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Spinning a Tale –

Media Bias and Government Spin: Working Together for a 'Safer' Australia

Introduction

In 1996 following a horrific multiple shooting at Port Arthur in Tasmania, the commonwealth government coerced the states into adopting the National Firearms Agreement pushed by Prime Minister John Howard. This was in spite of the fact that nothing in the Constitution gives the federal government authority over firearms. That power is the exclusive province of the states.¹

The Port Arthur murders were committed with a military style, semi-automatic rifle. The new legislation banned all semi-automatic rifles, and all semi-automatic and pump action shotguns.

In 2002 following a double murder at a Melbourne university, committed with a handgun, the prime minister again imposed his will upon the states and induced them to ban a large number of handguns based on calibre, barrel length and magazine capacity.

Some 640,000 rifles and shotguns were confiscated and destroyed in 1996. The number of handguns to be surrendered and destroyed is unknown at this time but is probably around 25,000. These firearms were all taken from ordinary law-abiding Australians; criminals have surrendered not one gun.

The total cost of both buybacks is likely to exceed \$600,000,000.

Off-repeated phrases used by proponents of the new controls during both the so-called 'buybacks' were "getting the guns off the streets" and "making Australia safer".

The main sources of information relating to the usage of firearms in Australia are the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Both organisations are regarded as credible. However, on some occasions the manner of publicising their findings leaves something to be desired.

The Institute of Criminology also releases papers² on suicide with a firearm in Australia. One might ask what a body set up by the government to examine crime and criminal justice is doing examining suicide. Suicide is not a crime in this country.

So how effective have the buybacks been, and how much safer are Australian streets?

It depends on whom you believe.

Many Australians maintain a healthy disregard for pronouncements from the government; pronouncements that they regard as being heavily 'spin-doctored'.

Similarly, Australians increasingly do not trust the media to objectively report on some subjects. Many reporters will repeat word for word, right down to the headline, any media release issued by government press secretaries without even the most cursory checking of the contents for accuracy. Some journalists often mistake opinion for fact.

It cannot be denied that there has been a reduction in the number of deaths with a firearm but this has merely continued a trend dating back to the mid 1980's. If the trend line for all firearm deaths is examined it will be seen to have followed a steady downward progression while the overall murder rate has remained stable and the overall suicide rate has increased. Accidental firearm deaths have also declined.

Media Bias

A news item in The Weekend Australian of 3-4 January 2004, written by Padraic Murphy and headlined "Gun deaths plummet", claimed that "shooting deaths have halved over the past decade, driven largely by the crackdown on gun ownership after the Port Arthur massacre. Between 1991 and 2001, firearms were involved in 5083 deaths – 77 per cent of them suicide."

The news that deaths involving firearms have shown such a marked reduction in numbers is indeed welcome, but to claim that this is a direct result of the "crack down on firearms ownership" is misleading, and since suicide has increased it is obvious that method substitution has occurred.

The Weekend Australian based the article on a Trends & Issues³ paper issued by the Australian Institute of Criminology. Information contained in the AIC report very clearly shows that the reduction in firearm related deaths began well before the implementation of the National Firearms Agreement in 1996.

Nowhere in this paper is the decline in shooting deaths attributed to the “crackdown on gun ownership after the Port Arthur massacre”.

The Australian’s article goes on to say: “The available data suggest a trend towards greater use of handguns in suicide and accident-al deaths,” the report found.”

But the AIC report qualifies this statement by adding, “To place this in perspective, it is important to note that in Australia handguns are one of the firearms least likely to be used to commit suicide or to be involved in an accidental discharge resulting in death.”

The AIC report also noted that of 128,544 deaths recorded in Australia in 2002, 7876 were caused by accidents, poisoning and violence including suicide (referred to as ‘external causes’), and firearms represent only a small fraction of all external causes (4.2%).

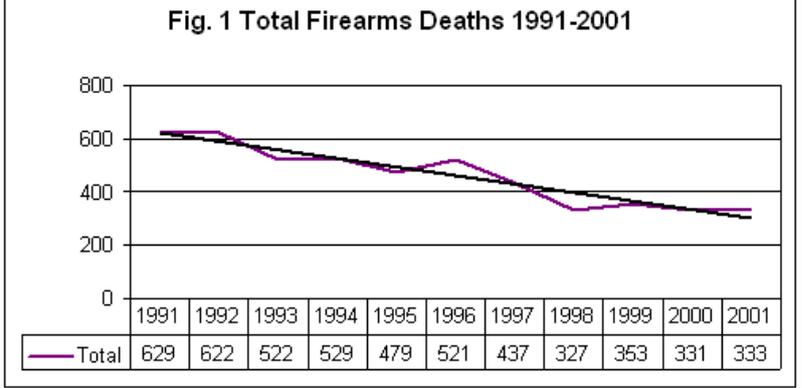


Figure 1, compiled from figures contained in the AIC report, shows the trend line continuing from 1991 in a steady downward progression. If anything, the trend appears to have flattened since 1998, when the national controls could have started to show an effect.

A Long Running Saga

Nor is this the first time The Australian has exhibited a bias against shooters. A news item published in the April 29th, 1998, edition was headlined “Joy for shooters on day of massacre”. The article reported, among other things, that the “Queensland cabinet had approved a massive rifle range to cater for 10,000 shooters in Brisbane.”

Following complaints to the Australian Press Council by the Sporting Shooters Association and 36 other persons, the council issued a ruling that said in part,

“The principal concern of the complainants is that the headline, rather than the text of the article, implies that shooters do not feel sympathy with those affected by the Port Arthur massacre. The article does not carry any indication that shooters will be joyful at the establishment of the rifle range. No representative of shooters is quoted in relation to the rifle range or the massacre. The council considers that the headline is misleading in that it does not summarise the views of shooters and it is open to the reader to infer that shooters do not regret the massacre. The council accordingly upholds the complaint”.

The Australian did not accept the Press Council ruling but was obliged to report it which it did with considerable bad grace quoting remarks by Justice Glass of the NSW Court of Appeal in a 1976 case to support its attitude.

In December 2002 The Weekend Australian Magazine carried an item headlined “Gun Lobby takes pot shot at the facts”. It contained a cartoon ridiculing shooters and after expressing an opinion on the US NRA quoted John Crook of Gun Control Australia, as follows:

*“Many (gun owners) are reckless”, counters Crook, citing figures that show the number of accidental gun deaths is **close to the number of actual homicides.** (Emphasis added)*

In actual fact there were 45 accidental firearms deaths⁴ in 2000, the latest year for which statistics were available at the time, and total homicides amounted to 327 in 1999, again the latest year for which figures were available. A reasonable person might infer from Mr Crook’s remarks that there were in excess of 300 accidental firearms deaths in that year.

Following complaints, the editor of the magazine replied claiming the article was “fair and accurate” and quoted statistics⁵ from the United States to support that contention. The editor ignored the situation in Australia and the reporting of Mr Crook’s misleading remarks. The relevance of the US statistics remains unexplained.

The Australian refused in any way to admit bias and the Australian Press Council declined to consider the complaint. Other newspapers in Australia have shown bias from time to time but many also put the opposing view. So far as can be ascertained, The Australian has not carried a balancing article since 1996 when it printed an opinion piece by the poet Les Murray⁶ and prior to that one by D. D. McNicoll.

Sins of Omission

The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, has long been an advocate of tighter firearm laws. In 2001, following a spate of crimes involving (illegal) handguns, it ran an editorial headlined “Total ban is best form of protection”⁷.

The Telegraph said, while pushing for an outright ban on handguns, “There is no reason for anyone to be allowed to carry a gun on the streets of Sydney or any other Australian city.

“Prime Minister John Howard’s ban on military style and semi-automatic rifles and shotguns in the wake of the Port Arthur massacre changed the national psyche.

“Almost 600,000 (sic) banned semi-automatic weapons were destroyed.

“And there are tough new conditions about storing guns that are owned legally.

“The gun ban has been partly responsible for a dramatic fall in the number of homicide deaths caused by guns.

“In 1989-90, 28 per cent of homicides were caused by firearms. In 1998-99 only 20 per cent were caused by firearms.”

Unfortunately, the editorial omitted the fact that the guns used in crime are not registered, their owners are not licensed and they take no part in any amnesty.

It omitted to mention that no one, other than police, security guards, etc., is “allowed” to carry a gun on the streets of any Australian town or city.

It also omitted to explain that the decline in homicides committed with a firearm began well before John Howard’s 1996 gun bans were introduced⁸.

And it omitted to point out, that when the 1991-2001 figures⁹ are examined, it is clear that the bans had no effect whatsoever on the overall homicide rate which has remained relatively stable since 1915.

The editorial continues; “It is estimated that 60,000 handguns are registered in NSW and police say that the weapons, which are easily concealed, have become the weapon of choice for criminals,” the clear implication being that properly licensed and registered handguns are the choice of criminals.

“Many more have been purchased illegally on the black market.

“The gun lobby argues that a ban on the weapons will force ownership underground but police concede there is already a black market in the weapons.”

The Telegraph can’t have it both ways. If there is already a black market in operation, how will banning legally owned handguns, which demonstrably are not used in crime, prevent criminals acquiring illegal handguns on the black market? It omitted to explain that, too.

Unsubstantiated innuendo?

Since 1996 Australian governments, both state and federal, have used subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways to ensure that firearms owners are presented in as poor a light as possible.

In February 1997, The Advertiser, Adelaide, carried an item¹⁰ headed “Law targets 1000 Games ‘extremists’.” It claimed that a joint law-enforcement operation had identified 1000 South Australian “extremists” with the potential to strike at the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

“Many of the targets are believed to be linked to the gun lobby and include recipients of classified publications on bomb and illegal firearm manufacture,” wrote The Advertiser.

“Police sources have told The Advertiser undercover operatives have been infiltrating the gun lobby, attending public meetings to identify “radical elements”.”

“Law-enforcement agencies fear those identified as extremists may use the Olympic Games and the international media exposure to show their opposition to the gun ban which followed last year’s Port Arthur massacre” claimed the article.

It is difficult to understand why a police force would conduct a so-called undercover operation and then announce it to the world.

The operation was said to have commenced the previous June (1996) at about the same time John Howard was shown in a photograph, carried in newspapers across the nation, addressing shooters at a rally in Victoria wearing a bullet proof vest^[ii] and at the time the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Fischer, “warned that failure to resolve the issue could see owners stripped of all weapons”^[iii].

The intention is obvious and the message was clear.

In the event the allegations, attributed by The Advertiser to anonymous “police sources”, appear to have been totally without foundation and served only to denigrate and further marginalise firearm owners.

Government spin, Media bias or just sloppy research?

The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, carried an item on February 23rd 2004 headlined “Buyback cuts gun crime in half”.

It claimed to have obtained Queensland Police Service figures revealing that firearms offences against people in the “Smart State” fell to the lowest figure in a decade. According to The Courier-Mail, firearms offences against people amounted to 400 in 2002-2003, 424 fewer than in 1996-1997.

However, the Queensland Crime Statistics Bulletin #2, May 1998, puts the total number of firearm offences against the person in 1996 at 477, not 824 as implied in The Courier-Mail article.

“Griffith University criminologist Dr Tim Prenzler said crime had decreased Australia –wide in recent years and the homicide rate had more than halved to 0.24 (sic) for each 100,000 people since 1996.”

“Australians do appear to be in less danger of being killed by a firearm than they were in the past,” he said.

It would appear that they are in as much danger as ever of being killed – just not with a firearm. The homicide rate in Australia has remained relatively stable at about 2 per 100,000 since 1915 and was at its lowest during the years from 1930 to 1970^[iv].

There were minimal controls on the ownership of firearms during this period and many homes in Australia had a .22 rifle in the closet.

Coincidentally, moves to restrict firearms ownership gathered pace during the years when firearms crime was at its lowest.

“If responsible people are penalised, then that’s the price of safety, as it is for road regulations or dog ownership,” Dr Prenzler is quoted as saying. It could also be said that “responsible people” have indeed been penalised but statistics indicate that the promised safety has proven illusory.

There appears to be a bizarre belief among some academics, and sections of the media, that murder by means other than with a firearm is somehow more socially acceptable.

As for road regulations, about 2000 people a year die on Australian roads but the wait for similar measures to be introduced against motor vehicle owners will, rightly, be long and tedious.

The Australian, again



Cartoon published in *The Australian* on June 17th 1996.

Newspaper cartoonists in Australia have a long and honourable history but they have displayed a sense of narrow-minded intolerance during the so-called 'gun debate' that is breathtaking for its spite and malice. The example on the previous page was just one that *The Australian* printed in the months following the commencement of the Prime Minister's campaign for stricter gun laws. It depicts gun owners as violent, illiterate rednecks hurling insults and missiles at John Howard.

Rallies by gun owners may have been conducted in a manner that John Howard would have described as "robust" - most rallies are - but they have never been violent. In fact, police have complimented shooters on their good behaviour. No missile was ever thrown at the prime minister, or anyone else, at a shooters' rally.

During the first term of the Howard government, a union rally at Parliament House in Canberra caused more than \$100,000 damage to the building. Rallies by shooters, on the other hand, have caused no damage wherever they have been held.



The union rally was reported without the provocative rhetoric or inflammatory cartoons used against shooters, such as the one above by Nicholson. Gun owners are portrayed in both cartoons as over weight, slobbering, camo-wearing imbeciles.

Everyone's ABC?

Bias manifests itself in many ways. Most times those who exhibit it are unaware that they do so and when it is pointed out to them will strenuously deny that it exists. They would be amazed if anyone described them as anything other than "middle of the road". It is often not an intentional bias; it's just the way things are.

A number of presenters on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation could accurately be described as 'small l' liberals. They believe that their view of the world is so obviously correct that it must be held by a majority of their fellow citizens. It follows from this that anyone who disagrees with that view must at the very least be ill informed or illiterate, or worse.

The Law Report, ABC Radio National

At the height of the 'gun debate' in 1996, Susanna Lobez presented an edition of *The Law Report* that discussed, inter alia, national gun laws following Port Arthur.

Ms Lobez spoke to Dr David Neal and at the conclusion of the interview said, "I usually try to keep my personal views out of *The Law Report*," then went on to make sure that her personal views were known to all, concluding with the following remarks:

"...today I personally urge all politicians to stand up to the lobby groups who demand the right to keep and use guns. A suggestion: if they need guns to kill feral animals or go on hunting trips, or do target practice, couldn't the guns be held in protective custody and then retrieved, or hired, just for the hunting trip?"

Some might say we must avoid knee-jerk reactions, but surely sometimes such reactions are appropriate. So carpe diem, politicians, Seize the Day."^[v]

In somewhat the same vein Kerry O'Brien while hosting the 1997 Election Night Report on ABC TV in South Australia disparagingly referred to the United Australia Party, which contested the election, as "...the shooters party". The leader of the federal National Party, Mr John Anderson, has at times described himself as a shooter. Would Mr O'Brien disparagingly refer to the Nationals in the same way?

ABC Local Radio

Matt Abraham, on the Morning Show on Adelaide's ABC radio station 891 in 2002, talking about the delay in putting the legislation to implement the "buy-back" before the South Australian Parliament asked what was so hard about legislating to remove the personal property of a sizable number of the state's citizens concluding with the words, "Just do it!"

While the overall crime rate has increased in recent years, the armed crime rate has not.^[vi] In fact, after rising during the 1990's, it fell in 2002. Knives are the weapons most often used. Other weapons range from sharpened screwdrivers to blood filled syringes. Armed hold-ups with firearms are relatively rare.^[vii]

ABC TV News

When a hold-up is reported on TV news, regardless of the weapon used, the logo almost always inserted into the news item will invariably show the “standard” red circle with a diagonal slash superimposed over a semi-automatic handgun. Sometimes semi-automatic rifles, which have been banned since 1996, are also used.

An item from late 2002 was shown on ABC TV News in NSW. Several masked men of “islander appearance” attacked the St Marys Band Club. The video footage from the security camera showed the offenders scrambling over the counter, holding iron bars and baseball bats and attacking the clerk. They escaped with some thousands of dollars and left the clerk badly injured. The voice-over from ABC TV said, “armed men attacked an employee of the club and made off with money” The logo inserted above the newsreader, showed the red circle over a semi-auto pistol throughout the news item.

Complaints to the TV station will sometimes see the circle and slash pistol logo removed from subsequent news bulletins only to reappear with the next report of an armed hold-up.

Sky News

On Sky News, the satellite TV news channel, in December 2003, Michael Willesee asked the question “Do we need tougher gun laws?” He invited viewers to email him with their views.

He must have been surprised that many who replied took the opportunity to express their opinion that the firearms laws should not be further tightened because he accused those who disagreed with him of “not looking at the issue with an open mind”.

He used the theft of a pistol from Kerry Packer as an example that guns are being stolen all the time. [\[viii\]](#)

He conveniently ignored the fact that Mr Packer’s gun was improperly stored in a drawer of Mr Packer’s desk [\[ix\]](#) and that theft is a crime committed by criminals who take no notice of the law. In the end it was Michael Willesee who was shown to have a limited grasp of this important subject, and to have a closed mind.

Myths and illusions

An inability to countenance an opposing view can be very comforting. It reinforces beliefs that fly in the face of all the evidence. It means that an opinion can be held without the need to justify it. Myths can be created; illusions fostered.

One of the myths perpetuated in Australia is that removing guns from the community will lead to a reduction in the homicide and suicide rates. Nothing could be further from the truth.

While the rate of homicides and suicides committed with a firearm has declined, the overall homicide rate has remained steady for almost 100 years and the overall suicide rate has risen. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, suicide in Australia rose from 2,197 in 1988 to 2,723 in 1997, an increase of 24% over the period. [\[x\]](#)

The media persists in the portrayal of shooters as beer swilling, overweight rightwing rednecks. Again, that is far from the truth. Firearms owners come from all walks of life from bank managers to surgeons and boilermakers to truck drivers. And even prime ministers, as in the case of Malcolm Fraser. [\[xi\]](#)

The present prime minister has fostered the myth that restricting the ownership of firearms by law-abiding Australians will lead to a ‘safer Australia’. Since the destruction of 640,000 firearms in the “buyback” of 1996 we have seen an increase in the criminal misuse of firearms – but not their misuse by licensed owners.

In Melbourne alone there have been 24 gangland killings in the past six years. [\[xii\]](#)

Similarly numerous drive-by shootings and murders, all with illegal firearms, have been committed in Sydney recently. The police in both cities seem to be powerless to prevent these crimes and appear to have had limited success in solving them.

The increase in gun crime mirrors the experience of the United Kingdom since the total ban on civilian handguns in 1997. Firearms offences, which had been decreasing since 1989, have doubled since the ban according to Home Office statistics.

Smoke and mirrors

Perhaps the greatest illusion fostered by the Australian media is that the National Coalition for Gun Control (NCGC) is anything other than a one-person show. The March 25th 2004 Newsletter circulated by NSW MLC, John Tingle, offered the following:

“On March 22 2004, Mike Jefferys, who does the breakfast programme on 2CC Canberra, interviewed Samantha Lee. When he asked her who the NCGC actually were, and how many of them there were, she hedged. When he put it to her that she was the only member, she replied, “Maybe I’ve just got a loud voice.”

He then asked her what had happened to the TV Commercial. Was it a fact they had to withdraw it because segments in it could be in breach of the firearms laws? No, it had been canned because of a personal matter between herself and the advertising agency, Saatchi and Saatchi, which produces ads for the NCGC on a free “pro bono” basis; and that the “public” didn’t need to know the reason behind the cancellation.”

Ms Lee, often aided and abetted by sections of the Australian media, demands full disclosure from all and sundry but is remarkably reticent when asked to provide details about her own organisation.

The National Coalition for Gun Control is an organisation of smoke and mirrors that makes outrageous statements, often bordering on slander, for the sake of a quick headline.

Conclusion

The nature of the 'gun debate' guarantees that the opposing sides will view it from diametrically opposite points.

Firearms owners in Australia are in little doubt that bias exists in both the reporting of anything to do with firearms and shooting, and in the way the federal government approaches the matter.

Some members of the media exhibit bias that is palpable to firearms owners, but which journalists and editors regard as fair and accurate reporting. Evenhandedness requires that where a news item contains a quote from an anti gun source, a shooters' representative should be invited to submit a rebuttal. In fact, this seldom happens.

As an example, John Crook, President of Gun Control Australia, was quoted in The Advertiser, Adelaide, on July 15th 1997:

"Our logic is that shooters are the most ill-disciplined people of any recreational group, that's what attracts them to guns. It's a state of mind."

". . . they are usually poorly disciplined, they never had much success at school and were never very good at sport. Guns to them represent something they were never able to achieve."

A rebuttal from a shooters' representative was not included.

Bias manifests itself in many ways and some of the more obvious examples have been included in this document, but there is a more subtle bias that is not so easily countered.

Many of Australia's gun owners are prolific letter writers to both politicians and to the letters to the editor section of daily newspapers – at least they were before losing patience at the media's refusal to publish those letters. Yet letters with an anti gun focus are often printed even when they have little literary or factual merit.

If Australia's ¾ million licensed firearms owners are to have any confidence in the accuracy and fairness of the reporting of firearm related topics by the media, the mindset of journalists and editors will need to change.

On past performance this is unlikely, at least in the short term, but the media owes it to itself and its' readers to report on this subject in a balanced way and to question why, with ever more draconian laws being enacted, criminals continue to acquire firearms illegally and with little apparent hindrance.

Appendix



Figure A1. Prime Minister John Howard addressing a rally of firearms owners at sale, Victoria, in June 1996 wearing a bullet proof vest. The imagery was devastating and many shooters were deeply insulted. In all the rallies conducted by them, involving more than a quarter of a million people in all, not once was an instance of violence recorded.



Figure A2. Another of Nicholson’s cartoons distorts the facts. The people he was attacking were not heavily-armed lunatics on the street, but plain people who had guns locked in heavy safes at home. There are and always were plenty of laws to manage pistols. There were plenty of laws to deal with murder. The police procedures for legal pistols in Victoria were voided by bad enforcement, when a foreign student used a licensed pistol to murder someone who refused to fraudulently sit his exams for him.

Selected quotes.

John Howard:

“I hate guns.”

“I don’t think people should have guns unless they’re police or in the military or in the security industry. There is no earthly reason for people to have ... ordinary citizens should not have weapons. We do not want the American disease imported into Australia.”

“I think guns have become a blight on American society. We do not have the same gun culture as the Americans and we should strenuously resist any slide into the gun culture of the United States.”

Radio 2GB Sydney, 17 April 2002.

“Well look I don’t like getting into the business of banning things. I’m not a banner. I’m an encourager and a persuader and an advocate.”

Doorstop interview Meewen, Victoria. 2 February 2001.

“Our year long national gun amnesty and buy back scheme saw over 640,000 firearms surrendered for their genuine value totalling almost \$315 million. All of those firearms with the very few exceptions for museum and police use were then destroyed. Taking such a strong stand was unpopular in some quarters but demonstrated the Government’s determination to fight crime.”

Interpol15th Asian Regional Conference Rydges Hotel, Canberra. 17 February 1998.

Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, 9 September 1997 on the gun buyback.

“... it was all about draining the suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney of firearms.”

David Kelly, Senior Adviser, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 16 December 1998.

Asked how the buyback will reduce crime in Australia:

“The simple answer to your question is that the first part of your question has nothing to do with the second part of your question.”

Australian Bureau of Statistics; Report in The Australian, 27 September 1997

Gun deaths fell by 46 per cent during the last 15 years before tough new firearm legislation introduced after last year’s Port Arthur massacre, according to figures released yesterday by the ABS. “The figures clearly show that the absolute numbers of (gun) deaths, and the rates of death, has been steadily declining before Port Arthur.”

¹ All powers not specifically reserved to the Federal Parliament remain with the states – The Australian Constitution, Part V, Powers of the Parliament. The Howard government has used quite extreme coercion to enforce Howard's will over the states' reserved powers.

² Trends & Issues in crime and criminal justice No, 269, the Australian Institute of Criminology, November 2003

³ Australian Institute of Criminology 'Trends & Issues No. 269' Firearm related Deaths in Australia, 1991-2001.

⁴ The number of accidental deaths involving firearms spiked in 2000, up from 28 in 1999 and falling to 18 in 2001. In the years 1991-1999 the mean was 26.66. The spike to 45 in 2000 remains unexplained.

⁵ Even the supporting figures quoted for the United States were wrong being overstated by almost thirteen per cent. (FBI Uniform Crime Reports)

⁶ Les Murray, The Australian, 24th July 1996, asked, "Did the gun row have much to do with guns?"

⁷ The Daily Telegraph, Monday April 30, 2001. D D McNicoll, "Greenies out for a duck", The Australian 2nd February 1995.

⁸ Trends and Issues No. 269, The Australian Institute of Criminology, Firearm related deaths in Australia 1991-2001.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Law targets 1000 Games 'extremists', by Police Reporter Nick Papps, The Advertiser, Adelaide S.A., February 5th 1997.

¹¹ Christopher Dore, in an article "The smoking guns buyback" in the Weekend Australian, 26-27 May 1997, wrote: "So heated was the debate over gun reform throughout most of last year that Australians experienced a rare and, to most, disturbing sight: the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, addressing angry Victorian gun owners wearing a bullet-proof vest underneath his dark tweed jacket.

That image . . . galvanized a nation and almost in itself guaranteed the success of Mr Howard's push for uniform national gun laws." See appendix.

¹² "NP infighting flares", The Advertiser, Adelaide, June 6 1996. Again, the federal government appeared to be operating outside of the confines of the federal constitution.

[iv] The Second Outlook Conference - Violent crime, Property Crime, and Public Policy.

Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra 3 & 4 March 1997.

[v] The Law Report, Radio National, Tuesday, April 30th, 1996.

[vi] Australian crime facts and figures, 2003. Australian Institute of Criminology, February 2004.

[vii] Guns are used in only 6% of armed hold-ups. Australian Institute of Criminology, 2004.

[viii] Mr. Packer's pistol was stolen in January 2003 during a break-in at his Sydney office.

[ix] NSW Police have decided not to charge Mr. Packer for failing to safely secure his Glock pistol, The Advertiser, April 12th 2004. By contrast, in 1998 NSW Police insisted on prosecuting a 16-year-old boy with firearm offences for possessing a toy cap gun. The presiding magistrate, who described it as a "silly case", threw out the charge. The Sunday Mail, Adelaide 29th September 1998.

[x] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002. AusStats, Special Article - Suicide.htm 1301.0.

[xi] The gun showdown, article in The Australian March 17, 1988.

[xii] The Age, December 16, 2003.