

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CRIME COMMISSION

Question No. 10

Senator Wright asked the following questions at the hearing on 16 October 2012:

Senator WRIGHT: The media release also indicates that a significant proportion of the illegal firearms market consists of weapons that were not registered or surrendered after the 1996 gun buyback. We know that up to 660,000 firearms were surrendered as a result of that buyback. Do you know, or do you have an estimate of, how many firearms were eligible for surrender at that time? I am interested in understanding better the percentage of guns that were eligible that were surrendered at that time.

Mr Lawler: This figure might be a little elusive. The reason for that is the data we are relying on is jurisdictional data. My understanding is that there were different licensing regimes in the various jurisdictions in relation to long arms and hand guns, how that was recorded and whether we are able to definitively say at a particular point in time how many weapons were registered. As I understand it there were regimes where a person who was registered could have a number of firearms registered to them based on a licence to a person. For some of those figures to be absolutely accurate may be elusive, but I will take that on notice.

Senator WRIGHT: Thank you for that. If you could take on notice not only the question I asked, which was the number of weapons which were eligible for surrender at the time, but also an assessment on the basis of those figures of what percentage of the newly prohibited firearms did the buyback scheme succeed in removing from the community. I understand that it is not always going to be a totally accurate figure, but the degree of uncertainty that you have around the figure would be helpful for me to understand as well. This is just so we have a sense of the problem we are looking at.

Mr Lawler: If the information is available—that is the only caveat I would put in place here.

Senator WRIGHT: Thank you for that.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

Prior to the 1996 National Firearms Agreement (NFA), registration of many types of long-arms (shotguns and rifles) was not required in New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. Australian governments implemented significant legislative changes through the 1996 NFA, strengthening legislation controlling the legal possession and use of licensed firearms and mandating the compulsory registration of all firearms in all jurisdictions. A key component of the NFA was the national firearm buy-back scheme, during which 642,000 long-arms were surrendered.

There are no reliable statistics that identify the number of long-arms that would have been eligible for surrender as a consequence of the implementation of the NFA. The inability to obtain precise statistics is a direct consequence of several jurisdictions not requiring registration of long-arms prior to the introduction of the NFA.