

Individual submission to the enquiry on proposed changes to gun control in Tasmania by the House of Assembly Select Committee.

22/10/2018

I am writing as a GP of over 30 years experience in Tasmania, with a strong interest in mental health.

I am extremely concerned about the watering down of current gun control laws which these changes indubitably represent.

I have two sets of concerns.

The first is about the impact of the presence of more guns in the community, which would be the inevitable result of the proposed changes.

In Tasmania we already have the highest rate of teenage suicide in the nation. Death by suicide is closely related to the availability of lethal means, and guns are lethal means.

Domestic violence is a massive scourge in our nation, and the presence of a gun in the house is a powerful controller. I have had a mother and her baby who were my patients shot dead by her violent partner, and heard too many stories of other terrorised women and children, often told many years later.

I have seen the terrible impact of gun-related suicide on several families. I have treated those who have found the body and other first responders. The legacy is grim.

There is no excuse for softening gun laws - the result is clear to see in America, where the carnage extracted by guns is abundantly evident.

It is not clear to me that the interests of sporting shooters trumps those of the vulnerable. These changes will mean more semi-automatic guns and rapid fire guns and possibly silencers in the community. That will mean more deaths, as can be clearly seen in other places where more guns are available. This is not an evidence free zone, as this simple summary of a great deal of research from the Harvard School of Public Health points out:

5. A summary of the evidence on guns and violent death

This book chapter summarizes the scientific literature on the relationship between gun prevalence (levels of household gun ownership) and suicide, homicide and unintentional firearm death and concludes that where there are higher levels of gun ownership, there are more gun suicides and more total suicides, more gun homicides and more total homicides, and more accidental gun deaths.

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>

Doubling the time to renew a licence also misses a chance for problems to be detected. There appear to be other changes to do with training and assessment that I can see no details about - there was no information with the submission information that explained exactly what we are making a submission on, and I had to get my information from the media, so I cannot comment.

My second set of concerns is around the way this matter has been handled, which I find worrying. Why was this policy not on the public website and why was it revealed on the very eve of an election, and why was the initial enquiry stopped as if the Government was backing down and then quietly revived? These changes will mean more guns sold, which is why they are being so actively promoted by the gun lobby, for whom this is

simply a business plan. How much in political donations has come from these vested interests, I wonder. No amount is enough to pay for the trauma of gun death.

The hardest week of my professional life was that after the Port Arthur massacre, which was so deeply disturbing for so many, even when not directly affected. I hope I never have to support people through such a dire event again, and I believe the immediate action by the Howard government has been instrumental in the fact that so far we have not had a repeat. These gun control measures need to be vigorously protected.

Dr Clare Smith

