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Guns and Politics

Politicians and political parties only really care about one thing, which is getting re-elected to form the government; this is why Chris Bishop Nation Police spokesperson is holding firearm forums around the country. It is therefore important that as many shooters as possible attend these meetings and make it clear that shooters will only vote for those who respect our interests. It is vital that we put forward the message that shooters will only tolerate changes to firearm legislation that will solve real issues and result in measurable outcomes.

It is not good enough to tighten gun control measures in order to deal with imagined or perceived problems that have been sensationalized in the media. However many members of the general public when asked if gun laws should be tougher will respond “yes”, simply because they are ignorant of existing laws and are influenced by what they see in the media. It is up to all of us to educate the public; you can start by talking to your friends and family members.

Future Form of NZ Firearm Legislation

We've all heard rumours about a new Arms Act. Some folk think this is justified because the 1983 one is, well, 35 years old and was only amended back in 1992 (26 years ago) and underwent slight changes in 2012 (6 years ago). There are plenty of other Acts still in use that are far older – Crimes Act (1961 for starters (no great clamour to reinvent that). Is the 'old' legislation working? SSANZ says “YES”, and here's why: Official statistics show no significant increase in firearm offences, and a steady decline in homicides with a firearm, and while robberies are on the increase, **robbery with a firearm is declining**.

This leads us to outline what we think is “effective” legislation:

- It attracts popular (= public, widespread) support because it is simple, sensible, clear and easily complied with.
- It does not generate a raft of new offences (which rapidly boost the number of offences recorded against the legislation).
- The law abiding find the law easy to follow and easy to obey.
- A law which deters criminal offending, diverting them into other forms or kinds of offending is not really useful to the community which it is intended to serve.
- A law needs to be cost-effective, meaning that the community savings it generates exceed the costs of enforcement and of processing those offenders caught under its provisions. The ratio of social benefits to the incurred costs must exceed 5, and preferably 10 for it to attract the spending of public money upon it.

Resolution still needed for the Hazmat Regulations Debacle

Last year some revised Regulations were promulgated about the operation of the Hazardous Goods and New Organisms. These obviously confused some 'hazmat' inspectors because they advised some operators of hazardous materials storage facilities that Class 1.4S Hazmats could not be kept there for longer than 24 hours, or face a \$50,000 fine for breaching the Regulations.

This is nonsense, we are advised that an exemption applies to Class 1.4S goods (namely, safety cartridges and primers) and has done so since the previous Regulations were issued in 2001. Just where the bad advice has come from is uncertain, but it seems somewhat similar to that which led to the adoption by Standards Association of NZ of standards requiring the near-demolition of houses in which 'P' had been prepared. That was subsequently disproved.

Issues around Collapsible or Folding Stocks

When the Arms Act (1983) came into force it defined a pistol as: “**pistol** means any firearm that is designed or adapted to be held and fired with 1 hand; and includes any firearm that is less than 762 millimetres in length” One has to assume that the intention for this limit on length was to discourage people, particularly criminals, from cutting down long guns in order to conceal them, and make such instances subject to the tougher penalties for supplying or possessing a pistol over those for long guns. In those days too there were few legal long guns with collapsible or folding butts.

In 1992 a new category of firearm was introduced in the legislation, the MSSA, and one of its defining features was a collapsible or folding butt. Since the MSSA was a strictly regulated type of firearm requiring stronger security and vetting of owners similar to a pistol, police took the view that its length should be measured with the butt extended.

35 years on the situation has changed. Now there is a proliferation of firearms that have been imported of modular design that incorporate both collapsible butts and shorter barrels, including semi automatics, bolt action and shotguns; the AR15 types being the most recognisable. This has led police to recently review the way that collapsible butts are measured and conclude that the firearm should be measured with the butt collapsed.

The consequence of this change in policy by police has led to some firearm owners now being in possession of illegal firearms which were previously lawful. In November in a district court case brought by NZ Hunter Group v Commissioner of Police to challenge this new police policy the judge ruled that the length should be measured with the butt collapsed, but declined to rule on whether muzzle attachment should be included in the length. However in a separate district court case the judge said that muzzle attachments could only be included in the length measurement if they were permanently fixed.

Some owners have expressed their frustration at this outcome of costly court action by suggesting on social media retaliating against police by banning police training from club ranges. SSANZ would caution against this sort of retaliation as it will invariably lead to adverse commentary in mainstream media and damage our reputation as responsible law abiding firearm owners; far better to seek clarification through a superior court or the democratic process when opportunity arises to change the legislation.

SSANZ advice to owners of “short” rifles is to check your length with the butt collapsed or folded and seek compensation from police for market value or the cost price, whichever is the greater, for loss of firearm or any costs incurred to rectify if found to be less than 762 mm. Especially if purchased through a permit to procure issued by police.

Meanwhile ponder this: a B Endorsed owner may own a pistol and a C endorsed owner may own all manner of restricted firearms that are shorter than 762mm and are trusted as fit and proper persons to be law abiding. So why can't E endorsed owners who are subjected to the same security requirements and vetting process be trusted in the same way to own MSSAs that are less than 762mm when their butts are collapsed?

Annual Subs are now due for Regular members

Please send \$20 to the above address or pay by Direct Credit to SSANZ Account 03-0179-0160150-00 with your name as reference.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year