

The Secretary  
Select Committee on Firearms Legislation and Policy  
House of Assembly  
Parliament House  
HOBART TAS 7000

24 Oct 2018

Submission by Katherine Scholes to **Select Committee on Firearms Legislation and Policy**

Dear Mr Buttsworth and members of the Select Committee on Firearms Legislation and Policy.

I am a Tasmanian mother of two sons. All through their school years, I never felt afraid that they would be massacred in their classrooms, or on a holiday camp, or at the park. Now that they are young men I worry about car accidents and other dangers, but I don't lie awake fearing that they will be killed by a gunshot. They grew up in the years after the Port Arthur Massacre, in a Tasmania where effective gun control laws were – and still are – in place.

We only have to look at America to see the other path that we might have found ourselves on, if we had responded to the actions of Martin Bryant in a different way. We know the policies that were put in place worked. We know that we in Australia are the envy of many other countries as a result. Why would we now want to make changes that jeopardize what has been achieved?

It seems obvious to me – and surely any parent – that we don't want to make it any easier for people to kill one another. Therefore we don't need any more guns in the hands of our citizens. We also don't want to make it any easier for someone to kill lots of people in a short space of time. Therefore we don't want to allow any legalization of the weapons that facilitate this.

All over the world there is proof that firearms will always find their way into the wrong hands and be used for the wrong purpose, regardless of who they were originally licensed to. There is also proof that identity background checks don't stop unsuitable people getting licenses and guns. It won't be any different in Tasmania. Therefore we should not make any provision for opening up greater access to firearms – especially high powered, semi-automatic, or automatic weapons. We should take note of the clear-as-day fact that gun violence and the proliferation of guns in a society go hand in hand.

With this in mind, let's just consider Tasmanian social landscape.

We are fighting a losing battle against domestic violence. Why would we do anything to make the job of murdering defenseless women and children any easier?

We have an ice epidemic that is contributing to psychosis and violence in our communities. Why would we do anything that could increase the harm done by an addict who is out of control on ice?

We have frightening statistics regarding suicide, especially in young men. Many of these deaths are permanent solutions to a temporary crisis. Guns help make suicide achievable. Why would we want people in distress to have easier access to them? It is not possible to predict who might turn a firearm to this use; the only solution is to have only a very limited number of guns in our society.

Like many Tasmanians I am baffled as to why we are even having a conversation about weakening gun control. We know the regulations brought in after Port Arthur work well. The measure is simple: we have had no more massacres. Why would we want to risk tampering with the situation?

Since it makes no sense, I'm left feeling deeply suspicious about the motives of any politicians involved in supporting the changes under discussion. The fact that the Hodgman Liberal Government acted on gun law reform on the very eve of the last election was very concerning. I suspect it is part of a hidden agenda that we, the public, are still not privy to.

Who is behind this agenda, I wonder? I'm thinking it has to be someone who plans to make money from the changes – perhaps arms importers and retailers. These people presumably don't care if their bank balances grow at the cost of innocent human lives. But our politicians should care; they should be putting our safety first.

The situation is so dubious that I believe the Government must rigorously examine all possible motivations – political donations, family and/or business allegiances – that could be involved in this push for change. The public must be able to see, beyond doubt, exactly what forces are in play over something that seems so clearly destructive to our wellbeing and that of generations to come.

Surely we'd do almost anything, as a society, to avoid replicating the nightmare that is America? We do not want a Tasmania where kinder kids practice gun alert drill, teachers are trained to kill, and bulletproof backpacks are on offer.

And just in case anyone is seriously arguing for the need to offer enhanced sporting opportunities, or enable more efficient ways to cull unwanted wildlife – lets just ask one question. How many human lives would this 'benefit' be worth? Surely, not even a single one.

I urge you not to consider amendments or policy changes that could weaken gun control in Tasmania in any way.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Scholes

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Katherine Scholes.