

Parliamentary Committee on Firearms Legislation

Current legislation governing the sale and use of firearms in Tasmania have kept our state safe free of the mass shooting experienced by our community in 1996 at Port Arthur. Prior to the events in 1996, or the Port Arthur Massacre as it became known automatic firearm were more readily available to the general public. Since the gun laws that were brought in as a result of the Port Arthur Massacre Tasmania has not experienced another mass shooting.

Tasmania cannot afford to water down or change its laws regarding firearms. These laws have been overwhelmingly a success for our community and saved lives. The easy availability of powerful weapons resulted in the tragedy of the Port Arthur Massacre. I have had the privilege working in the immediate aftermath and community recovery of the Port Arthur massacre. I, along with other health professionals provided support for survivors of the shootings at Martin Bryant's trial. I sat through the evidence presented at the trial and a very clear picture emerged. Martin Bryant was an angry misfit with a chip on his shoulder, who had lost his main supports and stabilisers in his life. If he had taken a knife to someone and killed them (as he had originally planned to, according to the psychiatric reports tended to court), he would have only inflicted that single crime on the community. A single murder would have been a personal tragedy for those affected but not the community wide tragedy that occurred.

Martin Bryant's easy access to weapons of immense power changed everything. Automatic weapons and their lethal capabilities gave him a heightened sense of power and a more attractive means of extracting revenge and settling grudges. These weapons gave him the means to kill a lot of people very quickly. Chief Justice Cox noted in his comments when passing sentence,

“(in a period) of 90 seconds., 29 rounds were fired, causing the deaths of 20 people and injuries, many of

them severe, to another twelve...,” (p14, EMA Conf, 1996)

The immediate scene at Port Arthur immediately after the shootings by Martin Bryant can be best described as a slaughter house. It resulted in the deaths of 35 people including several children and serious injury to another 21 people.

People in the community who wish to water down laws that ease the restrictions of the sale and ownership of high powered guns will no doubt say that they are not a Martin Bryant, that there are many responsible gun owners. I am sure there are responsible gun owners, but how do we distinguish the responsible from the irresponsible? Prior to Port Arthur Martin Bryant had not come to the attention of the Police, and there were no major indications his intentions. In hindsight we can construct a picture of why Martin Bryant committed the terrible crimes that he did. However, no-one at the time predicted these terrible events. We cannot predict or anticipate what people's future intentions are, and to give people the means of committing another massacre is a risk that the Tasmanian community should not take.

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