

In Defence of the Shooting Sports

"Harnessing the power of the membership"

C.L.A.S.S. Opinion and Research

Coalition of Law-Abiding Sporting Shooters' - c.l.a.s.s.

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Executive summary:

The Australian Shooting Associations should learn from the advertising campaign conducted by the Mining Lobby which so frightened the Australia Labor Party that it conducted a political coup and installed a new prime minister.

The campaign in 1988, conducted by shooting associations, was instrumental in leading to the defeat of the Unsworth Labor Government. The various associations in NSW worked together to defeat a government that pinned its re-election on an arbitrary anti-gun policy.

The various associations throughout Australia should put aside their differences and co-operate to show people across the country that shooters are ordinary people just like anyone else and do not deserve the concept of collective punishment that is being administered by Australian state governments.

In South Australia, the SA Police Dept. (SAPOL) has embarked on a campaign to prevent the ownership of so-called “large calibre” firearms, using powers contained in the Firearms Act to cancel registrations. So far as we are aware, other states have not followed the lead of SA in coming down on large calibre firearms.

Queensland has embarked on a comprehensive review of the Weapons Act with all the costs being placed on firearms owners. There are other, insidious, changes mooted to the Act governing firearms ownership which should be resisted by gun owners.

A meeting held in Tasmania earlier this year, attended by police from all states, which decided that certain steps should be undertaken taken was - according to our information - conducted without minutes being recorded.

SAPOL has also intimated that lever-action shotguns may be next to be targeted, because SAPOL see this as a ‘loophole’ in the law which shooters are taking advantage of when all that shooters are doing is obeying the law – there is no loophole.

It’s time for shooters to fight these arbitrary controls. The very least any shooter should do is write to their local MP, both state and federal, in their own words, protesting against arbitrary controls which are designed to punish shooters just for being shooters, not for any other reason. If the national organisations will not take up the fight, then it’s time for individual action.

“Harnessing the power of the membership”

Shooting Associations can learn a great deal from the successful advertising campaign conducted by the Mining Lobby against the Resource Super Profits Tax (RSPT). It teaches us much on how successful outcomes can be achieved. The miners brought about the downfall of a prime minister because they worked as one. And while shooters shouldn't aim for a similar outcome, there is nothing wrong with trying to influence a government so that a favourable conclusion can be delivered.

Australia's shooting associations must harness the 'power of the membership' to successfully lobby state and federal politicians and convince them that any action that does not benefit us directly will lead to electoral cost.

Unfortunately, some associations are afraid to challenge a government, whether state or federal. They have hidden behind a policy of being "apolitical". There is no such thing as "apolitical" no matter how much we may wish otherwise. Since John Howard forced his gun laws on Australia in 1996, apolitical-ness has gone out the window. Where we are concerned, everything in Australia has been highly political for many years, and it was certainly the case even before 1996.

But we have one thing going for us: nothing concentrates a politician's mind as much as the spectre of an oncoming, losing election.

Political Parties usually take action because they think it will help them to remain in power, and will do whatever it takes to achieve that aim. Once out of power, their first thought is to regain it.

What possible reason can there be, other than the possible loss of power, for the bloodless, political coup staged recently? The Labor Party decided that Kevin Rudd had become a political liability, so it was time to get rid of him. In his place we have a Prime Minister who, on election night in 2007, said that she admired John Howard, "when under very difficult circumstances he achieved better gun laws in this country"¹. But Julia Gillard has shown herself to be politically pragmatic, and she may well be a shrewder, more astute political operator than Kevin Rudd - though there has been little evidence to support this notion thus far.

The various associations, from the largest to the smallest, must get together and fight for the survival of the shooting sports, otherwise shooting, and the associations themselves, are *doomed*. They must put aside differences and treat an attack on one as an attack on all; and an attack on one

means an attack on a specific part. An example being the cancellation of registrations of so-called “large calibre” firearms as is happening in SA right now.

In 1988 the shooting associations in NSW co-operated in an advertising campaign and brought about the demise of the anti-gun Unsworth Labor government – the first time anywhere in the world shooters had been instrumental in dismissing an elected government. They were successful because they worked together to achieve a common goal in much the same way as the miners have done recently.

A campaign will not be cheap, but it is not outside the ability of the various associations to fund it. The national bodies must, of necessity, carry the greater burden with contributions from state and territory offices and a fund-raising campaign to solicit donations from ordinary members.

And state parochialism must be forgotten!

It has been many years since the major associations have solicited donations from members. Once the membership believes that the associations are working in their interest, they will be forthcoming with money to fight the campaign. This is a national fight and not something that can be left to the individual states. The state bodies see only part of the problem - and sometimes only a very small part, leadership must come nationally; a national organisation formed by all shooting associations - like the one in NSW in 1988 - to work together for the benefit of all.

CLASS will not point the finger at individuals on state executives. All are volunteers giving freely of their time to help their members. Or at least to help their members as they perceive the problems their members face. Most work for all the members, some however are woefully out of touch with the membership at large and cannot recognise a problem when it arises because it does not affect them personally. One, referring to firearms the police identify as “large calibre” wrote, ‘No need for these in (*deleted*)’, a remarkably short sighted view.

The current battlegrounds are South Australia and Queensland, but all states are either in the process of reviewing legislation, or will do so in the near future. The war, for want of a better term, will be fought all over Australia.

The Coalition of Law-Abiding Shooters (CLASS) has learned (from a correspondent in Tasmania) that the action on “large calibre” firearms was decided at a meeting of ranking police officers in Hobart, at which no minutes were kept, and at which it was decided that so-called “large calibre” firearms were to be targeted. The South Australian Firearms Branch has since moved to cancel the registrations of “large calibre” firearms because, according to the Deputy Registrar, they were

“inadvertently” registered. No compensation has been offered for rifles that cost many thousands of dollars to acquire. How can firearms be “inadvertently” registered? Either it is registered or it is not. There are no half measures. Once a shooter has undergone the whole procedure from applying for and being granted a “Permit to Acquire” then registering the firearm, the claim that they were ‘inadvertently registered’ becomes untenable.

The SA Police Minister, in a letter shown to CLASS, claims the .338 Lapua is ‘flat shooting out to 3000 metres and with a few degrees of elevation will reach to 7000 metres’, a statement that indicates that the law of gravity has been repealed, though with what it has been replaced is unknown.

CLASS has also learned that the next type of firearm to be targeted may well be Lever Action shotguns. After that, who knows? Nothing will be safe. The SA Firearms Act is being reviewed and police have submitted a proposal that club membership a condition of firearms ownership. Once all firearms owners are bundled together in clubs it will be easy to control shooters because shooters will be beholden to the clubs and will have attendance requirements thrust upon them to maintain their licences.

The nightmare of many shooters is that Australia’s gun laws may one day be worse than those of the UK which, in spite of ever tighter restrictions, appears to have a greater incidence of armed crime and murder than it had prior to the restrictions. That nightmare is upon us. We are led to believe that in the UK, air pistols and air guns below a certain power rating are freely available, unlicensed.² Compare that with Australia’s laws where low-powered air guns are considered to be firearms, with all the attendant restrictions. (In Australia a perception fostered by the Mainstream Media (MSM) is that gun-related crime is spiralling out of control and that gun laws should be further tightened. That perception is unsupported by any evidence).^{3,4}

References:

1. [Julia Gillard statement supporting John Howard](#)
2. <http://www.youngmans.com/acatalog/law.html>
3. [Crime rate 1994-2008](#)
4. [Comparison of weapons use: Less than 1% of violent crime was committed with a firearm](#)

Links:

- <http://www.lafo.org.au>
- [Queensland Shooters union](#)

Action points:

1. A co-ordinating body to oversee a campaign designed to present shooters as ordinary working Australians, not the would-be criminals as the media often portrays.
2. The co-ordinating body could be called the Firearms Advisory Council (as in NSW in 1988) and should be composed of representatives from all national associations and their constituent state bodies. It would meet on a regular basis, either by phone hook-up, email or in person to formulate policy and make day-today decisions on the running of the organisation.
3. The co-ordinating body would mount a national advertising campaign, as suggested in point (1), designed to influence state and federal governments, and the general public.
4. The advertising campaign would use ordinary firearms owners to show the community at large that gun owners are people just like everybody else.
5. The co-ordinating body would write to all MP's pursuing re-election, and all candidates seeking election, asking their views on firearms ownership and rate them to the member associations based on the results of this correspondence. This would then be circulated to the members of those associations for circulation to their members.
6. Work to "harness the power of the membership" by urging them to write letters to all actual and aspiring MP's putting their view that shooting is a legitimate and lawful pastime that contributes financially and practically to rural well-being. Point out that there about one million licensed shooters in Australia, all of whom vote.
7. Solicit donations from firearm manufacturers and importers to help for the campaign
8. Research the financial benefits to rural communities made by shooters as they transit those communities.
9. Fight all restrictions as and when they occur,
10. Demand that further restrictions must be evidence based, not merely at the whim of a politician who wants to be seen to be 'doing something' to control crime.
11. Demand that the police cease treating firearm owners as potential criminals and stop regarding them as a soft target.
12. A return to the concept of allowing firearms for self defence in all states and territories.
13. Abolition of the 28 day waiting period for second and subsequent firearms and all applications for a second and subsequent firearm to be cleared as they come in. There is no good reason why applications cannot be lodged and approved electronically on the day they are submitted. (Prior to 1996, SA introduced a permit to acquire system that allowed dealers to fax an application to Firearms Branch in the morning with approval coming back in the afternoon of the same day, so we are led to believe.)

Summary:

- a) The SA Police have embarked on a campaign to outlaw the ownership of so-called “large calibre” firearms. SAPOL says they have not been banned, but just try and register one.
- b) Queensland has embarked on a comprehensive review of the Weapons Act with the cost of the so-called ‘services’ being placed on firearms owners.
- c) Other states have not followed the lead of SA in coming down on large calibre firearms, which must be a awful disappointment to some in Firearms Branch. (Perhaps because we raised the alarm on this matter.)
- d) A meeting held in Tasmania where the police decided among themselves that these steps should be taken was, according to our information, conducted without minutes being recorded, maybe so a trail of evidence could not be followed.
- e) According to the website lafo.com.au/ the Queensland government plans include:
 - Participation requirements for Category C shotguns
Why? No one knows. But we presume to make it more difficult for licensees to keep their licenses and guns.
 - The fitting of trigger locks to guns already kept in gun safes
Why? No one knows, but we hope the criminals with their unregistered and illegal guns use a trigger lock.
 - Introduction of a Hierarchy of Storage Controls
Why? So the Government can easily prosecute people whom, through no fault of their own, have had their firearms stolen.
 - Registration of deactivated category A & B, and Antique and Historical Firearms
Why? No one knows.
 - Registration of replica handguns
Why? No one knows. Better get rid of those nasty water pistols and cap guns.
 - Enlargement of the discretionary powers of the Authorised Officer
Why? No one knows.
 - Criminalise the possession of magazines for firearms you don’t own
Why? No one knows.
 - Licensing cost increases – unreasonably high
Why? Revenue raising.
- f) South Australia has also intimated that lever-action shotguns may be next to be targeted, because police see this as a ‘loophole’ in the law which shooters are taking advantage of.

It’s time for shooters to fight these arbitrary controls. The very least you can do is write to your local MP both state and federal, in your own words, protesting against arbitrary controls which are designed to punish shooters for being shooters, not for any other reason. If the national organisations will not go into bat for you, it’s time to do it for yourself.

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? - "Who will guard the guards?"

Juvenal, The Satires of Juvenal

"Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

Pericles (430 BC)

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead (1901 - 1978)