owners had registered guns to be surrendered under the buyback.

## Legislation to create registration, tighten licensing and much more is before the NZ parliament.

After Port Arthur, Australian shooters expressed their dissatisfaction at the ballot box contributing to the rise of the populist One Nation party, especially in Queensland where the party claimed almost a quarter of the vote and won 11 seats at the 1998 state election. New Zealand could have something similar in future with the next general election scheduled for September 19. Ms McKee said it was expected gun laws would be an election issue with 240,000 licensed shooters eligible to vote. ●

## QLD trading to resume

GREAT NEWS COMING FROM the latest Queensland Health Direction as per the link below. Firearms dealerships and armourers can recommence trading as per normal from Saturday 16 May 2020. Please keep in mind that social distancing requirements still apply.



<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers/non-essential-business-closure-direction>

## NZ party highlights LAFOs in new candidates



THE ACT PARTY HAS HIGHLIGHTED that a number of its new candidates are licensed firearms owners signalling that firearms laws will be a key election issue for the party. Local media reported the Party's president Tim Jago specifically singled out the seven licensed firearms owners among the candidates in the September election. "They are standing because they be-

lieve New Zealand needs better firearm laws that treat licensed firearms owners with dignity and respect while closing the loopholes that allowed our nation's tragedy in Christchurch last year," Tim said. Act voted against changes to New Zealand's gun laws after the March 15 terror attack. Its position is that the rules unfairly penalise law-abiding gun owners. ●