

Dear Sir/Mam,

I write in regard to the Senate enquiry into personal choice. I refer in particular to Section F- any other measures introduced to restrict personal choice 'for the individual's own good'.

The issue I wish to raise are the restrictions imposed by the 1996 Firearms Act. I do not call it an agreement as several states initially refused but were forced to sign under threat of financial restriction.

The 1996 Firearms Act provides the framework for the regulation of law abiding gun owners in this country. Unfortunately, few segments of this act have any impact on criminals, (the requirement to shoot at a shooting range a certain number of times per year to keep ones licence stands out) and the main people affected by this act are the people who are law abiding. The criminal element operates outside of the law and is thus not affected.

My personal choice in enjoying the shooting sports I love is heavily restricted by the act. Where I can participate in shooting events, the restrictions are so unnecessarily heavy that much of the joy and personal choice are taken out. People can lose their gun licence and guns by a mere technicality such as accidentally leaving a loose round of ammunition on their workbench at home. Several times I have dropped packets of ammunition at home and spent ridiculous amounts of time looking for the last one or two rounds of ammunition, lest I be severely punished when a police officer next inspects my gun storage. If he/she spotted the loose round, I would have my guns confiscated on the spot.

To have a firearms licence, a person must pass stringent requirements, background checks and safety inspections just to be considered. Then, after passing the required standards, the individual is burdened by difficult to follow laws that heavily restrict personal choice.

A person who likes to shoot what is known as 3 gun competition, or modern military class shooting is not able to compete in these events under any circumstance. This is despite the high standards they must meet in order to obtain a licence.

The underlying theory behind the 1996 Act is that the firearm type or action is the issue in public safety. However, given that guns do not have a will of their own, common sense dictates that the person using the gun should be the focus of public safety concerns. Once the gun licence applicant passes the requirements of getting the licence, he or she has already proven they are not a risk to public safety.

An example is the issue of Category D firearms. Essentially these are self loading centrefire rifles. They are commonly used by professional shooters who run a pest control business or work as government contractors. These people have been using these arms since the introduction of the firearms act in 1996 without any noteworthy issues.

Unfortunately, regular target shooters and gun enthusiasts are not allowed to use Category D firearms. People who would like to exercise personal choice and own these guns for international competition and collection are not allowed. In some circumstances gun collectors may be allowed to collect these guns provided they have been internally destroyed and in no way function.

Category D firearms would be used in international recognised competitions such as the aforementioned 3 gun, military rifle Class B and other competitions. Very many responsible Australians, Doctors, Psychologists, Builders, Teachers, Labourers etc are denied the personal choice in pursuing the activities the love.

A love or fascination for firearms is not in itself any danger anymore than the love of cars increases the risk of drink driving or homicidal attacks via vehicle. People are born who they are. Passions, loves, interests are not choices, they are an inherent feature of the personality, in the exact same way that homosexuality is not a choice, being a gun enthusiast is part of the persona, not a lifestyle choice.

Thus, many Australians are denied the opportunity to enjoy who they really are. They are treated like criminals, despite the fact they have shown to be responsible even upstanding citizens. Why are we deemed threats? Is my local MP who shoots a threat? The 70 year old war veteran at my gun club, is he a threat? The criminals are the issue here, not the law abiding people.

Essentially, I and my cohort feel our inherent rights as free people give us the right to own and use firearms of our choosing, provided we have licences. The restrictive categories currently in place in the 1996 Firearms act do not provide for public safety and only provide to stifle the PERSONAL CHOICE of law abiding Australians. Is there any sense in me being able to own a 10 round capacity semi automatic handgun, but not being able to own even a 3 shot semi automatic .22 rifle? Or being able to own a lever action shotgun holding 5 or more rounds but not being able to own a pump action shotgun holding 3 rounds?

There is no sense or logic in the 1996 Act, it has little or no impact on criminals and allows them to be outside of the focus of laws aimed at stemming gun crime. Even the Police seem to be under the illusion that

laws affect criminals, who, by definition do not obey laws....laws aimed at people who do not obey laws.

Give Australians the personal choice to be involved in activities they love, rather than being punished for abiding the law.

We ask that the current Firearms Category system be altered to allow vetted people to enjoy all firearms, without pointless restrictions such as being restricted to .38 calibre for handguns or only allowing certain action types. Again, the action type of a gun should not be the focus of legislation, the person using it should.

I could continue on, but I believe my point has been made. I have chosen not to add references to make this email as reader friendly as possible. Even more evidence can be seen by observing the New Zealand gun legislation. They have closed the firearms registry, allow access to semi automatic long arms and even allow collectors to own all manner of fully automatic firearms, including artillery pieces. They have lower gun crime per capita than Australia does. The evidence for this is easily found online, via New Zealand government pages and similar.

I ask that Personal Choice be put back into this long standing Australian pastime. Marksmanship and hunting are most certainly long standing traditions and references can be found with ease showing that the Government, in the past, has provided encouragement and assistance to those seeking to practice shooting. This should be the case again.

I do not care to live in a country that denies me the right to live my life in a way that is pleasing to me. I value my personal choice very highly.

Sincerely

Mark Dwyer