



Australian Deer Association

Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs
References Committee inquiry into the ability of Australian
law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related
violence in the community.



Australian
Deer
Association

Introduction:

The Australian Deer Association (ADA) is a National, membership based organisation with established and active branches in all Australian States and Territories. ADA is primarily interested in advocacy for Australia's wild deer herds of free range game animals. ADA branches are active in hunter education, deer research, environmental management and public safety initiatives.

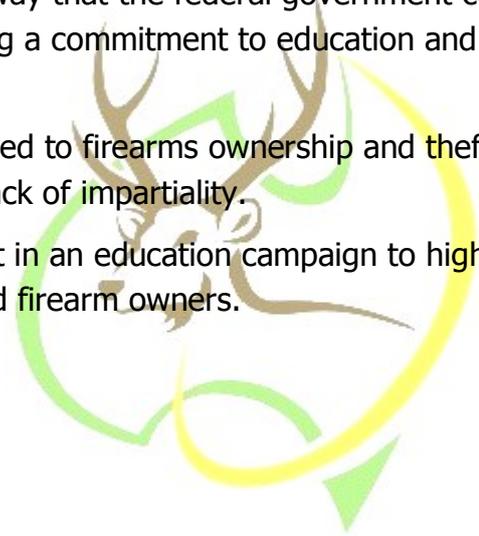
Executive Summary:

Hunting provides wide ranging social, economic and environmental benefits to the Australian community and these benefits must form the basis of any regulatory decisions related to firearms.

Whilst the theft of any firearm is concerning it is noted that the theft of legally held and stored firearms is statistically insignificant. The most effective way that the federal government could further reduce the rate of theft would be through making a commitment to education and awareness campaigns for licensed firearm owners.

Further, the current reporting of data and statistics related to firearms ownership and theft is sporadic, lacks transparency and is compromised by a lack of impartiality.

ADA recommends that the Australian Government invest in an education campaign to highlight the benefits of the proper storage of firearms to licensed firearm owners.



Benefits of hunting:

ADA recommends that the committee examine the positive contributions made to the Australian society by recreational hunters and the potential effects that negative and restrictive regulations have on this contribution.

In May this year the CSIRO's journal 'Wildlife Research' published a paper from the University of Queensland at Gatton entitled 'Expenditure and motivation of Australian recreational hunters'. This study reports that *'There are likely to be at least 200 000 and more likely 300 000 recreational hunters in Australia and they spend in excess of A\$1 billion dollars annually on hunting. Almost all of these hunters are willing to participate in direct wildlife management activities, such as pest control'*.

In June this year the Victorian Government released a report entitled 'Estimating the economic impact of hunting in Victoria in 2013'. This report quantified the economic benefit of recreational hunting to the Victorian economy as \$417,000,000.00 per annum with 60% of the expenditure occurring in regional areas.

In addition to the economic benefits hunting also delivers social benefits which extend deep in to the community.

In the first week of June this year volunteers from the ADA travelled to the Tiwi islands to deliver a modified version of our renowned hunter education program to interested locals. Tiwi islanders have a life expectancy of ten and seventeen years less than non-aboriginals, primarily due to renal failure, diabetes and heart disease. All conditions associated with a sedentary lifestyle and poor nutrition. The ADA program aims to provide the Tiwi with knowledge in animal welfare, hunting techniques, field dressing and meat handling and firearms safety, use and storage. Through the program eighteen Tiwi have qualified for their firearms licenses and the community has established as 'bush tucker club' complete with clubrooms and plans to build a shotgun and small bore rifle range to promote marksmanship and safety.

Volunteer hunters from the ADA and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia are working with Parks Victoria in ongoing programs to manage the impacts of deer in environmentally sensitive areas.

Over the past ten years volunteers from the ADA have partnered with Greening Australia and Parks Victoria to plant in excess of 10,000 new trees over 50ha of public reserve at Clydebank in Victoria. The project has transformed a neglected tract of former farmland in to valuable habitat for a wide range of wildlife, improved water quality in the adjacent Ramsar listed wetlands and arrested erosion on the banks of Lake Wellington.

Recreational hunting is an increasingly popular activity in the Australian community, for example the number of game licenses sold in Victoria has increased by 46% over the past decade. Hunting provides participants with the means to connect with the natural environment in a meaningful way, to obtain and clean and ethical source of free range food and to contribute positively to the viability of wild places and agricultural interests.

Firearm storage, theft and training:

ADA believes that the current requirements for the storage of firearms are robust and workable.

The available data does not suggest that there is a substantial problem with the theft of firearms which are stored in accordance with the relevant regulations.

In 2011 the Australian Institute of Criminology reported that *'Between 2004–05 and 2008–09, an average of 1,545 firearms were reported as stolen to Australian state and territory police'* and further that this number *'was less than half the estimated average of 4,195 reported stolen each year in the previous decade'*. The logical conclusion to be drawn from these facts is that the storage requirements introduced in 1996 have substantially worked. Given that there are an estimated 2,700,000 registered firearms in Australia the rate of theft is now less than 0.06%. It is clear that the majority of illegally held firearms in Australia originated either from illegal manufacture and importation or from anomalies and inadequacies in government registries which have almost completely been rectified since 1996.

Given that the rate and volume of theft of firearms in Australia is extremely low it is reasonable to conclude that the extent to which the number and types of guns stolen each year in Australia increase the risk posed to the safety of police and the community is negligible, especially when compared to all other known sources of illicit firearms.

Firearm owners tend to be amongst the most law abiding and responsible members of society. Far removed from tired stereotypes about hunters, the Victorian Government reports that the 'average' hunter is a middle aged suburbanite with a partner and children and a post school education earning greater than the average weekly wage. Hunters spend significant amounts of money on their recreation and tend to safeguard their equipment. In addition to the legal requirements hunters are well educated on Firearms safety, various safety courses have been a mandatory pre-requisite for firearms licensing and 41.2% of hunters have also undertaken voluntary undertaken accredited hunter training.

ADA conducts regular hunter education courses in every Australian state and territory and these courses are, more often than not, over-subscribed.

The most effective recommendation that the committee could make with regards to firearm storage would be for government to allocate resources to training and education for firearm owners.

Data and Statistics

ADA notes that there are vast anomalies and discrepancies reported statistics related to firearm ownership and theft.

The timely dissemination of information to firearm owners and the confidence of firearm owners in the statistics presented is significantly compromised by this fact.

Police registries routinely fail to release clear, transparent and unambiguous data related to firearm ownership and theft. Statistics are reported on by the Australian Institute of Criminology but the raw data underpinning the reports is not easily available.

ADA has delegates to the various police firearm liaison groups in most Australian jurisdictions. Delegates across the country routinely complain of their inability to obtain access to the data, despite the fact that it is regularly reported upon by journalists who are seemingly granted private access.

Police unions tend to view the private ownership of firearms as a health and safety issue for police members.

An illustration of this is in the hyperbolic response from the Queensland Police Union when the Queensland Government announced the formation of a ministerial weapons advisory panel to examine potential reductions in 'red tape' in 2012. Union President Ian Leavers opined that *'If anything, we shouldn't reduce red tape for gun owners but increase it'* and *'A reduction in red tape around gun ownership will simply mean more people will die. It's as simple as that.'*

Given that police unions and associations in Australia have 'coverage' rates exceeding 90% of sworn police members it is reasonable to contend that this type of attitude permeates firearms registries, and, in turn, affects the nature, spread and frequency of the dissemination of qualitative data on firearm ownership and theft.

The timely and transparent dissemination of data related to firearms ownership and theft would logically further increase the compliance of licensed firearm owners with the existing storage requirements by highlighting any trends in the instances of firearms theft and consequently encouraging firearm owners to 'double check' their storage requirements.

Conclusion:

The Australian Deer Association thanks the committee for the opportunity to make this submission and advises that we will make a representative available for a public hearing if the committee desires.

Sincerely

**References:**

- ¹Expenditure and motivation of Australian recreational hunters. Finch, Murray, Hoy & Baxter.
- ²Estimating the economic impact of hunting in Victoria in 2013. Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries.
- ³Hunters share bush tucker skills with Tiwi'. Page 44, Sunday Territorian, 24th of June 2014.
- ⁴'The Deer Hunters'. Good Weekend supplement to The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald, 14th of June 2014.
- ⁵Australian Government Department of The Environment Fact Sheet 'Australia's Ramsar Sites'
- ⁶'Naphthine government considers plan to turn Victoria into a Mecca for hunters'. The Herald Sun, 9th of June 2014.
- ⁷Firearm theft in Australia 2008-09. Samantha Bricknell. Australian Institute of Criminology.
- ⁸'Gun Numbers Top Pre Port Arthur Levels'. ABC News. 12th of November 2011.
- ⁹'Survey explodes myth hunters are all beer-swilling rednecks'. The Weekly Times, 25th of June 2014.
- ¹⁰Summary of University of Queensland Hunter Survey Responses to 20 July 2012.
- ¹¹'More people will die: Police Union berates gun law overhaul'. Brisbane Times, 22nd of August 2012