

The British Shooting Sports Council



Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Firearms Control

Additional evidence relating to matters raised at the National Shooting Centre, Bisley on 8th November 2010 and subsequent oral evidence.

Gun Control Network: Canada has a registration system since 2003 for most conventional long arms (rifles and shotguns) and a licensing system for pistols and 'restricted' long arms.

Gill Marshall-Andrews referred to one third of all traced murder weapons in Canada being licensed. Statistics produced by various organisations on the misuse of registered firearms can be at variance. For instance the Canadian public safety department has recently stated that, of 2,441 homicides recorded in Canada since mandatory long-gun registration was introduced, fewer than 2 percent (47) were committed with rifles and shotguns known to have been registered. A study of homicides between 1997 and 2005, however, reported that 13%, not 30%, of all firearms involved in a homicide could be found in the registry (Dauvergne, 2005). A variety of police studies have found that between 2% and 16% of crime guns were ever in the Canadian gun registry. Each police department defined 'crime guns' in a different manner. Canadian Juristat homicide reports show that firearms crime has been stable for seven years and homicide with firearms has been stable for ten years. There has been a very significant, if unsteady (with peaks and troughs), historical decline in firearms homicides in Canada, but this decline started in the 1970s, long before registration. There is a 30% figure which comes from a recent study of "recovered guns" by the Canadian Chiefs of Police, almost all of which have been recovered by police when they attend an 'incident'. The so-called 'crime guns' in this study are mostly from suicides, attempted or actual, not murders or crimes such as robbery or assault. The guns used in criminal violence in Canada are mostly not recovered.

Canadian legislation requiring spouses to sign off on applications for firearm licences was introduced by the Kim Campbell government in 1991, not 1995.

The murder rate of women by their spouses has been gradually declining for 3 decades.

Gill Marshall-Andrews is not correct when she states that gun ownership is a privilege, not a right. Whilst it is reasonable to assert that the right to have arms which existed prior to 1920 has been circumscribed, elements of that right remain in current legislation, viz. Section 27(1) "A firearm certificate shall be granted where the chief officer of police is satisfied..." and Section 28(1), "...a shot gun certificate shall be granted..." Whilst the conditions that follow are stringent, the term 'shall' is used rather than 'may'. This is not accidental and arises from recommendations of the Blackwell Committee of 1919.

Nor do we agree that the duration of a firearm or shotgun certificate should be shortened to two years. The present five year period is satisfactory. Finland has a 'life' license, Sweden

has 'life' or five years depending on weapon type, Belgium, Italy and Luxembourg have five year licenses, the Netherlands is to change from one to five years, Eire has changed from one to three, while Germany and Portugal have three year licenses. The important factor is whether or not there is a monitoring system in place. There is an argument in favour of very long licenses with mandatory periodic reviews (and revocation if necessary), since this avoids problems that may require the issuing of temporary permits if for some reason the police have not renewed a license by its expiry date. Unfortunately EU legislation does not permit 'life' licenses.

With regard to the introduction this year of licensing of air guns in New Zealand, this applies only to powerful pre-charged pneumatic types and is *not* applied to traditional spring powered or CO2 powered types, or to BB guns or paintball guns. This is very similar to existing law here which requires a firearm certificate for 'specially dangerous' air rifles whose muzzle energy exceeds 12 ft lbs.

With regard to greater public knowledge about who possesses firearms, Gill Marshall-Andrews' comments, below, to the Coventry Telegraph published on the 15th November were not hedged with the *caveats* she gave in her oral evidence:

“These are deadly weapons and we should know much more about who is permitted to own them.

“Gun owners in the UK have always been protected by a culture of secrecy. Police will not give out information about gun ownership, saying it's a private matter.

“But when legal gun owners commit such dreadful crimes, it's clearly not a private matter.

“We should know who around us has guns so we can judge whether they are suitable people to hold such deadly weapons.”

The BSSC sees no need for a 'spousal hotline'. Spouses and others, including rifle clubs, show little reluctance in calling the police if they have a concern over a shooter's behaviour.

We would wish to see the evidence from which Gill Marshall-Andrews has inferred that poor storage by shooters has contributed to thefts of firearms.

We are happy to continue to 'collude' with the police on matters pertaining to firearms security, although we prefer the word 'co-operate'.

Medical issues: With regard to the involvement of General Practitioners we would note that acting as an agent of the state is not their primary role, and routine referral of all applications for a certificate would place a significant additional burden on the police and the medical practices. Routine referral risks the filing of far more indicators (such as copy letters) in practice records which would flag up to the ill-intentioned the presence of a firearm at a particular address. The proportionality of routine referral deserves consideration. Nor are such referrals reliable or consistent in their outcomes. We are advised that many GPs are

reluctant to meet their obligation in the Road Traffic Act to advise the DVLA of individuals who are unfit to drive, so suggest that the effectiveness or otherwise of this existing reporting requirement might be considered an indicator of the likely effectiveness of a similar requirement relating to firearms. The BSSC accepts in principle, however, that the greater involvement of General Practitioners should be given careful consideration, but would wish to review any detailed proposals and has concern over any financial impact on an already expensive licensing process.

Numbers of firearms: The BSSC does not consider that the number of firearms held by an individual is an indicator of potential risk. It is not possible to use more than two firearms concurrently. Different types of specialised firearm are required if a good standard of performance is to be achieved in each target shooting discipline. Some shooters choose to shoot in a variety of disciplines. Different rifles and shotguns may also be required for different types of quarry. The Home Office Statistical Bulletin 05/10 'Firearm Certificates in England & Wales 2008/09', the latest figures available, indicate that there are on average 3.1 'firearms' per firearm certificate (although this average may include such things as spare barrels and sound moderators as well as complete firearms) and 2.4 shotguns per shot gun certificate. Some certificate holders are collectors with an antiquarian and heritage interest and may well hold larger numbers than average. The security aspect is well covered by 'Firearms Security Handbook 2005' produced by the Home Office, ACPO, ACPOS and the BSSC.

Power of air guns: We understand that BASC is to respond on this point raised by Dr Huppert.

Raoul Moat: We understand that there may be some misunderstanding about Raoul Moat's possession of a sawn-off shotgun. We understand that Moat was a violent criminal who had just been released from prison, did not have a shotgun certificate and obtained the gun in question from criminal associates.

Storage: The BSSC endorses the additional submission from Mike Eveleigh (BASC) on this matter.

Streamlining of the licensing system by the shooting organisations: Graham Downing has responded to the Chairman on this issue in his letter of the 15th November 2010.

Last year (2009) the National Rifle Association applied for 400 British Visitor's Permits, of which 271 came from the EU, so possessed an European Firearms Pass. Mr Roger Weedon, Licensing Officer for Surrey, reckons it takes about 20 minutes to process each one. The National Small-bore Rifle Association applied for about 100 with 80 from the EU and the CPSA processed 540, with 245 from the EU. If EU citizens could travel on their EFP only then the manpower saving for Surrey would be about 200 hours plus of course postage etc. It is understood that Thames Valley processes even more applications than Surrey.

Theft of firearms: The Fraud squad at Gwent advise that 309 guns were reported as "missing" at the beginning of the D J Litts enquiry. They have now traced 120 of these, but

189 are still outstanding. It is not clear what number of these were reported to the Home Office as misappropriated, as it may be that they had recovered a number of them when the returns were sent.

The Home Office report itself is vague - "around a third of these shotgun thefts....related to one incident in the Gwent police force area."

On the basis of information available to the BSSC, the apparent huge rise in thefts of firearms in the 2008/9 year relates largely - if not wholly - to the DJ Litts enquiry, i.e. they have not fallen into the hands of potentially violent criminals bent on their misuse.

Young people and firearms: The British Shooting Sports Council is firmly of the opinion that there are real benefits to be gained for society and for the individual by permitting and even encouraging those young people who are interested in firearms (and there are many) to learn their disciplined use in appropriate circumstances. Even with the very strict firearms legislation in place in Britain, this point of view has been widely accepted.

Gerry Sutcliffe, then Minister for Sport, speaking in 2008 stated: "National Shooting Week gives an opportunity for all the misconceptions about shooting to be put to one side but it also gives people an opportunity to understand that this really is a sport that can be for everybody".

In 2009, Martin Salter said in regard to National Shooting Week: "When Rob Gray from the Countryside Alliance asked for my support for this new project back in 2006, I was only too happy to help because it is so important to demystify firearms and show the general public that responsible shooting is safe and accessible to all."

Kate Hoey has taken school children from her inner-city constituency clay pigeon shooting. She says "I have taken some constituents to experience the countryside and have a go at clay pigeon shooting. I think it is important that children understand that shooting can be a great fun sport where we win medals and children are taught about the discipline..." Ms Hoey said encouraging inner-city children to shoot in the countryside would not entice them to use illegal guns on the streets. "Anti-social young people are going to do that anyway - what we are doing is showing youngsters the opportunity that shooting can be a properly disciplined sport".

Adrian Whiting, Chair of the Association of Chief Officers of Police Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group and member of the ACPO Criminal Use of Firearms Steering Group stated in correspondence with the BSSC's Secretary in specific reference to a draft United Nations CASA (Coordinating Action on Small Arms) ISACS (International Small Arms Control Standards) module concerned with children, youth, small arms and light weapons: "Having had a chance to quickly read this through, and as you indicate I concur it is seemingly very much aimed at reducing youth related trauma through criminal use of firearms - very laudable intention. In terms of licensing control I sense there is little to observe save that police are content that properly supervised shooting sports activities for youth appear to generate self discipline and positive sporting traits and do not appear to have an adverse impact on youth. On that basis I would not pro-actively support any suggestion

that the controls that may flow from the document should be taken as needing to reduce or restrict the ability of youth to participate in lawful sporting shooting activities.”

We would support Adrian Whiting’s comments on this issue to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the 16th November.

In 2008 the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his Education Minister Ed Balls supported the growth of the Cadet movement in schools. Mr Balls stated: “I believe combined cadet forces can make a huge difference to the young people who join them and the schools and communities in which they are based.” A major review of the military's role in society stated that encouraging more state secondary school pupils to join the cadet corps would improve discipline among teenagers while helping to improve the public perception of the army, navy and air force. Under the new government proposals, state schools which did not set up a cadet system would encourage pupils to attend a community cadet force instead. One of the core elements of the cadets' training is mastering shooting skills and military drill. Advocates believe the virtues of discipline, physical exercise and team spirit outweigh any concerns over the use of firearms. The notion of introducing cadet forces across schools was welcomed by heads and teachers. Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, said: 'One of the things that these organisations do bring is discipline and order and, in my experience, working with children who have fragmented lives at home, that is something that is missing and something they crave.'

David J. Penn

Secretary, British Shooting Sports Council

22nd November 2010.