



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into Legislation on proposed firearms reform

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Submission to the Inquiry into the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 (ACT)

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1. Introduction

This submission responds to the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 and evaluates the proposed reforms against the available empirical evidence. While I support evidence-based public-safety policy, several amendments, particularly numerical limits on firearms per licence holder and re-categorisation of existing firearm classes are not supported by criminological research or national data. The evidence demonstrates that:

- Limiting the number of firearms owned by a licensed individual does not reduce gun violence.
- The current ACT firearm categories remain functional, proportionate, and aligned with national standards.
- The long-term decline in firearm related crime in Australia began well before major legislative reforms and cannot be attributed primarily to regulation.
- More effective public safety outcomes can be achieved through administrative and intelligence-based reforms rather than additional restrictions on compliant licence holders.

2. Limiting the Number of Firearms: No Demonstrated Public-Safety Benefit

The Bill proposes a cap of five firearms per licence holder. This measure assumes that reducing the number of firearms held by licensed individuals will reduce gun violence. However, national evidence does not support this assumption.

2.1 Criminal misuse overwhelmingly involves illicit firearms

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) identifies the illicit market, not licensed owners as the primary source of firearms used in crime. ACIC estimates that more than 260,000 firearms circulate in the illicit market, sourced through theft, illegal importation, and unregistered weapons (ACIC 2022). These firearms, not those held by compliant licence holders, are overwhelmingly implicated in criminal activity.

2.2 No evidence that owners of multiple firearms pose elevated risk

There is no evidence that individuals who own more than five firearms are more likely to commit offences. Nationally, licensed firearm owners remain overwhelmingly law-abiding, and ACT Policing has not identified any correlation between the number of firearms owned and criminal misuse. Research consistently shows that lawful firearm ownership is not a predictor of violent offending (Baker & McPhedran 2007; Lee & Suardi 2010).

2.3 Theft risk is not reduced by numerical caps

Firearm theft risk is driven by storage quality, not quantity. The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) found that most stolen firearms were taken from insecure storage or rural properties, not from high-volume collectors (AIC 2002). Reducing the number of firearms per owner does not reduce theft risk and therefore does not improve public safety.

3. The Current ACT Firearm Categories Are Functional and Evidence-Based

The ACT's existing firearm categories (A, B, C, D, H) are aligned with the National Firearms Agreement and have been stable for nearly three decades. These categories:

- Distinguish firearms based on mechanical function and risk profile.
- Are well understood by police, dealers, and licence holders.
- Support consistent enforcement and national interoperability.

The ACT Government has not identified specific deficiencies in the current categories or provided evidence that re-categorisation will improve public safety. Without such evidence, re-categorisation risks creating administrative burden without measurable benefit.

4. Firearm Regulation and Crime Trends Since the 1980s

4.1 Firearm homicide was already declining before the 1996 NFA

Criminological research demonstrates that firearm homicide rates in Australia were declining steadily throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, well before the introduction of the National Firearms Agreement (Chapman et al. 2006; Baker & McPhedran 2007). This decline mirrors broader reductions in violent crime driven by demographic changes, improved policing, and reduced alcohol-related violence.

4.2 Post-1996 declines cannot be attributed solely to regulation

While firearm deaths continued to decline after 1996, researchers note that:

- The decline did not accelerate after the NFA (Lee & Suardi 2010).
- Non-firearm homicide and suicide declined at similar rates.
- The rarity of mass shootings makes causal attribution statistically difficult.

The Australia Institute (2025) further notes that despite the NFA, the number of registered firearms in Australia has increased by approximately 25% since 1996, yet firearm homicide remains extremely low. This undermines the assumption that reducing the number of firearms per licensed owner is necessary for public safety.

5. Disproportionate Impact of the Proposed Amendments

5.1 Financial harm to compliant licence holders

The proposed cap will require some owners to surrender lawfully acquired property. The federal buyback scheme does not guarantee market-value compensation, meaning owners may be forced to accept significant financial losses. Additionally, funding the buyback will create significant costs to the Commonwealth and Territory governments with little to no positive outcomes. Funding other initiatives, such as those listed below will incur a significantly lower cost and provide much greater benefits.

5.2 Burden on legitimate sporting, occupational, and collecting activities

Collectors, farmers, sporting shooters, and professional users may require more than five firearms for legitimate purposes. The proposed cap does not adequately account for these needs.

5.3 Misalignment with evidence-based policy principles

Effective regulation should be proportionate, targeted, and evidence-based. The proposed amendments do not meet these criteria.

6. Recommendations to Strengthen Public Safety without Burdening Law-Abiding Owners

6.1 Increase Resourcing for the AFP-Managed ACT Firearms Registry

The Registry is widely understood to be understaffed and overburdened, limiting its ability to perform essential functions. Registry postings are often viewed as undesirable, undermining morale and reducing the ability to attract experienced officers. This is coupled with the registry not being funded by the ACT government to complete storage inspections or proactive engagement with firearms owners. This increases the risk spoken about in point 2.3 above.

Recommendation:

Provide dedicated, ongoing funding to expand staffing, improve training, and professionalise the Registry's internal culture, enabling the registry to fully fulfil its function.

6.2 Digitise and Integrate the ACT Firearms Registry with National Systems

The ACT remains reliant on paper-based records, making cross referencing with interstate and federal databases slow and error-prone. This limits the ACT's ability to participate fully in national intelligence efforts.

Recommendation:

Digitise the Registry and integrate it with national systems such as the National Firearms Interface.

6.3 Reform the "Fit and Proper Person" Test to Encourage Mental-Health Help-Seeking

The current application of the test discourages some firearm owners from seeking therapy or counselling due to fear of licence loss, even when treatment is unrelated to risk.

Recommendation:

Clarify the criteria to distinguish between routine mental-health support and genuine risk factors.

6.4 Reconsider the Proposed Firearm-Number Limit

The cap imposes financial hardship, lacks evidence of public-safety benefit, and targets a small, compliant subset of the population.

Recommendation:

Withdraw or substantially revise the cap. If retained, ensure full market-value compensation and practical exemptions for sporting, occupational, and collecting purposes.

7. Conclusion

The Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 contains sensible measures relating to emerging technologies, but the proposed numerical limits and re-categorisation are not supported by empirical evidence and risk imposing unnecessary burdens on law-abiding ACT residents.

Public safety would be better served by:

- Strengthening the AFP Firearms Registry.
- Digitising and integrating the ACT registry.
- Reforming the “fit and proper person” test.
- Focusing on illicit firearms rather than compliant licence holders.

These reforms address genuine risks, enhance administrative capability, and support responsible firearm ownership.

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