

# Target on guns: Coroners warn on shooting range suicides


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## EXCLUSIVE

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Most of the nation's shooting ranges are not required to install bulletproof barriers or lifesaving tethers for guns used by unlicensed shooters, despite warnings from coroners after the suicide deaths of at least 11 people at the facilities.

In May last year, NSW [Deputy Coroner Carolyn Huntsman](#) urged [Police Commissioner Karen Webb](#) to ban most people [without licences](#) from shooting at a firing range, unless a pistol was “securely tethered”, [preventing it from being turned on the shooter](#) or others.

Her recommendations followed the death of an Iran-born man, known only as GH, who did not have a gun licence and shot himself on April 26, 2017, at the St Mary's Indoor Shooting Centre in Sydney during a supervised “try shooting session”.

The man's close friend had emailed the centre two years earlier warning against letting GH [use a gun](#), as he had depression and talked about suicide “many times”.

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TARGET ON GUNS



### Nation’s leaders urged to do deal on gun register

Police and gun safety advocates urge premiers, PM to ‘show some fortitude’ on firearms ahead of the anniversary of the Wieambilla police murders.



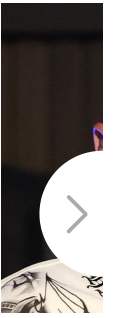
### ‘Red-flag cop-haters, sovereign citizens’ on firearm register

A national firearm register should include intelligence about licensed gun-owners who have been identified on social media as ‘police-haters’ or sovereign citizens.



### Fight over cash derails register

The national guns register has hit an 11th-hour roadblock with a blow-up between state and federal treasurers derailing plans to finalise a funding deal.



### Delay suspec

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“I must emphasise that at no circumstances should he be allowed to practice with live ammunition, especially with a small calibre hand gun,” GH’s friend emailed on April 16, 2015.

“He might harm himself. You must take extreme caution. If possible, please notify other shooting ranges in Sydney.”

Despite the warning, GH was allowed to participate in a “try shooting session” at the St Mary’s centre just over a month later, and again when he killed himself.

On both occasions, GH was required to fill out a P650 form and declare whether he had been suffering from “any mental illness or other disorder that may prevent you from using a firearm safely”.

A tethering system was installed at St Mary’s after GH’s death. Three other NSW centres have installed tethers after patron suicides, the inquest heard. Ms Huntsman said the “relatively inexpensive” technology should be used at all firing ranges, and [the NSW Firearms Registry should create](#) an “alert system” based on intelligence received by gun clubs.

[The Australian has identified](#) eight suicides by unlicensed shooters at firing ranges in NSW, South Australia, [Western Australia](#), and Queensland since 2002.

As well, there have been three additional self-inflicted gunshot deaths in NSW noted in the inquest.

Yet all jurisdictions still allow people without gun licences to try shooting at firing ranges, usually while supervised.

Sporting Shooters Association of Australia media and politics officer Rachael Oxborrow said the SSAA had 440 shooting ranges with strict safety controls “where thousands of people would attend without incident on a weekly basis”.

“It is really unfortunate that suicide does happen in society and that it has happened at shooting ranges in Australia. In terms of market-based business ranges where there is a more casual-based clientele, tethering and barriers are among appropriate safety measures,” Ms Oxborrow said.

“Target shooting is not unlike any other sport or hobby, where you can participate in a healthy, social pursuit in a supportive environment. Our sporting equipment requires safety protocols for the protection of all involved.”

A [South Australian coroner in 2017 slammed](#) the state government for failing to heed an earlier coronial demand to change the law to require bulletproof barriers and gun-tethers at shooting ranges, after three suicides at facilities in the state.

[SA coroner Mark Johns was investigating](#) the December 2015 death of Brenton Winton McConnell, who shot himself at the Marksman Indoor Firing Range in the Adelaide CBD.

McConnell had been charged with aggravated assault in August 2013, diagnosed with a delusional disorder, remanded in custody, and in January 2015 was banned from possessing a firearm.

But the 47-year-old was allowed to walk into the Adelaide firing range, hire a Glock pistol, and turn the gun on himself while supervised by an instructor.

Mr Johns said in 2011, he had formally recommended the government order commercial firing ranges and gun clubs to install “suitable tethering and/or bulletproof screening for use by persons who are not the holder of a firearms licence or member of a club”.

The 2011 inquest investigated the suicide deaths of 54-year-old Raymond Glen Jast, who shot himself with a pistol at the Marksman facility in March 2009, and 23-year-old Julia Hisae Morris, who killed herself at the same facility in October 2008.

“There is no doubt if the Firearms Act had been amended as recommended during the 4½ years between June 8, 2011, and December 15, 2015, Mr McConnell’s death would have been prevented, at least by that method,” Mr Johns said in his 2017 findings.

*Anyone experiencing a crisis can call these helplines for support: Lifeline 13 11 14 | Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 | Beyond Blue 1300 224 636*

#### **SARAH ELKS, SENIOR REPORTER**

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