

The British Shooting Sports Council



QUARTERLY REPORT, JANUARY-MARCH 2008

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:

While the Amendments to the EU Directive had been agreed by the EU Parliament during the last Quarter, some residual work remained to be done. There were further meetings of Government experts in Brussels during February to consider the 'final' draft prepared by the EU's 'lawyer-linguists', and there were briefly fireworks over textual changes introduced by the aforementioned 'lawyer-linguists' which would have considerably hindered unsupervised shooting by under-18s. Thanks to rapid intervention by FACE, the European hunters' group, and by Graham Widdecombe (Home Office, extensively briefed by the BSSC and GTA) at the meeting, plus support on the day from the Nordic nations and France, these changes were dropped, and the version approved by the EU Parliament was restored.

Annual General Meeting and the Council's new Chairman:

At the AGM held on the 2nd April, The Earl of Shrewsbury & Talbot was elected as President, Brian Carter as Vice-President, The Lord Glentoran was elected as Chairman, Martyn Jones and Bill Wiggin were re-elected as Vice-Chairmen, Graham Downing was re-elected as Treasurer, Jim McAllister was again co-opted onto Council and Mark Scoggins was appointed Honourary Legal Adviser. The outgoing President Sir Patrick Lawrence was thanked for all his work for the Council over many years, and Lord Shrewsbury, in taking on his new role as President, assured the Council that he would continue to be active in defending shooting. Our new Chairman, Lord Glentoran, besides being a keen Shot, is Shadow Minister for Northern Ireland and Wales, and Shadow Minister for the Olympics, in which he takes a strong interest. He won an Olympic Gold for Bobsleigh in 1964 and is also much involved in sailing.

Arms Trade Treaty and other United Nations:

Preparations are under way for the Biennial UN Meeting of States in New York from 14th to 18th July, for which the Secretary is to be a part of the World Forum on the Future of Sports Shooting Activities team from 14th to 16th July, to cover the Non-Governmental Organizations' presentation day on small arms issues. This will continue work on the Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the issue of civilian possession of firearms remains firmly on the agenda.

Deactivated firearms:

Following the Home Secretary's announcement on 10th January of her intention to introduce a 'ban' on pre-1995 deactivated firearms, the subject was discussed at a meeting with Graham Widdecombe at the Home Office on 22nd February, and at a meeting John Batley of the Gun Trade Association and the Secretary had with Vernon Coaker, the Home Office Minister, on the 27th February. The historical and financial value of collections of deactivated firearms was strongly emphasised, as was the lack of evidence for further controls. We now await the Home Office's reaction, and considerable concern remains over the impact of any proposals on collectors of deactivated firearms and on the trade in these items, although there is no expectation that simple possession is to be banned. The scope of any proposal is also not known at this point.

Firearms in Scotland:

Despite the Home Secretary's decision before Christmas to veto the devolution of firearms legislation to Edinburgh, her decision not to participate in the Scottish 'gun summit' to be held in May, and the defeat on the 17th January of the Scottish Government's motion on banning the ownership and use of firearms and air weapons (other than for recognized and legitimate occupational and sporting interests), the Scottish Government remains keen to move its legislative proposals forward. These must remain of considerable potential concern to the BSSC, and the situation will be monitored closely.

Health and Safety Executive:

A meeting with the HSE took place on 16th January to discuss its consultative document entitled 'Proposals for Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations', including the long-standing proposal that the Firearm (or Shotgun) Certificate become the basis for licensing the possession of black powder by shooters. This was positive in tone, and the shooting representatives made a strong case for the retention of the 15 kilo holding, but modified to allow possession of any combination between 15 kg of black powder to 15 kg of smokeless, based on most helpful research carried out among their members by Sandy Robertson of the MLAGB and Matt Perring of BASC. A number of other technical points affecting the licensing of the trade and the transport of black powder were also discussed. Subsequent to the meeting, it was learned that the proposed use of FACs and SGCs as the basis for licensing was unlikely to be proceeded with, but the BSSC will continue to press for other improvements, and a further meeting has been requested.

Home Office Ban on Offensive Weapons:

Following discussions with interested parties which were focussed on a ban on cheap modern replica 'samurai' swords, the Home Office table an Amending Order to the 1988 Criminal Justice Act which bans the import, manufacture and transfer (but not

simple possession) of swords with curved blades and a 50 cm blade made after 1908, whatever their national origin. Only post-1908 swords of Japanese origin were given protection. *This ban took effect on 6th April, and is now law.* This Amendment was clearly unjust and was immediately protested by the BSSC, GTA and other interested organisations including the auction houses and the Arms & Armour Society. Further discussion is underway to rectify the situation, it is hoped within about two months.

National Shooting Week 2008:

More than 80 shooting grounds and clubs have signed up to this year's National Shooting Week, which will run from the 3rd to the 11th May. Between them they will be putting on around 175 public open days from Northern Scotland to the Channel Islands. There is notable interest from air rifle and pistol clubs as well as clay shooting and rifle clubs. The Minister for Sport, Gerry Sutcliffe, will attend the Press Launch on the 29th April, and there has already been good exposure in The Guardian and GQ Magazine. National Shooting Week is set fair to repeat the huge success of 2007.

Olympic pistol shooting:

The Home Office met with interested parties on 26th February to discuss how the training of the Olympic pistol squad in Britain could best be achieved. Present were representatives of the BSSC, British Shooting, ACPOS, the Scottish Executive, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (which was throughout very supportive of the Olympic effort for pistol shooting, which is expected to produce a medal) and various branches of MoD with ranges within their purview. The meeting was very positive in tone, and it is hoped that the elite squad will be training on British soil in the near future. There will be a further meeting on 24th April.

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

A meeting took place on the 13th February. Main points were: that work on firearms forms remains stalled, because two key police contributors were unavailable (one on a foreign posting); that cadet forces have Crown immunity with regard to the acquisition of air weapons; that good progress had been made over the transport by Section 5 authorized dealers of prohibited weapons owned by third parties (the Home Office is now willing to vary Section 5 authorities to this effect subject to some evidence of need); the reasons for reducing firearm certificate and shotgun certificate numbers; changes in the ACPO Violent Crime Portfolio (criminal use of firearms issues will no longer be considered in isolation from other forms of violent crime); explosives issues relating to HSE proposals; the need for revision to the system of Section 7 Permits to reflect changes to the Firearms Act prohibiting expanding ammunition and pistols, and fox shooting with muzzle-loading firearms. These meetings continue to be very valuable for discussion of issues of concern, and do facilitate change, if not always as rapidly as one would wish.

Violent Crime Reduction Act:

Specifications for blank firers are still being working on with the Gun Trade Association and others in the light of the EU Weapons Directive, and are now likely to be in place on 1st October 2008. John Batley is to be congratulated for all his efforts to ensure the practicability of this very difficult piece of legislation.

World Forum on the Future of Sports Shooting Activities:

The World Forum held its Executive Committee Meeting, Sub-committee meetings and plenary session on 12th and 13th March in Nuremberg. Carlo Peroni, of IEACS, who had served with distinction as Chairman since WFSAs foundation, announced his retirement. He was presented with a fine statue, suitably inscribed. Ted Rowe, Chairman of MAG (the Manufacturers' Advisory Group), was unanimously elected in his place. Besides all its work at UN level, the World Forum is working increasingly at a regional level, particularly the Organisation of American States, where small arms issues are again coming to the fore and World Forum is recruiting members, the EU and Africa, particularly with relation to hunting issues. ECOWAS, the West African region, has produced ECOSAP, a set of procedures relating to small arms, which was being studied for its possible impact on the movement of firearms for hunting. The 'Lead and Noise Attenuation' workshop organised by World Forum in Palermo in 2007 (the Proceedings have already been distributed) was already proving very valuable. Lead in ammunition had been removed from anti-lead legislation in Vermont because the shooting community had demonstrated a high standard of activity in addressing the problem of lead in shooting. The wide-ranging EU REACH survey of the use of heavy metals is expected to publish its findings on lead in 2009. Two aspects of concern to shooting are REACH's interest in 'shooting areas' (i.e. areas where hunting took place without clearly defined borders) in contradistinction to 'shooting ranges' where the area of use was clearly delineated, and indirect lead poisoning (raptors and other carnivores). The World Forum is to hold a Workshop on the Environmental and Economic Benefits of Hunting; This subject, suggested by the Secretary and Professor Mauser, is to be addressed in September 2009 in either Windhoek or Cape Town. It is aimed primarily at African Governments and is intended to produce Proceedings based on good science. It will be heavily subsidized by industry. It remains clear that noise, lead and increasingly problems from old clay target fragments containing high levels of toxic hydrocarbons called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) are seen as issues internationally.

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