

28 January 2018

Mr Tony Judd
President
Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (South Australia)
GPO Box 1605
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Mr Judd,

Thank you for your letter of 26 February 2018 requesting the Liberal Democrats' policy position on the responsible legitimate ownership and use of firearms in South Australia and our position on continuing dialogue with representative bodies.

The Liberal Democrats regard the right to own firearms for sport, hunting, collecting and self-defence as fundamental to a free society, irrespective of how many choose to do so. The Liberal Democrats do not believe governments have a general right to limit the ownership of firearms.

The Liberal Democrats believe:

- Sport, hunting, collecting and self-defence are all legitimate reasons for firearm ownership.
- Firearm ownership should be subject to possession of a licence. However, all adults over 18 years of age have a right to a licence unless it has been removed because of a history or genuine prospect of coercion.
- Those who wish to carry a concealed firearm for self-defence are entitled to be issued with a permit to do so unless they have a history or genuine prospect of coercion.
- All genuine sporting uses of firearms are legitimate.
- There should be no registration of long-arms.
- There should be no prohibitions or special limits on semi-automatic firearms.
- Individuals and organisations are entitled to establish facilities that involve the use of firearms. This includes shooting ranges and hunting reserves.
- Impediments to children participating in safe shooting activities should be removed.

- Airsoft and paintball should be deregulated subject to measures to protect innocent bystanders.

Gun ownership, by itself, harms no other person. It says nothing about what might be done with a gun and cannot justify criminal sanctions. However, as with any right, there are associated responsibilities. Failure to meet these may be criminal.

- The responsibility of those who own firearms is to only use them for non-coercive purposes or to protect themselves or others from coercion. Those who use firearms for coercive purposes, whether actual or threatened, may have their right to own them restricted or removed.

Self defence

The right to self-defence, including with firearms, precedes the authority of governments. Consequently, while it may be restricted in the case of particular individuals, within limits, it should not be removed on a collective basis. In particular, it is not a privilege to be granted or denied by governments.

In terms of genuine crime control, most gun laws are ineffective. Making gun ownership illegal does not stop gun ownership; it merely affects those gun owners who are law-abiding and least likely to use their guns in crime. Disarming the law-abiding is irrational when the lawless cannot be disarmed.

Australians have a right to decide how best to protect themselves, their families and property. For over two hundred years, many Australians have relied on guns in their homes to sleep more comfortably. Indeed, firearms may be the only means by which people such as women, the elderly and infirm can hope to defend themselves against rapists, robbers and murderers.

The police do not provide security in the home, business or street. They arrive after the crime to take reports and do detective work. The poorer the area, the riskier it is for peaceful residents.

Only armed, law-abiding citizens can be present in sufficient numbers to prevent or deter violent crime before it starts, or to reduce its spread. A criminal is more likely to be driven off from a particular crime by an armed victim than to be convicted and imprisoned for it. Thus, widespread gun ownership will make the community safer.

Ownership of firearms is also the only practical means by which the people can retain any semblance of ensuring that governments remain their servants and not vice versa. Although the ballot box and peaceful protest will always be the preferred means of removing unsatisfactory governments, history is full of examples where those options were denied.

As Thomas Jefferson put it, "What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?" Or as another US President, Woodrow Wilson, put it, "Liberty has never come from government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of government. The history of liberty is the history of resistance."

Sport

Firearms are also legitimate sporting tools, used in a wide range of regional, national and international competitions including the Olympic and Commonwealth Games. Indeed, shooting is one of the original sports of the modern Olympic Games, commencing in 1896. Semi-automatic pistols are required for certain Olympic events.

It is not legitimate to curtail the sporting activities of one group of Australians while encouraging others, simply on the grounds that their implements have the potential to be used for harmful purposes. Many sporting implements have similar potential, as do a vast array of everyday items.

Hunting

Firearms can contribute to positive environmental outcomes in the hands of hunters. Hunters can be remarkably effective at reducing populations of pest animals such as foxes, pigs, goats, wild dogs and feral cats. These animals have been responsible for enormous destruction of Australian native fauna, with some small marsupial species probably extinct as a result, and they also pose a threat to agriculture in some areas.

Similarly, hunters contribute to positive environmental outcomes by helping to develop and preserve wetlands which concurrently accommodate species that may be hunted such as ducks, while also providing a haven for protected species.

Support for the shooting community and representative bodies

The Liberal Democrats have a long-standing, public position supporting and working for the shooting community. Other parties say supportive things when speaking directly to the shooting community, but provide no real support when it counts.

Senator Leyonhjelm has:

- secured the property rights of rifle ranges,
- fought against creeping prohibitions under the guise of the National Firearms Agreement,
- ensured that representative bodies such as the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia are included in consultations with government,
- made representations on behalf of law-abiding shooters facing ill-treatment, and
- defended the shooting community whenever ill-informed anti-gun hysteria hits the headlines.

I am the lead candidate for the Liberal Democrats in South Australia, and I am a proud shooter. I am keen to continue the hard work of Senator Leyonhjelm in serving the shooting community. My door will always be open to members of the shooting community and their representative bodies.

Warm regards,

Michael Noack
Leader of the Liberal Democrats, South Australia
Lead candidate for the SA Legislative Council