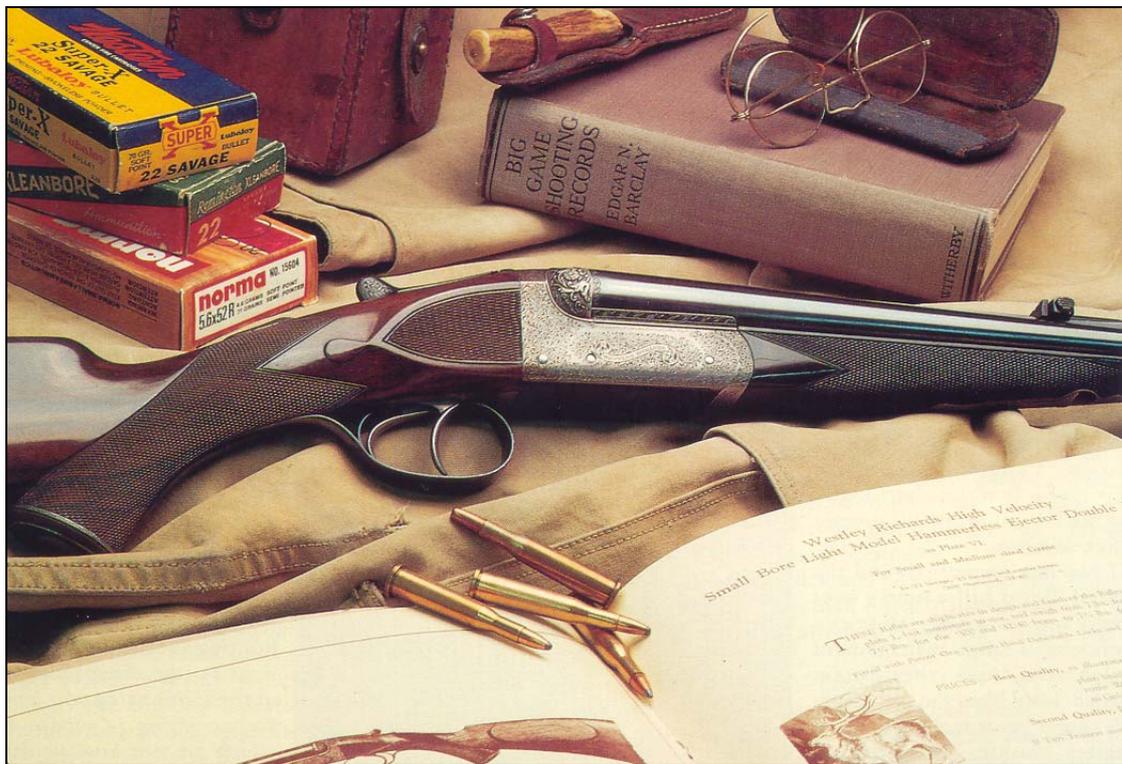


# Gun Prohibition in Australia: An expensive mistake!



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# **Gun Prohibition in Australia: An expensive mistake!**

Politicians, Criminologists and Community Leaders are all alarmed by the increase in criminal activity during the past six years. During that same time there has been an unprecedented increase in litigation leading to enormous personal injury payouts. This paper analyses the connections between the introduction of many tough new laws, high levels of litigation and the attitudes of law-abiding citizens and criminals.

## **Keywords**

- Gun Buy Back
- Violent Videos
- Mental Health Policy
- Police
- Criminals
- Medical Intervention
- Gun Prohibition
- Victimless Crimes
- Individual Responsibility
- Helpless Victim Syndrome
- Self-Defence

## **Background**

Let us reflect on the developments, which have taken place since the 1996 Australian Police Ministers Conference held on May 10, 1996 in Canberra. At that time Australia was still numb from the murders at Port Arthur and the resulting media frenzy. The newly elected Prime Minister, John Howard, possibly anxious to make his mark, was quick to accuse Martin Bryant of being the murderer, before any trial or official inquiry was held and before Police had completed their investigation. This must be one of the most blatant examples of contempt of the judicial process in Australian History. Without waiting for any Court case, Mr. Howard forced the Police Ministers, under threat of withholding federal funding, to accept his version of gun control. In the absence of an independent inquiry, we will never know if the Port Arthur murders were a result of poor policing (Bryant had already been close to two people who had died under suspicious circumstances and there had been several complaints made against him for wildly firing his rifles late at night), or because of the addiction he had to watching violent videos. Or was it a failure of the Government's own mental health policy? Mr. Howard considered it, to be the guns' fault, so the guns got the blame!

At no stage did Mr. Howard appear to consider, or be aware of, the examples of other countries, which had attempted to control the levels of gun ownership in the general community. Jamaica, for example, has had total gun bans for several years so that the only people who have guns are the Police and criminals. Consequently, their general crime rate and murder, in particular, is one of the highest in the world. After Dunblane the UK brought in their own version of "tough gun laws" which banned all handguns. Their murder rate has since increased by 50%. Criminal use of Guns has increased by almost 400%. Cities in the UK are now among the most dangerous in the world – more so than in the US.

But let us return to the Police Ministers. They had to return to their States and Territories with the framework of a “gun buy back”, funded by an increased Medicare levy. They then proceeded to take family heirlooms, historical artifacts, farmers tools of trade and sporting equipment, from the very group of people who are shown by many statistics to be least likely to commit any crime, law-abiding firearms owners. Mass protest rallies were held in major capital cities, the size of which we had not seen since the anti-Vietnam War Protests. And every protest by people regarded by Mr. Howard as being “dangerous”, was perfectly peaceful. Resentment swelled in the community towards the Police, seen to be the face of an uncaring and unsympathetic Government. Respect for the Police also dropped when, in numerous cases firearms which had been handed in found their way into the private collections of some members of Police, or into the hands of criminals, used as “plants” to help gain convictions, or even resurfaced for sale at the local pub! The most significant result, for those Police Ministers, was that within a very short time, they were all out of a job, thanks to voter revolt, which sacked the Liberal-National Party Governments in all states or (in the case of Police Minister Paul Whelan, in N.S.W), replaced by the premier!

### Increase in crime

So let's look at what has happened to the crime rates in the past six years since those “knee jerk” laws were introduced. In N.S.W. (from the institute of Criminology), armed robbery has increased by 280%. Australia overall now has one of the highest rates of assault on a person compared with other developed countries. In the 15 years prior to 1996, the number of firearms deaths in Australia had been steadily decreasing. According to the Bureau of statistics it had halved during that time. In fact the number of deaths by firearms had been steadily decreasing since the beginning of the 20th Century... long before the "buy back".) What has happened, as with Liquor during the Prohibition Era in USA, is that guns are now highly sought after by criminals and a huge black market has resulted, driven by the need to own something very effective, which is banned.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for all of Australia are:-

Attempted Murders in 1996 = 335 and in 2001 = 458 (36% increase)

**Armed Robbery in 1996 = 6526: in 2001 = 11, 056 (70% up)**

Firearms related robbery in 1996 = 1585: in 2001 = 1686 (6% up)

**Kidnapping/Abductions in 1996 = 480: in 2001 = 758 (58% increase)**

The number of Murders with a Firearm has remained static at around 50 per year, out of a total of average 300 murders per year. There were 49 Firearms Murders in 1994 and 49 Firearms Murders in 2001; the \$500 million was a complete waste.

Medical Professionals also point to the benefits of more advanced and timely medical intervention; thus after an attack, a victim is saved, rather than dying. This is supported by the Data for Attempted Murder, which during the period, increased as outlined above, although the number of murders did not increase. Perhaps the reason for the prompt arrival of medical assistance is due to the high density of mobile phones! Imagine how many more lives would have been saved if the money wasted on “Gun Control” had been better invested in improved medical services, or improvement in mobile telephone access! But, you can use statistics to "prove" whatever you like! Some Gun-Prohibition advocates incorporated the figures for suicides (where a firearm was used) to inflate the total for "gun deaths", even though suicide isn't a crime!

It is when we hear of Murders, hold-ups and assaults, in broad daylight at our local suburban shopping centre, that we start to take notice. The fact is that many suburbs in our cities are now patrolled by private security firms. Most shopping malls as well as Pharmacies and liquor stores also have permanent armed guards standing at their doors. The N.S.W Police can now be hired out, in their own time, to guard shopping centres and private functions. The callous murder of Police

Officer, Glenn McEnallay, is only one of many cases that prove Howard's "tough gun laws" aren't working. The existing laws only serve to inconvenience and cause resentment among law-abiding Australian men, women and youths who, for occupational, Olympic/Commonwealth Games competition, general sporting competitions or recreational purposes choose to own a firearm. At the same time they have absolutely no effect on those in the community with criminal intent, who will always find a "weapon" be it a gun, knife or cricket bat.

### **Misdirected Resources**

The existing system of strict licensing of firearms owner and the registration of each and every legal firearm, means that an immense amount of Police time and resources is wasted in chasing a paper trail, with forms, interviews, inspections, approvals etc., of the very group of citizens who are least likely to commit any firearms-related crime! Statistics from Australia and many other countries show the veracity of this statement. While vast amounts of Police time and energy is used in this activity, their colleagues and ordinary citizens are getting shot at by criminals, who by definition, don't obey any laws, let alone Howard's "tough gun laws"!

It's time to consider the scrapping of the existing wasteful, unworkable system of firearms licensing and registration and replacing it with one that is realistic, workable and which specifically targets and punishes the real criminals?

The only people who are benefiting from the "tough gun laws" are criminals, as crime in all categories climbs dramatically. What governments have done is simply introduce more and more laws. More laws, with more arrests, give the appearance that the Police are doing a great job. Now, with Sniffer dogs, the Police can harass innocent people, just for SMELLING like trouble! But all the rush of Tough New Laws relate to "victimless" crimes. Meanwhile, people are being assaulted, robbed, burgled and murdered in even greater numbers.

### **Individual Responsibility**

It seems to now be espoused by Mr Howard and the "gun control/ban everything" lobby that an individual is no longer responsible for his/her own actions. Instead the government blames the instrument used in a crime rather than the criminal! So, after a man with a gun, killed people at Port Arthur, the Government introduced "tough gun laws". The Prime Minister even claimed, at a suicide prevention conference in 1996, that "guns caused suicide", with suicide having increased to an all-time high, the stupidity of his claim is now obvious. After a person wielding a knife killed a Policeman, the NSW Government banned knives. Apparently, putting the blame on the perpetrator is somehow not "politically correct".

But it seems that Howard has still not understood that his 1996 "Buy Back" was a waste of money. After a recent double murder at Monash University, more gun prohibition orders have been issued; this time on hand guns, which, in Howard's own words, had never been a problem, as they had already been extremely tightly regulated.

Howard's reaction in immediately blaming certain types of hand guns was as if Australia didn't already have a law which made murder illegal.

But, along with more and more Laws, there has now developed a phenomenon known as "Helpless Victim Syndrome"; no longer is any one individual responsible for his/her own actions, but always something or somebody else is to blame. How many times have we heard reported that "the car went out of control", or "a truck veered into the oncoming traffic". Even the constant references to Motor Vehicle "Accidents", concurs with the commonly held view that the ability (or culpability), of the Driver of the vehicle is somehow irrelevant! Are we all being conditioned to accept that we all suffer from "Helpless Victim Syndrome"? There was even a case recently reported, of a bank

"hold up" and thousands of dollars handed over, to a man who didn't even have a weapon of any sort! The practice of removing individual responsibility has led to a dramatic increase in Insurance Claims, since 1996, with Millions of Dollars being paid out to people who dived into shallow surf, or who slipped over while clowning around at a local swimming pool. What now with Swimming, Surfing and Horse riding, now that we have declined to accept any concept of Individual Responsibility? The irony is that Shooting Clubs, enjoying the increase in attendance, as Licenced Gun Owners comply with the Laws for frequent attendance, are now seeing their safe history being reflected in minimal increases in Insurance Premiums!

Let's re-introduce to young people at school, concepts such as "personal responsibility" and "self control". Let's emphasise the fact that "Self-defence" is a perfectly natural reaction to an attack. Classes in Karate and similar Martial Arts are promoted as "Self-defence", so let's introduce "Self-defence" classes using the best available equipment – a firearm.

Let's give our citizens the confidence and means to overcome the symptoms of "Helpless Victim Syndrome" and the courage to help stamp out criminal activity.

We give driver training, coach sports and many other activities at school so that children develop self-esteem as well as abilities in many activities. This should be extended to include Firearms Training. This will have a real and positive effect when they later get behind the wheel of a car, join a rifle club, go bushwalking or hunting, or simply decide to go surfing at Bondi. May the Police Ministers, faced with steadily increasing criminal activity, decide to overturn the Gun Laws and focus their limited resources on targeting the REAL criminals, while giving responsibility back to decent law-abiding citizens.

Only when we have a more level headed attitude to such activities as firearms ownership, with the appropriate stressing of individual responsibility, will we be able to have a reduction in crime, a reduction in frivolous insurance claims and consequent reduction in insurance premiums.

### **Source Material**

Institute of Criminology  
Australian Bureau of Statistics  
NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics

### **Appendix**

1 "How Ryan failed to reduce crime" courtesy of [The Daily Telegraph](#)

2 "Efforts not worthy of any reward" courtesy of [The Daily Telegraph](#)

# How Ryan failed to reduce crime

By WARREN OWENS

FIVE years and more than \$2 million in salary and perks later, Police Commissioner Peter Ryan has revolutionised police practice in NSW — but with limited impact on crime rates in that time.

Latest official figures show more than half of all major crime categories are worse than when Mr Ryan arrived from Britain, while only a handful are better.

Clear-up rates of crime over Mr Ryan's five years are generally better. Of 21 major crime categories, 25 per cent are better, 25 per cent are worse — and half are unchanged from 1996 levels.

In the categories at the centre of police management decisions: car theft, stealing, robbery, burglary and assault, there is little change or it is worse than five years ago.

A comparison of crime rates now and in mid-1996 when Mr Ryan took over, based on Bureau of Crime Statistics figures, show the following trends (changes greater than 10 per cent):

Murder, little change; attempted murder, 33 per cent worse; assault, 20 per cent worse; sexual assault, 12 per cent worse; indecent assault, no change; other sexual offences, 10 per cent better.

Robbery, 35 per cent worse; armed robbery (gun), 23 per cent better; armed robbery (knife), 80 per cent worse.

Home, shop, factory burglary, car theft, little change; theft from cars, 30 per cent worse; shoplifting, 10 per cent better; theft from person (mugging), 23 per cent worse; other theft, 35 per cent worse.

Fraud, 15 per cent worse; extortion, demanding money with menace, 50 per cent worse; arson, 35 per cent worse (mainly last year).



Revolutionary: NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan at a graduation ceremony

Police "clear-up rates" — mostly arrests within 30 days — in the period are mixed:

Sexual/indecent assault, 30 per cent worse; theft from cars, 20 per cent worse; extortion/demand money with menace, 25 per cent worse; abduction/kidnapping, robbery, theft from home, 10 per cent better; car theft, 40 per cent better; theft from cars, 20 per cent worse; shoplifting, 25 per cent better; theft from person (mugging), 10 per cent worse; fraud, 25 per cent worse.

Many more users of co-

caine, heroin and amphetamines are being arrested than five years ago, also more dealers and suppliers.

Arrests of cocaine dealers have dropped since 1996, and arrests of marijuana dealers and growers have slumped.

A spokeswoman for Police Minister Paul Whelan said "The increasing use of heroin is still behind a lot of crime. That is a national problem."

More burglars are being arrested and stolen goods recovered than five years ago.

Arrests of dangerous driv-

ers, particularly for manslaughter and culpable driving, and drunken drivers, have risen dramatically.

Bureau of Crime Statistics chief, Dr Don Weatherburn, the big Olympics commitment may have affected policing.

"The police were making serious progress in reducing crime — particularly car theft, robberies and burglaries — for the two years until about June 2000," he said.

"But after that, most major crime categories began to rise again — and are still rising."

# The Daily Telegraph

Monday, May 6, 2002

## Efforts not worthy of any reward

**T**HE gall of former Police Commissioner Peter Ryan in holding out his hand for an additional year's salary while organising to end his contract is matched only by the frustration of the long-suffering taxpayer.

During his term, crime increased substantially; the rate of armed robbery with a gun rose by 34 per cent last year to represent an increase of more than 280 per cent since Mr Ryan took office six years ago.

When compared to crime rates in other states, again Mr Ryan's record is abysmal.

State Auditor-General Bob Sendt rated the occurrence of crime against people in NSW as well above the national average in 2000.

His promised reforms also are in tatters. While the Police Integrity Commission hearings over the Operation Florida investigation reflect good police work, unfortunately for Mr Ryan, it also reveals that high levels of corruption remain endemic within the force.

A number of reforms introduced by Mr Ryan after the Wood royal commission were overturned by the jumping-jack Police Minister Michael Costa — even his own reform unit disintegrated in acrimony.

Yet while being paid to protect the citizens of NSW, Mr Ryan managed to take 10 weeks' leave in his last year of service. This included a stint to the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and three trips to Athens, where he has accepted the job as head of security for the 2004 Olympics.

Now there is conjecture Mr Ryan had already accepted this position when he announced his resignation as police commissioner on April 10, although Mr Costa says he had no knowledge of this when his departure was negotiated.

At the time both the State Government and Mr Ryan referred to a "mutual termination" of his contract — leaving it ambiguous as to whether Mr Ryan resigned or was sacked.



**Australia's proud tradition of Sports Shooting is being eroded!**

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