

Australian Press Council Adjudication No 976

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The Press Council has upheld a complaint brought by the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (Inc.) on behalf of itself and 36 other persons against the headline of an article in *The Australian* dated 29th April 1998.

Under a headline "Joy for shooters on day of massacre", *The Australian* reported the approval by the Queensland government of the establishment of a "massive rifle range to cater for 10,000 shooters in Brisbane". The article noted that this approval had been given on the second anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre. The article reported the commemoration service for the massacre held at Port Arthur and then set out comments relating to the decision to establish the rifle range. As far as the Council is aware the content of the article is factually accurate.

Some of the complainants dispute the accuracy of the reporting and claim that it is biased against gun owners. The Council does not agree. The fact that a rifle range is to be established is not disputed; the decision was taken on the anniversary of the massacre; and the accuracy of the comments of interested persons, including concern expressed about the lack of sensitivity of the Queensland government in the choice of date if its decision, has not been disputed.

The principle concern of the complainants is that the headline, rather than the text of the article, implies that shooters do not feel sympathy with those affected by the Port Arthur massacre. The article does not carry any indication that shooters will be joyful at the establishment of the rifle range. No representative of shooters is quoted in relation to the rifle range or the massacre. The Council considers that the headline is misleading in that it does not summarise the views of shooters and it is open to the reader to infer that shooters do not regret the massacre. The Council accordingly upholds the complaint.