



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026

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Inquiry into Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026

To: Standing Committee on Legal Affairs
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From: Richard Wild

The following public submission into the inquiry into the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 highlights key points supporting the effectiveness of existing firearms laws and provides suggestions on how to meet changes to technology and classifications.

I trust this submission assists the Standing Committee in its deliberations on this issue.

Yours Sincerely

Richard Wild

Executive Summary

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ACT's Inquiry into Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026, and acknowledge the ACT Legislative Assembly's commitment to enhancing public safety within the Territory through effective and contestable firearms policy development.

In doing so, I also acknowledge the terrible events in Bondi and welcome serious and holistic reforms that are evidence-based, proportionate and focused on real risk. However, I cannot stress strongly enough that terrorism wins when it frightens a society into changing its behaviours, policies and values. This has occurred in such a dramatic manner since December 2025 in Australia needs to be explored in honest detail.

This submission reflects my experience as a competition shooter and hunter for over 40 years, a counter terrorism specialist, and a Government policy writer. In developing this submission, consideration was given to equivalent Weapons Legislation in other Australian States and Territories and the National Firearms Agreement (NFA). This submission seeks to align with fundamental aspects of the NFA but is not intended to be uniform with legislation of the Commonwealth or another State.

The ACT stands as an exemplar jurisdiction in its regulation and administration of firearms licensing. Its existing legislative framework is structured, comprehensive, and demonstrably effective in balancing public safety considerations with the rights of lawful licence holders. In the absence of compelling evidence of systemic failure or regulatory deficiency, there is little, if any, legal or policy justification for substantive amendment to the current regime.

Key Points of this submission include:

- . **Firearms limits:** This submission does not support artificial or arbitrary caps on firearms ownership. Recreational hunting requires different firearms for different species and different environments. This also encompasses animal welfare and minimum calibre requirements. Sporting shooters, regardless of discipline, require different firearms to meet the requirements of the different disciplines they choose to compete in.
- . **Firearms categories:** Changes to firearms categories need to be fit for purpose and reflect changes in technology but also historical authenticity. Any changes should be based on technical reasons, they should be enforceable and they need to be informed by consultation. This includes establishing new categories for historical weapons.
- . **Safe Storage:** Safe storage of firearms removes the perception of "threat" from the community. A licensed and legal firearms owner, whose firearms stored in accordance with best practice, has removed those firearms from the community. Regardless of the number, this is the most effective and efficient way to keep firearms "off the streets".
- . **Inter-Agency information sharing:** Identification and removal of any and all stovepipes that prevent inter-agency information sharing needs to be a cornerstone of this Inquiry. Stovepipes

are formed through habit and poor technology and the National Firearms Register would assist with enhanced information sharing.

- **Laws fit for purpose:** Laws are only effective when they are viewed as legitimate and fair and do not demand unrealistic behaviour. Current ACT firearms laws have been proven to work due to the professionalism of the ACT Firearms Registry and the respect held by the ACT firearms owners for the existing legal framework.

Key Recommendations

Maintain the current Legislation

The current ACT *Firearms Act 1996* remains fit for purpose and does not require caps on the numbers of firearms owned. There is sufficient scope within the ACT firearms legislation to support policing efforts to manage public safety when used in conjunction with other Federal and Territory laws. The professionalism of the ACT Firearms Registry, in conjunction with AFP ACT and their Federal counterparts would indicate the issues seen in other jurisdictions would not be seen here.

Consequence

A low impact, but high return, approach which rewards the licensed ACT firearms owners yet is empowered to punish breaches. Allows ACT finances to be directed to capability enhancement such as digitalisation, officer training and compliance management.

Firearm Categories

Establish a new category for target rifle competition using historic straight pull rifles. Using the existing handgun model for acquisition, make the relevant clubs and associations responsible for compliance. Require Cat H levels for secure storage.

Consequence

A preservation approach within a tightly defined, competition-based category would protect legitimate historical and sporting interests while at the same time maintain regulatory oversight. In doing so, the ACT would avoid unnecessary compensation expenditure and lead the Nation in demonstrating that regulatory measures should focus on firearms that pose demonstrable public safety risks.

Tighten Storage Requirements

Review current storage guidelines and remove the option for non-steel storage. Have enhanced security procedures codified for ownership of more than 20 firearms.

Consequence

Safe storage in the ACT operates as a frontline risk mitigation measure. It removes immediate access to firearms by children, unauthorised persons, and opportunistic thieves, and creates deliberate barriers that reduce impulsive misuse. Enhanced storage measures support the Government's stated aim to enhance public safety by securing firearms when not in use. A Government sponsored education campaign in conjunction with the clubs and local firearms dealers would support these objectives.

Inter-Agency information sharing

An internal review of whether stovepiping exists within the ACT security system. Run regular exercises to test scenarios that might occur within the Territory as well as regular training on radicalisation indicators.

Consequence

Ongoing learning through practical scenario based exercises will enhance knowledge exchange within the broader security and local law enforcement community. Radicalisation indicators have evolved since 2001, and these need to be identified, discussed, and challenged as the ACT community changes.

Treat Handguns separately

Cat H licences and the number of handguns owned should be treated as a separate and additional issue to the current debate due to the lengthy and intrusive process required to earn a Cat H licence. A standalone Cat H licence can be administered in parallel to existing Cat A and B licences.

Consequence

The ACT's clubs and associations have been the cornerstone of handgun licensing since before the Territory was self governing. The regular engagement between handgun clubs and the ACT Firearms Registry allows for early issue identification and management and provides a community based, low cost offset for law enforcement.

Establish an Expert Working group specific to categories

Establish a Working Group alongside the current Firearms Advisory Committee that would incorporate independent technical expertise required for any reclassification process. Members could including firearms engineers, armourers, competitive shooting representatives and historical firearms scholars.

Consequence

An expert panel of volunteers offers ongoing support on technical issues outside the everyday knowledge of local government and law enforcement. Members would meet on an as required basis to review current and emerging technology and provide advice to government on its implications and challenges.

Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ACT's Inquiry into the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 and acknowledge the ACT Legislative Assembly's commitment to enhancing public safety within the Territory through effective, transparent and contestable firearms policy development. These comments are offered in good faith, with the objective of strengthening public safety while ensuring that legislative measures are practical, effective, and appropriately targeted and, at the end of the day, fair to all ACT residents and do not discriminate against any member/s of the community.

In doing so, I recognise the tragic events in Bondi and support serious, holistic reforms that are evidence-based, proportionate, and clearly directed at addressing demonstrable risk. However, I cannot stress strongly enough that terrorism wins when it frightens a society into changing its behaviours, policies and values. This has clearly happened across Australia.

This submission draws on more than 40 years' experience as a competitive shooter and hunter, alongside my professional background as a counter-terrorism specialist and government policy writer. The proposed changes in the Bill will have a direct and negative impact upon me as a sporting shooter and recreational hunter. Throughout my shooting career, I have have competed nationally and internationally, held a long distance shooting record that remains in the world's top 10 achievements. I continue to mentor, train and support the development of fellow shooters to be better at their chosen disciplines. I have helped develop new disciples and competitions that are used around Australia. As a hunter, I provide a free service to land owners in order to control pest species in areas around the ACT. My ambition is to represent Australia in international competition and I take that desire into every event.

Removing my ability to use different firearms for different competitions will prevent me developing as an elite competitor and undermine my ability to be competitive in Australia and overseas.

Removing my ability to choose the best calibre/firearm combination to hunting and pest control will prevent me assisting regional landowners manage pest species and contribute to reducing the economic and environmental damage caused by invasive species.

Underlying Principles

It goes without saying that the Bill under review should be guided by the following principles and I have applied these principles to my comments and suggestions.

- 1. Risk:** Changes to the existing legislation should focus on clear and demonstrable risks to public safety in the ACT. It should not focus solely on restricting lawful ownership nor participation.
- 2. Proportionality:** Any changes should be proportionate to the risks they seek to address and should be supported by evidence of effectiveness. This should include modelling of "unintended consequences" as part of the re-drafting process.
- 3. Compliance:** Firearms laws should encourage continued participation in licensing and compliance.

4. Consistency: As a Commonwealth, Federal consistency is important, but any reforms of the ACT Legislation should reflect the unique make up of the ACT's firearms community, especially as it affects competition pathways nationally and internationally.

5. Focus on crime: Public safety can only be achieved through disruption, arrest and successful prosecution of illegal firearms activity. Public safety will not be enhanced through the addition of penalties on existing or aspiring lawful firearms owners.

This Inquiry is particularly timely in light of the events of 18 February 2026, when posters were seized from the Dissent Cafe and Bar and the premises were declared a crime scene. The subsequent assessment of whether those posters constitute "hate speech" under the newly enacted legislation raises significant questions as to statutory interpretation, proportionality, and procedural fairness. These circumstances underscore the necessity for legislation that is precise, workable in practice, and consistent with the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

Response to the proposed changes in the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill)

52A - The number of firearms that can be held by an individual

I do not support the introduction of arbitrary numerical limits on the number of firearms held by any licensed individual in the ACT.

Within the hunting context, any one single firearm cannot safely or humanely meet every hunting circumstance. Existing laws regarding prevention of undue suffering, in addition to long standing ethical standards with the hunting community mean that hunters may legitimately need different firearms to ensure compliance with animal welfare obligations and to ensure safe hunting. For example, a hunter may require more than five firearms to meet the terrain and animal variations in, and around, the ACT. Subject to an individuals budget, this could include:

- a. Different shotgun types and gauges for duck, quail and rabbit hunting.
- b. Different centre fire rifles for large sized species, especially deer. Harvesting of deer, for example, requires a minimum calibre but rifle choice is more often governed by specified hunting terrain eg hilly and wooded requiring a larger calibre in a lighter stock, versus open country with more vehicle access that might allow for a smaller calibre but heavier rifle.
- c. Different centre fire rifles suitable for medium sized species such as certain deer species, pigs and goats with similar caveats to those in point b above.
- d. Different centre fire rifles suitable for small sized species such as rabbits and foxes with similar caveats to those in point b above.
- e. Different rimfire and air rifles for rabbit and pest management.
- f. Heirloom firearms and antique hunting rifles.

Within the competition shooting environment, this list only grows. There is not a single use rifle combination suitable to compete within all available shooting disciplines. As a member of both National Rifle Association of Australia (NRAA) and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) for over 35 years, I compete across a range of rifle disciplines from long range benchrest, to historical service rifle, and precision service rifle. These competitions are shot at different ranges, require different sights (iron sights versus optical) and use technology from different eras. For example, disciplines I have competed in require:

- a. Service Rifle: Rifles from the the late 1890s to the end of WWII. These are equipped with iron sights, are made with wooden stocks, are bolt action or straight pull, and are used at distances from 25 metres to 500 metres. No single rifle can be successfully used across all events.
- b. Precision service rifle: Modern rifles using telescopic sights and capable of competing to ranges in excess of 1000 metres using different shooting positions.

c. Benchrest rifle: There are many competitions that now cater for single shot, very heavy rifle that can only be used from a rest. Long range competitions can be a mix of ranges from 300 metres out to 1500 yards and beyond (at interstate ranges).

d. Rimfire rifle: Scoped rimfire rifles that can be used across a range of disciplines and at multiple ranges. While initially seen as a training option, the difficulty and challenge of the rimfire rifle match has led to more formalised competitions being run each year.

If the proposed amendments are adopted, I would be deprived of access to the firearms necessary to participate competitively in these and other recognised shooting disciplines.

14 through 20 inclusive - Firearms Categories

I support firearms categories that remain fit for purpose, technologically informed, and responsive to genuine developments in firearm design and function.

However, I strongly urge the Committee to ensure that long-established hunting, target, and historical firearms are not unintentionally captured by category changes that are driven by perception rather than demonstrable risk. Category reform must be informed by technical expertise, empirical evidence, and operational experience — not by narrative framing.

I note recent punitive approaches surrounding straight-pull firearms and observe how terminology has evolved in public discourse — particularly in New South Wales — where statements by the NSW Premier Chris Minns introduced and repeatedly referenced a so-called “belt-fed shotgun” category.

It is important to separate political rhetoric from technical reality. The term “belt-fed shotgun,” as used extensively in public commentary, does not reflect a recognised or established civilian firearm class in the Australian market. Policy development should not be anchored to terminology that lacks technical precision. Additionally, belt fed firearms have never been available for common purchase in the ACT nor can they be legally owned.

Similarly, I note that government talking points have increasingly framed straight-pull firearms in a manner that may exaggerate their practical capability. While some manufacturers’ marketing materials employ assertive language — as is common in commercial advertising across industries — this promotional language does not reflect real-world usage conditions and policy must distinguish between marketing language and operational reality.

Where category changes are not clearly tied to documented misuse patterns, there is a risk that reform becomes symbolic rather than preventative. In practice, straight-pull firearms require deliberate manual cycling between shots, and they are mechanically more demanding than traditional turn-bolt systems. In addition, they are sensitive to maintenance and ammunition selection, they are not self-loading, and their effective rate of fire is limited by ergonomics and user skill.

As it is currently drafted, the issues with the over-broad reclassification risks include capturing low-risk firearms used exclusively for lawful sporting competition with the net outcome of displacing rather than mitigating genuine risk. All at a significant financial cost to the Territory.

I respectfully propose the establishment of a distinct category to preserve historical straight-pull rifles manufactured between 1895 and 1955 for competition and historical research, education and demonstration purposes.

This proposal is based on the fact that this type of firearm represents a transitional period in early 20th-century firearms engineering and are rare and often expensive collector items. They do require specialised knowledge to operate safely and are typically used in controlled competition or historical shooting contexts.

The forced removal of these rifles through broad buy-back mechanisms would result in the permanent loss of an important chapter of firearms technological history.

A preservation approach within a tightly defined, competition-based category would protect legitimate historical and sporting interests while at the same time maintain regulatory oversight. In doing so, the ACT would avoid unnecessary compensation expenditure and lead the Nation in demonstrating that regulatory measures should focus on firearms that pose demonstrable public safety risks, rather than targeting rare, historical, or collectible firearms simply because of their design or age.

A further consideration for the Committee is the need for sound policy underpinned by mechanical literacy. Classification decisions made without detailed technical input risk unintended capture of low-risk platforms and erosion of regulatory legitimacy.

To that end, I strongly encourage the Committee to incorporate independent technical expertise in any reclassification process, including establishing a Working Group composed of firearms engineers, armourers, competitive shooting representatives and historical firearms scholars. This group could then sit alongside the Firearms Advisory Committee as a way to provide advice to Government.

Handguns have also not been discussed or examined in any detail and there is a lack of clarity in how Cat H licence owners are able to work within the draft changes. I suggest Cat H licences and the number of handguns owned should be treated as a separate and additional issue to the current debate. This is due to the lengthy and intrusive process required to earn an Cat H licence and the subsequent additional attendance requirements and ongoing patrol care by the Club members and officials. As with rifle matches, each handgun club requires more than one type of handgun to compete effectively and there is also greater need for spare or backup equipment should handguns break during matches.

Safe Storage

I note there is no mention of safe storage of firearms in the Bill as presented.

Safe storage of firearms in the ACT is governed primarily by the *Firearms Act 1996* and associated regulations, which impose clear obligations on licensees to store firearms securely, unloaded, and in a manner that prevents unauthorised access. These requirements are not merely technical; they go directly to the core public safety objective of preventing theft, misuse, and accidental harm.

The importance of strict compliance was reinforced by the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) in its decision of 8 December 2015 (ACAT 84), where the Tribunal affirmed that safe storage obligations are fundamental conditions of firearms licensing in the Territory. In that matter, the Tribunal upheld regulatory action taken in response to storage deficiencies, emphasising that:

- Safe storage requirements are not discretionary or optional;
- Even technical or seemingly minor non-compliance can justify regulatory intervention;
- The statutory purpose of the regime is preventative — aimed at reducing risk before harm occurs.

The Tribunal made clear that firearms ownership in the ACT is a conditional privilege, contingent on demonstrable and ongoing compliance with safety obligations. The decision underscored that the regulatory scheme is designed to prioritise community safety over individual convenience, and that storage standards must be interpreted consistently with that objective.

Accordingly, safe storage in the ACT operates as a frontline risk mitigation measure. It removes immediate access to firearms by children, unauthorised persons, and opportunistic thieves, and creates deliberate barriers that reduce impulsive misuse. The ACAT's 8 December 2015 finding confirms that the Legislative Assembly intended these provisions to be applied strictly, and that enforcement action for non-compliance is both lawful and consistent with the protective purpose of the legislation.

Inter-Agency information sharing

While not directly stated in the Bill, I would stress the importance of inter-agency information sharing, not only during the initial licensing period, but through the whole of life of the licence. One of the key lessons the Australian Government learnt after Sept 11, 2001 was the importance of “need to share” when it came to terrorism and public safety. Section 18(2) of the current ACT refers to this need to share.

Stove-piping occurs when intelligence or risk-relevant information moves vertically within a single agency but is not shared laterally across agencies or jurisdictions that may hold complementary fragments of the threat picture. In counter-terrorism and public safety settings, this can produce fragmented threat assessment leading to missed indicators across datasets. This can result in delayed intervention; and/or over- or under-reaction due to incomplete context.

If this Bill is to meet the criteria regarding effective legislation in relation to public safety then and large part of the internal actions need to be within the bureaucratic structures that apply to compliance.

It is important to stress that the ACT government, the ACT Police and the ACT Firearms Registry work as effective structures because they are small, nimble and focussed. The only capability that needs to be addressed urgently is technology and the need for enhanced data basing.

Unlike the NSW Firearms Registry, which has to cover a vast state with limited resources, the ACT Firearms Registry works because of the individualised approach to licensed owners. Staff at the Registry know their customers and recognise where issues might arise.

In the context of potential amendments to firearms legislation:

- Licensing authorities must have access to credible risk intelligence
- Counter-terrorism indicators should be capable of informing regulatory decisions

- Information barriers between policing, intelligence, and administrative units should be minimised where lawful

If reforms strengthen regulatory powers without simultaneously strengthening intelligence integration, risk mitigation may remain incomplete. Therefore, preventing stove-piping is therefore not about expanding state power indiscriminately. It is about ensuring decision-makers can operate with the fullest lawful risk picture available, so that proportionate intervention can occur before harm manifests.

Laws fit for purpose

It is important that all ACT residents are able to live without fear, or persecution, or violence. A basic tenet of democracy is that laws must work for the greater good, but do not vilify or diminish any group.

In the aftermath of traumatic public events, there is strong and understandable pressure on governments to “act quickly.” While timely reform can be appropriate, legislation developed primarily in response to acute public emotion — rather than structured risk assessment — can produce unintended psychosocial consequences for the broader community.

Public trust is a critical asset in public safety. Where regulation is seen as proportionate and demonstrably linked to risk, compliance improves. Where it is perceived as punitive or politically driven, social licence weakens.

It cannot be stressed enough that the ACT population is not the same as the NSW population. The factors that contributed to the tragic events witnessed in Bondi do not exist in the ACT. With many of the licensed firearms owners in the ACT having had careers in the Australian Public Service (APS) or the Defence Forces, there is a strong sense of community, safety and social obligation inherent in the clubs. A significant number of members have also held high level security clearances as well as senior positions of trust in the APS and private enterprise. I expect their voices to be heard in the public responses to the Inquiry and I expect their insights to have value.

There is also a need to identify and cost the unintended consequences of legislative change in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event. In Australia, we can catalogue the economic impact on the economy following the Port Arthur massacre. This tragic event had a financial impact on every taxpayer for a number of years as a result of the Buy Back levy, and businesses suffered or closed as economic drivers related to hunting and camping were reduced.

Anecdotally, this is happening again and I expect businesses will be forced to close as a result of firearms changes vilifying lawful firearms owners.

With the current high cost of living in this country, every State and Territory in deficit, and economic drivers weak, removing a legitimate sport and recreation from the population will reduce confidence in the ACT Government’s ability to manage the Territory as well as divert much needed funding away from health and education in order to provide a solution to a problem caused by a breakdown in another State’s public policy and police budget.

Conclusion

In summary, the *Firearms Act 1996* remains largely fit for purpose, having operated effectively to protect residents of the Australian Capital Territory while maintaining a balanced and regulated licensing framework. Its existing provisions—particularly those empowering the Registrar to assess suitability and those tested through review before the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal—demonstrate that the scheme is both workable in practice and supported by established precedent.

Looking specially at the Bill, I note that firearms categories should evolve where risk evolves. However, reform must remain anchored in technical precision, demonstrated misuse patterns, and proportionality. I support evidence-based modernisation of categories. I do not support narrative-driven expansion that captures rare, historical or low-risk firearms without clear public safety justification.

I would repeat my earlier comments that the proposed changes would deeply impact me, my ability to compete and my ongoing preparations for national and international level competition. It would also hamper my ability to support regional landowners deal with the economic and environmental damage caused by invasive species.

In conclusion, public safety is strengthened not by the volume of legislation, but by the precision of its design and the integrity of its implementation. The ACT stands as an exemplar jurisdiction in its regulation and administration of firearms licensing and we, as a community, should be proud of the way it has achieved this outcome.