

To

The Secretary, Select Committee on Firearm Legislation and Policy
Parliament House, Hobart, TAS 7000.

From

Wendy Miles,

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Dear Members of this committee,

I am writing to you because I am very concerned about the possibility of a loosening of current firearms legislation in Tasmania. I feel that this would be a retrograde step for this state which has sad history regarding use of firearms.

I refer, of course, mainly to the Port Arthur Massacre which touched me personally. I was acquainted with two of the people who died and a colleague of mine was friends with the family whose wife and two children were horrifically murdered.

On that fateful day 35 people died. As I recall, following the Port Arthur Massacre, the legislation was tightened nationwide with the introduction of the National Firearms Legislation.

Imagine if a gunman was to walk into the House of Assembly and massacre its 25 members and 10 others. Improbable but not impossible. What a National outcry there would be. There would be no talk of loosening firearms legislation then.

I do accept that there is a need for some firearms in the world. War and crime generate the need for the armed forces and some police to be armed. And farmers of course have a special need to control wildlife. But this does not mean there is any need for the rest of us to have access to firearms. The more people that have them, the more criminals will use them. This has already happened in America. Children being shot to death in their dozens while in school. Imagine that happening Elizabeth College, a school within walking distance of your desks. It could happen to your family. You might think I am being overdramatic but the reality is it happens and it is only the luck of the draw and the firearm legislation that keeps it from your own doorstep

There have been cases of members of shooting clubs using their legitimately gained guns to murder others or to commit suicide. These people were licensed to own guns but still proved to be rogue. If we must have licensed shooters then it is my opinion that there is a need more stringent vetting of the applicants. I know of one case in Southern Tasmania a number of years ago where a person of dubious mental stability was refused a licence, quite understandably. But the partner applied for a licence and without vetting was granted one. The result was that the unlicensed person used the gun, admittedly only on their own land, and the licensed person never touched it. Much more stringent vetting of applicants is needed regardless of the cost. It is people's lives we are talking about here.

I would also suggest the rules about storage of guns need tightening or better policing. I know of a case where the teenage child of a licensed shooter was able to access the parent's gun and used it to commit suicide in the family home. I could go on all day bringing examples but I hope I have made my point.

I think the reason for a move to alter the legislation at this time needs to be addressed. It is my opinion that the bottom line is the dollar.

Government has been influenced, if not bullied, by the very powerful gun lobby. In America they are responsible for the maintaining of the lax laws which enable the massacres being experienced there in schools and universities, not to mention the death rate from gun crime in the general population. The average recreational shooter is not to blame. It is those who are involved in financing the industry. They are few but have considerable wealth already which enables them to fund their lobbying.. Looser laws means more people will be able to buy more powerful and expensive weapons which, incidentally, are designed to kill more people more speedily. The manufacturers and importers stand to make a great deal of money out of this proposed move.

In summary, it is my opinion, and that many if not most Tasmanians, that the legislation should remain as it is now or even made more stringent. We should not be moving towards encouraging more crime on our streets. We should be taking more care as to who is licensed to own a gun and the purposes for which they can be used. And finally we should not be making it easier for the gun lobby members who are already rich to become even richer at the expense of the Tasmanian people.

I remain yours faithfully,

Wendy Miles