



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

Executive Summary

The ACT already operates under one of the most restrictive firearms regulatory frameworks in Australia. Available data shows:

- The ACT has the lowest firearms-related homicide rate nationally.
- Between 2013–2024, approximately 30 homicides occurred in the ACT, with roughly 6.6% involving firearms.
- This proportion is less than half the national average proportion of homicides involving firearms.
- Assaults and robberies involving firearms have declined over the past two decades.
- The proportion of licensed firearms owners per capita has nearly halved since the late 1990s.

In light of these trends, further restrictive measures including buybacks, recategorisation, or numerical caps require clear, quantitative justification.

In the absence of demonstrable high quality evidence of increased public risk, such reforms risk imposing high fiscal cost for limited, if any, measurable public safety gain.

1. The ACT's Existing Regulatory Environment

The ACT implements:

- Mandatory licensing with background checks
- Permit to Acquire (PTA) requirements and registration for each firearm
- Mandatory waiting periods of 28 days
- Requirement to physically attend the firearms registry
- Safe storage inspections and rigorous storage requirements

Each PTA application requires registry processing and generates revenue while maintaining individualised oversight and increasing contact with regulatory authorities.

Policy reform should therefore begin with the question:

What measurable deficiency in current law is evidenced by ACT-specific data?

2. Firearms Homicide in the ACT: Proportion and Incidence

From 2013–2024:

- Total homicides in the ACT: ~30
- Firearms-related homicides: ~6.6%

This equates to approximately 2 firearm-related homicides over an 11-year period.

When expressed as a rate:

- The ACT's firearms homicide rate is below the national average.
- It is also lower than comparable urban jurisdictions interstate.

If the total number of firearms-related homicides is statistically very low and stable, policy interventions should demonstrate proportionality relative to the scale of harm.

3. Trends in Firearms Crime

Data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicates that firearms-related assaults and robberies have declined over the past 20 years.

National data from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) shows:

- Firearm homicide rates declined substantially following the mid-1990s reforms and have remained low.
- Only a small proportion of stolen firearms (estimated 3–5% in various AIC analyses) are subsequently used in crime.
- The majority of firearm-related offending involves unlawfully possessed unregistered or illegal firearms.
- Chief Police Officer Lee has stated that the vast majority of firearms used in crime in the ACT and Australia are unregistered.

These findings suggest:

- Legal ownership is not the dominant pathway into criminal misuse.
- Targeted disruption of illegal supply chains and high-risk individuals may offer greater marginal benefit than broad ownership restrictions.

4. Licensing and Ownership Rates: Per Capita Decline

Although the absolute number of registered firearms has increased, this must be contextualised against population growth.

Licensed firearm owners per 100,000 people:

- 1997: ~6500
- 2024: ~3339

This represents an approximate 49% reduction in the proportion of licensed owners over 27 years.

In other words:

- Firearms ownership is more concentrated among fewer individuals.
- There is no evidence of exponential growth in per capita firearm ownership in the ACT.

Policy framing that suggests escalating lawful ownership risk should be reconciled with this long-term decline.

5. Firearms Theft and Storage

AIC research indicates:

- Firearms theft has declined significantly since the introduction of the NFA.
- Improper storage is a contributing factor in a subset of theft cases. A Police study from New Zealand found 66% of stolen firearms had been improperly stored.
- The proportion of stolen firearms later used in crime is low.

If theft diversion is a genuine concern, the most evidence-aligned interventions would include:

- Increased compliance inspections
- Enhanced registry resourcing
- Intelligence sharing between jurisdictions
- Data-driven identification of higher-risk licence holders

These measures are more directly connected to identified risk factors than arbitrary ownership caps. In the case of intelligence sharing, the Bondi attacks could have been prevented by interagency communication and application of existing fit and proper persons laws.

6. Buybacks: Evidence of Effectiveness

A 2008 working paper from the University of Melbourne (Melbourne Institute) examined the 1996 buyback and concluded that measurable effects on firearm homicide were statistically limited.

Given that:

- Firearm homicide in the ACT is already extremely low, and
- The base rate of firearms-related violence is small,

The marginal benefit of a further buyback is likely to be correspondingly small — while the fiscal cost may be substantial.

Cost-benefit analysis should quantify:

- Projected expenditure
- Expected reduction in incident rate
- Cost per incident theoretically prevented

Without such modelling, policy risks being symbolic rather than outcome-driven.

7. Proposed Five-Firearm Cap

There is *no published Australian evidence* demonstrating that capping the number of firearms owned by compliant, licensed individuals reduces violent crime.

In the absence of evidence that multiple-firearm ownership correlates with higher offending rates, or lawfully held surplus firearms are a primary source of diversion, a numerical cap appears arbitrary.

In the ACT, prior decisions of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) established that imposing arbitrary numerical caps on firearm collectors is unlawful if not based on direct public safety risks (reported by ABC News in 2015).

Evidence-based policy requires a causal link, not an assumed one.

8. Comparative Context

Internationally and nationally:

- Australia has not experienced a mass shooting event between 1996–2013.
- Total gun deaths (homicide and suicide) declined significantly post-1996 and have remained comparatively low, likely due to multiple factors in addition to the NFA.
- The ACT's firearms homicide proportion is below the national average.

When the base rate of an event is extremely low, large regulatory interventions produce diminishing returns.

9. Human Rights and Proportionality

Under the Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT), limitations on rights must be:

- Reasonable
- Necessary
- Proportionate

Where the empirical harm rate is already minimal, and where affected individuals are compliant and licensed, justification for additional restrictions must be especially robust.

Policy based on association rather than demonstrated risk may fail proportionality analysis.

The laws in their present form risk unfairly targeting law abiding firearms owners and associating them with criminal elements.

10. Recommendations

1. Publish detailed modelling of projected cost and measurable safety outcomes before implementation.
2. Await findings from the Victorian firearms review.
3. Prioritise:
 - Enhanced background checks
 - Interagency intelligence sharing
 - Targeted removal powers for identified high-risk individuals
 - Registry resourcing and compliance enforcement
4. Avoid numerical caps in the absence of empirical evidence of efficacy.
5. If recategorisation proceeds, implement grandfathering provisions to reduce fiscal and social impact.

6. Focus reform efforts on criminal misuse pathways rather than compliant ownership.

Conclusion

The ACT:

- Has the lowest firearms-related homicide rate in Australia.
- Experiences very few firearm-related homicides in absolute terms.
- Has seen a near 50% decline in licensed owners per capita since the late 1990s.
- Operates within an already stringent regulatory regime.

Before expanding restrictions, the Assembly should clearly demonstrate:

- The existence of a defined and growing risk, that proposed measures directly target that risk, and that expected public safety gains justify fiscal and civil impacts.

Evidence-based, proportionate policy rather than symbolic escalation will best serve community safety.