

# The British Shooting Sports Council



## QUARTERLY REPORT, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2007

During the Quarter, the main activities on which the BSSC has been engaged are as follows:

**Amendment of the EU Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons:** (This, along with the proposed UN Arms Trade Treaty, has been the key activity during the Quarter.)

The amended Directive will come into force in January 2008, with implementation by 2010. Over a period of 18 months the British Shooting Sports Council, working closely with the GTA on trade-related issues, has lobbied directly with UK MEPs on the relevant Committees, liaised with the Home Office and worked co-operatively with the main European organisations FACE (the hunters), FESAC (the collectors) and ESSF, the European Sports Shooting Forum.

Among the major achievements are:

- **Young shots:** Following heavy pressure from some quarters to restrict considerably or even prohibit target shooting or hunting by under-18s, we were able with much effort to reverse the tide to the point where young British shooters will be able to continue to shoot unsupervised, and the BSSC provided draft wording which was used to improve this section of the Directive.
- **Marking and tracing:** The BSSC took the lead in preventing the adoption of an ill-defined 'unique individual numbering' system which might have resulted in the compulsory marking of privately-owned firearms.
- **The avoidance of onerous controls on ammunition and reloading components.** Unrealistic proposals for marking and record keeping to 'facilitate' tracing ammunition have been defeated. .
- **Brokers:** Some draconian proposals regarding brokers have been dropped, and a common-sense definition achieved. One proposed Amendment could have included within the definition of 'brokering' advice given by one shooter to another on where best to get his gun repaired!

The BSSC has already been involved in negotiations with the Home Office on the practical implementation of the revised Directive, which is now EU law and will be implemented in the UK by means of an Order in Council. Some trade record-keeping issues apart, the only change that is likely to impact on the ordinary shooter is the raising to 18 from 17 of the age at which someone may buy a shotgun or rifle. 18 is already the minimum age for purchase of an air weapon or crossbow.

## **Arms Trade Treaty:**

The World Forum on the Future of Sports Shooting Activities made a presentation on the need to exempt civilian firearms from the proposed Arms Trade Treaty to the UN 1<sup>st</sup> Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007, one of only four NGOs invited to do so. This went very well, and, exceptionally, the WFSA team was praised for an exemplary presentation.

The Secretary was invited to a Foreign & Commonwealth Office conference held at Wilton Park, the FCO's country house conference/training centre, from 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> December. Attendance was by invitation and it was heavily subscribed, with 57 attendees from 26 countries. Most present were government representatives or staff of Non-Governmental Organisations, these comprising Amnesty, British Red Cross, BSSC (and World Forum), IANSA, Oxfam, Saferworld and SBAC (Society of British Aerospace Companies, which also covers high tech defence systems). Academic organisations were Chatham House, the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford and the Royal United Services Institute. Representatives of the UK Department for International Development, the UK Ministry of Defence and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs were also present. Much of what was discussed was aimed at informing the UN Group of Government Experts who will be considering the feasibility of an Arms Trade Treaty over the next year or so, and several of the GGE were present. The proceedings were conducted under Chatham House rules, so comments cannot be attributed to organisations or individuals. The format was talks on set themes (export, import, and scope), followed by breakout groups. The Secretary was there on behalf of World Forum as well as the BSSC, with the aim of ensuring that the position of the legitimate civilian firearms owner and the civilian gun trade was protected and understood in a milieu in which inevitably small arms and light weapons were the point of focus, whatever the aspirations of the proponents for the coverage of all conventional arms.

## **Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill:**

So far, this new Bill only proposes to make two minor changes to the 1968 Act, to incorporate references to '...or a youth rehabilitation order within the meaning of Part 1 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2007'. At the time of writing, there is no news on any further additions, but see 'Deactivated firearms' below.

## **Firearms in Scotland:**

Following the Scottish Nationalist Party's announcement as part of its 2007-2008 legislative programme that it was to pursue additional firearms legislation for Scotland, the Secretary briefed the Home Office on the undesirability of this proposal, as did the GTA, and subsequently met senior Scottish civil servants from the Scottish Government's Police & Community Safety Directorate and Sports Policy Unit on 14<sup>th</sup> November. It became clear that the debate in Scotland had moved on from a desire to 'ban' air weapons to a wish to create a new Firearms Act and a growing political appreciation of the benefits brought to the shooting sports, particularly to the rural economy. Just before Christmas, however, the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, vetoed the devolution proposal, claiming that any variation of the laws between Scotland and England would be "confusing and potentially damaging". Doubtless, this decision will continue to reverberate in the wider debate over devolution, but, from the perspective of the British shooter, it is a sensible and satisfactory outcome.

## **Game License:**

Although the Game License was abolished in England and Wales on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007, it should be noted that it remains a requirement in Scotland.

## **Health and Safety Executive:**

There has been no further discussion on the HSE's intention to issue new guidance on the storage of shooters' powders. Importantly, however, the HSE has issued a consultative document entitled 'Proposals for Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations. While much of this is to do with mining and other subjects of little interest to shooters, it does carry forward the long-standing proposal that the Firearm (or Shotgun) Certificate should become the basis for licensing the possession of black powder by shooters. While in principle an excellent concept that would simplify life for all parties, the devil will lie in the detail. The suggested maximum of 1.5 kilos of black powder to be held on the authority of a FAC is far too low. A meeting with HSE has been arranged for the 16<sup>th</sup> January.

## **Home Office Consultation Paper on Banning Offensive Weapons:**

The Home Office's Summary of Responses to its Consultation Paper on Banning Offensive Weapons has been published, and the Home Secretary announced on 12<sup>th</sup> December that action would be taken on 'samurai swords', in effect a ban with exceptions. It is understood that the intention is to have controls in place by April. This would be achieved by an Order amending the 1988 Offensive Weapons Order. The BSSC is seeking an early meeting with the Home Office.

## **The Independent Advisory Group to the ACPO Criminal Use of Firearms Portfolio:**

This Group met on 12<sup>th</sup> December, and was addressed by Vernon Coaker, Home Office Minister, who praised its work and confirmed its status as one of the Home Office's most important Advisory Groups. The role of the ACPO Criminal Use of Firearms portfolio will be changing. It will become part of the broader 'Violent Crime' portfolio, concentrating on the supply side of weapons. It is not yet clear how this will impact on the work of the NIAG. A very interesting presentation was given by a prison officer and a former armed robber, criminal armourer and 'lifer' on intervention programmes in prisons and schools, whereby formerly violent criminals are encouraged to help to dissuade children and those at an early stage of their criminal career to turn away from the carrying and use of weapons.

## **Practitioners Group meeting (BSSC, police, Home Office and Forensic Science Service):**

This group met on the 30<sup>th</sup> October, and again demonstrated its considerable value by addressing a number of issues of importance to the shooting community. These included:

The acceptance that there was no active move to prohibit long barrelled revolvers and the withdrawal of police letters of advice that such a prohibition was under consideration.

**The general acceptance that only photocopies of FACs or SGCs need be submitted at renewal, rather than the original certificate.**

**Continuing discussion of issues relating to training or supervision of novice shooters.**

**Issues of data retention arising from electronic means of communication.**

**Delays in grants and renewals of certificates. A 'best practice' renewal process is now in place. Problems relating to the issue of Section 7 Permits, and their limitations, continue under consideration.**

**Impact of the Violent Crime Reduction Act on dealer registration and on the acquisition of air rifles by the Scout Association and cadet forces, and the return of air weapons after repair. Positive pragmatic and practicable means of compliance were agreed upon.**

**Following minor revision in the light of comments, the proposed changes to the way of defining antique breechloading cartridge firearms were discussed further, and will be reconsidered in the light of the outcome of Amendments to the EU Weapons Directive.**

**Discussion continues on the transportation of prohibited weapons by registered firearms dealers.**

**Matt Perring of BASC has joined the Practitioners' Group as Minutes Secretary. He has immediately established his ability in this onerous but essential role.**

## **Violent Crime Reduction Act:**

**The final commencement order has been passed, the full act is in operation and regulations have been implemented. The regulations for blank firers have been enabled and specifications are being working on with the Gun Trade Association and others which will be finalised in the light of the EU Weapons Directive.**

## **Westminster Fair:**

**Another very successful 'Westminster Fair' was held at the Houses of Parliament on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November on the theme of 'Shooting-the Sport of a Million People'. Aimed primarily at MPs and Peers, this event gives the BSSC's constituent organisations the chance to put the case for the shooting sports to our legislators, and they put on outstanding displays which generated much favourable comment. Bill Wiggin MP, our host, and Martyn Jones MP, the BSSC's two Vice-Chairmen, spoke eloquently on the grassroots of the sport that provided the base of the 'performance pyramid' on which our international success is based, on the opportunity provided to see our sport flourish as a result of the London Olympics and the Paralympics in 2012 and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014, on the risk of a 'nil' legacy of permanent World-class shooting range facilities in either London or Glasgow, and of the need for individual shooters to ensure that their MPs were aware of the shooting sports and encouraged to attend the Westminster Fairs.**

## **Miscellaneous matters:**

**The Secretary was interviewed for an article which appeared in the 'Daily Telegraph' on the granting of shotgun certificates to children. This article elicited numerous responses on the 'Daily Telegraph's' website, almost all favourable to the responsible involvement of young people in the shooting sports. He was also interviewed at length about the amendments to the EU Weapons Control Directive for the American NRA Radio channel.**

DJP 9/01/2008