



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026

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Submission to the Inquiry into Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 by Sporting Shooters Pistol Club (ACT) Inc

Chair,

I am the Public Officer and a member of 45 years of Canberra's largest pistol club (580 active members). My comments to the Inquiry are therefore focused mainly, but not exclusively, on the possession and use of target pistols in the ACT and go, in particular, to the misguided perception that the application of an arbitrary cap on the number of pistols a licensed pistol shooter may possess will create a more effective community safety measure than the measures currently in place.

I will show that creating such an arbitrary cap is already producing an unintended further burden on already-stretched ACT Policing resources for no commensurate public benefit.

Target pistol shooting is probably the most "respectable" and certainly the most cerebral of the shooting sports, and women routinely compete on an equal footing with men in all recognised competition events. It is also the most carefully-regulated of all the shooting sports, with all pistols registered strictly "For Club Competition Only" and used only at an approved pistol club premises. This is in contrast to many long arm firearms which may be used on private property and on certain public land.

An applicant for a pistol licence in the ACT must go through a rigorous program of character reference, police check and then an extensive period of in-club safety and proficiency training before being permitted to apply for a pistol licence. Having secured a licence, they must then wait a minimum of six months before being permitted to apply to acquire their first two pistols and then 12 more months before being eligible to apply for subsequent pistols. The ACT is particularly rigorous in this matter. An aspiring pistol shooter must attend in person at the Firearms Registry a minimum of three times before obtaining their first pistol. This is in contrast to other jurisdictions where most firearms transactions are done on-line. This unique level of official scrutiny in the ACT runs in parallel with the scrutiny applied by pistol club officials over a lengthy training and probationary period.

Realistically, from commencement, a person will take a minimum of 10 months (and usually longer) before securing their first pistol. It is a very thorough process and unsuitable or unsafe individuals are routinely weeded out - we pistol shooters guard our privilege most jealously! In addition, there are rigorously-applied minimum attendance requirements on all pistol owners and people who fall short of their minimum obligation are promptly notified to the Firearms Registry. Further, the storage requirements for pistols are demanding - far more so than for long arms. There are specific legislated requirements in the ACT Firearms Regulations which place heavy obligations on pistol club officials to notify Police if a club member is reasonably thought to be a danger to themselves or others.

My club offers no fewer than 16 separate and distinct pistol-shooting competition events and most of our members shoot many of these events. This necessitates the use of a seemingly-large number of different types and configuration of pistols, plus backup pistols for our elite, or simply very frequent, shooters. This, to the lay or uninformed observer, would seem to be “too many”. Hence, it seems, the rush to impose various arbitrary caps on pistol numbers. To arbitrarily reduce the number of firearms an already-qualified pistol shooter has possessed for several years, as a public-safety measure, will do nothing to improve actual safety, but will do much to disenfranchise a group of some of the most heavily-regulated people in the community.

Given the rigorous, indeed intrusive level of initial and ongoing scrutiny to which pistol shooters are subjected it makes far more sense, from a public safety perspective to more tightly regulate (if that is possible) the suitability of individuals to possess pistols, than to attempt to regulate them by imposing an arbitrary number of pistols which a person may possess. In short, competition pistol-shooting is already very heavily regulated and there is nothing to be gained by arbitrary caps. Indeed, given the somewhat parlous state of the ACT budget, avoiding unnecessary compensation expenditure in this regard would seem a desirable objective.

Further, it is already clear that a significant unintended consequence of proposals to impose caps on firearm numbers has emerged. That is that licensed shooters who do not wish to surrender any firearms are already making arrangements to offload them to partners, relatives and over-18 children. This is demonstrated by a major upswing in the ACT in the number of new licence applications. This will inevitably result in there being more licence-holders than is currently the case, and more locations at which firearms are held, without any reduction in actual numbers of firearms held by licensed shooters. That this will result in the need for additional Police resources should be obvious.

The research in Western Australia should be closely questioned. There is a strong view among shooting organisations in that jurisdiction that the adoption of the imposed caps on firearms numbers was little more than the adoption of a politically-plausible, but arbitrary number. Further, Western Australia is a very different jurisdiction to the ACT; demographically, geographically and socially and what might be pertinent there is unlikely to apply so fully in the ACT. At the very least, it behoves the ACT Government to make that research public and to explain its apparently-untested reliance on it.

Arbitrariness is, I think, to be avoided in all areas of public policy and the murder of 15 people by two individuals, who should not have slipped through several official checks, was in no way related to the number of firearms the offenders had - lawfully or otherwise - in their immediate possession. It is highly unlikely that these individuals' backgrounds would have allowed them to obtain pistols in NSW, and they would certainly not have been able to do so in the ACT. This is, I'm sure you'll agree, an important point in making regulations about the possession and use of pistols in this jurisdiction.

The ACT is a relatively homogenous community with high levels of education and employment. A very high proportion of the ACT workforce is employed in the public sector and holds formal security clearances. This makes this jurisdiction unique in Australia. Firearm crime is the lowest in Australia and the fear of some legislators that stolen firearms

present a risk to the community is simply not borne out in the ACT, where there has been a negligible number of firearm thefts.

In my club we have, variously: prominent Canberra surgeons, General Practitioners, retired and some serving members of the Australian Intelligence Community, police and military officers, successful property developers and several former and serving diplomats. I am a retired public sector senior executive with a background in defence and counter terrorism and I chaired the ACT Government's Firearms Consultative Committee for many years.

All of us are keen competition pistol shooters and are long-established members of the broader Canberra community. For many of us, particularly the older or retired, pistol-shooting competition represents our major social outlet.

Clearly, none of us presents any conceivable threat to public safety and I respectfully repeat my earlier advice that applying arbitrary conditions and limitations on ACT pistol shooters will provide no benefit to the community; it will simply incur unnecessary additional public expenditure and an increased need for Police resources.

In short, I am asserting, with good reasons, I believe, that target pistol shooters do not, and have never, posed any threat to public safety, particularly in the ACT, and should perforce, be treated separately to the broader body of recreational and hunting long-arm users.

On the matter of compensation for ACT residents who may be obliged to surrender firearms should the ACT government unwisely follows NSW's model of imposing caps on licensed shooters, I draw to your attention that it was Prime Minister Howard's insistence on fair compensation for surrendered firearms that contributed so significantly to the high levels of community compliance in 1996/97, and subsequently in 2003. Howard recognised that to confiscate personal property on anything other than just terms would be unfair and likely to lead to widespread non-compliance.

An alternative to any imposed buyback program should the ACT Government impose caps, and in particular given the emergence of the unintended consequences mentioned earlier, is what might be called "grandfathering". That is that already-licensed shooters may not acquire any new firearm unless and until the number of firearms which they hold falls below that cap. This would not be difficult to administer, would involve no more community risk than presently exists, and would avoid the undesirable unintended consequences mentioned earlier, and reduce the unnecessary expenditure of public resources.

Finally, given the fervour, albeit hasty fervour, with which the Commonwealth and NSW have embraced, absent any evidence base, the need for "tighter gun laws", and the clear rejection of such a need by other jurisdictions, it is inevitable that Commissioner Bell will turn in her enquiries to this matter. It would seem therefore sensible to await her report before enacting material changes to existing ACT legislation.

Peter Moran
Public Officer

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