

## ACTION ALERT AA18-2: GUN CONTROL IN AUSTRALIA

***As Quakers, we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.***

April 2018

*This Alert follows one in July 2016 on this subject (16-07). There have been recent moves to increase pressure to water down gun laws in Australia. A summary of this is given below, along with suggested action in response.*

According to a report by Ben Smee in *The Guardian* (26 March 2018), gun control advocates have called for federal intervention after a report has shown that states and territories have breached the 1996 national firearms agreement. Gun Control Australia (which issued the report) is seeking a referendum to make the laws a federal responsibility. This comes at a time when (a) Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has revealed wanting to set up a committee to allow gun importers to review proposed changes to firearms regulations, and (b) Tasmania's re-elected Liberal Government plans to water down gun laws.

Ben Smee also listed a number of examples of weakening of the gun laws:

- Every state and territory allows minors to possess and use firearms.
- NSW allows the use of silencers, and of semi-automatic weapons.
- Queensland allows licences for 10 years, double the agreed national limit.
- WA has no requirement for safety training except for handguns.
- Many states do not keep a proper registry of firearms.

The Shooting Industry Industry Foundation of Australia (SIFA) opposes any change and supports the current arrangements whereby states and territories have responsibility for gun laws. It says the national firearms agreement is not law and is not binding on the states/territories. SIFA supports a "national, integrated, digital system of licencing".

In other media reports, the following information has come to light:

- A gun amnesty program in 2017 led people to turn in 57,324 firearms and 2,432 parts and accessories, plus more than 80,000 rounds of ammunition.
- Angus Taylor MP, federal law enforcement minister, was quoted in the *Huffington Post* (1 March 2018) saying that “it is critical to get them off the streets so they don’t end up in the black market”.
- The country has not experienced a mass shooting since 1996 when the Port Arthur massacre led to the national firearms agreement.
- A recent study published in *Annals of Internal Medicine* (and reported on 13 March by the on-line site *New Daily*) found that the odds of the absence of shootings being random chance were one in 200,000.

The Presiding Clerk of Australia Yearly Meeting wrote to the Prime Minister and Premiers/Chief Ministers in July 2016 affirming the national agreement, continuing:

*We are concerned that in recent years, steps taken by some States and Territories have weakened the impact of the current laws – by allowing shooting in national parks, fewer police checks for gun ownership, shooting in gun clubs without a licence, and wider access to rapid-style firearms. The Federal Government has allowed the importation of a six-shot Adler lever-action firearm. This trend stands in contrast to the policies being adopted by all governments to curb domestic violence.*

*We urge you to give priority to the prevention of gun violence in your decisions about gun control measures. In particular, semi-automatic handguns (similar to those used in recent shootings in USA) need to be made illegal. We also ask that any revisions of the National Firearms Agreement be consistent with the United Nations Protocol on Manufacturing and Trafficking of Firearms, signed by Australia in 2002 but not yet ratified.*

The responses received from Federal and State/Territory governments indicated an ongoing commitment to the national firearms agreement. It seems however that pressure is now increasing for changes that will ease restrictions. It would be worth contacting the federal and state/territory ministers again with a renewed expression of concern about trends and making points along the following lines:

- Most Australians are in favour of strict gun controls as consistent with our traditions for dealing with conflict and crisis using nonviolent means.
- The National Firearms Agreement remains a key to ongoing efforts to reduce the threat of violence in our society. COAG should take a stronger role in ensuring its enforcement.
- Government policies to prevent violence against women and children will be supported by strong gun control protocols.
- Buyback and amnesty schemes should be given priority as a way to reduce the level of gun ownership.

These and other views can be made known to the relevant ministers:

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Canberra, April 2018