

# THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO FIREARMS CONTROL 2010

## A GUIDE FOR SUBMITTING EVIDENCE

By **Bill Harriman** Director of Firearms, BASC

The influential parliamentary Home Affairs Committee has announced that it will conduct an enquiry into Firearms Control. The Committee has called for written evidence from interested parties. Anyone can make a submission and BASC encourages all those who shoot to do so. You can find the request for evidence here:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/news/firearms-control/>

Further guidance on submitting evidence can be found here:

<http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/take-part-in-committee-inquiries/witness/>

BASC will be making a detailed submission as will our friends in the British Shooting Sports Council. However, it's vitally important that the Committee hears from individual shooters, collectors and hunters too.

Submissions must be "original work" and not merely repeat the wording of circulated information. Put your arguments in your own words. The points given below are intended as an aid to memory and are not intended to be copied. Your evidence should be in by **27<sup>th</sup> August 2010**. They should be made by email to [homeaffcom@parliament.uk](mailto:homeaffcom@parliament.uk) using either Word or rich text. They need to contain your name, telephone number and address. You should also tell the Committee the type of shooting that do, how long you have been shooting and why it is an important part of your life. Paragraphs should be numbered for ease of reference. If you don't have email then send hard copy to Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons, 7, Milbank, London SW18 3JA.

**This is your chance to do your bit to help protect shooting sports. If you make a submission, please send a copy of it to [politics@basc.org.uk](mailto:politics@basc.org.uk) so that we can gauge the response level.**

Here are some general points to open your submission.

- According to *Shooting Sports*, a report published by PACEC in 2006, hunting with firearms is worth £1.6 billion to the United Kingdom, supporting the equivalent of 70,000 jobs.

- Shooting providers spend an estimated £250 million a year on habitat and wildlife management, five times the annual income of Britain's biggest conservation organisation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.
- Shooting is among the safest of sports and particularly so in the UK. According to United Nations statistics, the UK figure for accidental firearms fatalities is one of the lowest at 0.02 per 100,000, a figure which includes military and police fatalities.
- Shooting is an international sport. In the 2006 Commonwealth Games, 23 of the UK's 116 medals were for shooting, the second highest medal-winning discipline for UK athletes, exceeded only by swimming with 24.

The Committee wants to focus on the following issues. After each issue (**in bold**), there are some of the points that you should consider including in your submission. Please put them into your own words.

**The extent to which legally-held guns are used in criminal activity and the relationship between gun control and gun crime, including the impact of the Firearms (Amendment) Acts 1997.**

- No reliable statistics exist for the extent to which legally held guns are used in armed crime, because this figure is so small. Both police and Home Office commentators accept that the shooting community is law-abiding to a very high degree.
- Home Office figures for 2008/09 show that firearms crime only accounts for 0.3% of all crime.
- Firearms offenses have fallen steadily since their peak in 2003/04 and have reduced by 41% since then.
- There is no relationship between gun crime and legitimate gun ownership. In Scotland in 2005-6, gun crime fell by 6%, 28% lower than nine years previously. At the same time there has been an increase in privately-owned firearms, currently at a five-year high in that country. Home Office figures published in May 2006 for gun crime in England and Wales show a similar pattern. 2004 - 2005 saw gun crime fall by 8% but the number of privately-owned firearms rose 8% from the previous year.
- Although handguns were banned by the Firearms (Amendment) Acts 1997, they are still routinely used in crime to the degree that they are the

criminal's weapon of choice. In 2008/09, handguns were used in 52% of all non-airgun firearms crime.

- Gun crime rose steadily from 1999, to peak in 2003/04. During the same period the number of firearm and shotgun certificates on issue fell by 8% and 9% respectively

**Whether or not the current laws governing firearms licensing are fit for purpose.**

- Shotguns are routinely used for pest control, wildfowling, game shooting and clay target shooting. There are 1,366,800 shotguns held on 574,946 shotgun certificates in Great Britain, an average of 2.4 shotguns per certificate holder. Different types and sizes of shotgun are used for different purposes and quarry species. Over 200 million shotgun cartridges are used each year.
- The current licensing system for shotguns is both proportionate and effective because it concentrates on the suitability of the applicant. The police can refuse an application if they think the person does not have a good reason for possessing a shotgun or is likely to be a danger to the public safety or to the peace.
- .22 rifles are widely used for shooting pests and small game as well as for target shooting. There are 138,728 Firearm Certificates on issue. BASC estimates that at least 75% of them relate to .22 rifles.
- Most .22 sporting rifles are fitted with telescopic sights to improve the accuracy of shooting; and with sound moderators to minimise noise pollution. Derrick Bird's rifle has been wrongly described in the press as a "high powered sniper rifle fitted with a silencer". This description is both inaccurate and unhelpful.
- Successive governments have accepted that young people who show a genuine interest in shooting should be allowed to have access to firearms in a controlled manner from a relatively early age. BASC believes that it is a matter for parents and guardians to determine that age rather than it being imposed by law.
- The minimum age for the grant of a Firearm Certificate is 14 years and the police can place restrictions on the use of the firearms held. Nobody under the age of 15 can use a shotgun without being supervised by someone over the age of 21. Nobody who is under 18 may buy any firearm or ammunition for themselves.

- The controls placed on young people are based on a graduated approach which permits greater levels of access as age and responsibility increases.

### **Proposals to improve information-sharing between medics and the police in respect of gun licensing;**

- BASC is already exploring the proposal to put a marker or tag on firearms owners' medical records with colleagues from the police and the British Medical Association. The main concern with this idea is with the security of information and who has access to it within GP's practices. Wider public concern has already been expressed about the security of the proposed NHS database.
- Further concerns relate to tagged records acting as a disincentive for certificate holders with minor mental health problems from seeking help because of a fear that they will lose their certificates. There is also a general lack of basic knowledge of sporting firearms within the medical profession and BASC is aware of a significant proportion of GPs who are opposed to the private ownership of firearms.
- There is no scientific evidence to show that psychometric testing is capable of detecting someone who is likely to become dangerous with a firearm.

### **The danger presented by, and legislation regulating, airguns.**

- Home Office statistics show that in 2008/09, the level of airgun offences declined by 19% which in turn was a fall of 15% over the previous year.
- The overall decline in airgun offences since the peak year of 2003/4 is 56%.
- Although most airguns are not certificated, this does not mean that they are not controlled. Airguns are considered to be "firearms" for the purposes of the criminal law. Those who misuse airguns are subject to a wide raft of over 30 potential criminal charges with commensurate penalties including heavy fines and imprisonment.

- Air rifles are limited in power to a kinetic energy of 12 foot-pounds (ft/lbs). In comparison a .22 rimfire rifle, used for training cadets, target shooting and small pest control has a kinetic energy of around 135 ft/lbs and a standard shotgun can easily reach 1350 ft/lbs. Air pistols are limited to 6 ft/lbs. Above these power levels, air rifles can only be possessed on the authority of a firearm certificate and air pistols are prohibited weapons.
- Air rifles and pistols are used in target shooting up to Olympic level. Low powered air rifles (< 12 ft/lbs) fire a light projectile over short distances and are also used to control pests up to the size of a rabbit at ranges up to 25 yards. They are effective around buildings where standard firearms cannot be used.
- Informed estimates suggest that there are upwards of 4 million low powered airguns in circulation. A retrospective ban on possession would be impractical because no records exist of who owns them. This would simply criminalise large number of people to no effect and a large number of air rifles and pistols could become available to a criminal black market.
- Retrospective licensing of currently owned air weapons would not improve public safety because recent experience shows that most people who currently own one would not apply for a licence. Only already lawful users would be likely to apply.
- It is an offence for anyone to fire an air pellet beyond the premises where they have permission to shoot. When young persons aged 14 and under are being supervised by an adult aged 21 or over, both the young person and supervising adult commit the offence.
- Young people under 14 may not use an airgun unless they are supervised by someone over 21.
- Young people between 14 -17 years of age may not buy or hire an airgun or ammunition or receive one as a gift. However an airgun may be borrowed from a person over 18 years of age and used on private property with the occupier's consent, without supervision. A person within this age group may not carry an airgun in a public place at any time unless supervised by a person of or over 21 years and then only with a good reason for doing so.
- Nobody under 18 years may buy an airgun or its ammunition.
- Licensing airguns would impose an intolerable administrative burden on the police which would have an adverse impact on public safety by

diverting scarce resources away from front-line policing and firearms licensing.

**Add anything further you consider important to your submission. Please send a copy of it to [politics@basc.org.uk](mailto:politics@basc.org.uk) so that we can gauge the response level.**