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America's gun control debate: Thoughts from an Australian law abiding firearm owner

As President Obama attempts to reform America gun laws, the issue of gun control and violence is yet again in the spotlight. My thoughts and sentiments on this are not centred on American gun control or gun culture per se, but rather the Australian experience.

It is deeply disturbing that every time the issue of gun control is debated in America or other jurisdictions for that matter, Australian guns laws are hailed as the gold standard – a benchmark for leaders to achieve. Well, they are not.

As a starting point, we are not America, we do not have a constitutional right to bear arms, and in fact our constitution does not afford ordinary citizens many rights at all. Instead, what we have is an array of draconian and impractical state and national firearms laws, underpinned by a 'Howard' mentality that somehow regulating law abiding people will deter crime.

But the facts and evidence fly in the face of many of these 'anti-gun' lies and misinformation.

In late 2015, following intensive discussions with Robert Brown and I, the NSW Deputy Premier and Police Minister, Troy Grant, rightly pointed out what the Shooters and Fishers Party have been saying for over 20 years, "Greater than 97% of all firearms incidents reported in NSW relate to unregistered, or unbranded, or unmarked firearms... NSW has an illegal firearm problem".

This has been the reality in Australia for decades. The vast majority of firearms crimes committed are done so with the use of an illegal or unregistered firearm by an unlicensed individual.

Logic dictates then, does it not, that the Government should focus the vast majority of its time and resources on curbing the illegal firearms trade and tough sentencing measures? Rather, successive governments have spent over a billion dollars on targeting law abiding firearms owners through failed registration schemes, confiscation and pointless "tough gun control" measures.

Further, independent and statistical research indicates that the regulation, including banning, of firearms, has little to no causal effect on the rate of crime. The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research published a working paper on *The Australian Firearms Buyback and its Effect on Gun Deaths*, which ultimately concluded that the NFA did not have large or long-term effects on reducing firearms homicide or suicide rates in Australia.

Our gun laws are nothing to be proud of. In fact, they represent one of the most vile and draconian attacks on personal freedoms and culture. They have been formed, and continue to be formed, on lies, political mileage and misinformation.

In 1996, the then Howard Government decided that we couldn't be trusted with semi-automatic rifles and pump action shotguns anymore, yet it seems criminals didn't get the message?

Even today, the ordinary Australian citizens cringes or questions me when I tell them I love shooting and hunting. I don't blame them though. I blame the collective efforts of politicians like Howard, anti-gun groups like the Greens and most of the media. This atmosphere of paranoia and ignorance was created by them. It is our job to unwind the damage and further our rights in the process.

Licensed firearms owners are among the few classes of people that are acknowledged and endorsed as fit and proper persons. Criminals are not allowed to obtain firearms licences period. Ownership and use of a firearm is a highly held privilege. With that privilege we have the right not to be associated with or disadvantaged by the action of senseless cowards. Relaxing firearms laws to make it easier and more practical for law abiding citizens to enjoy their sport and cultural pastimes is not going to result in a mass shooting or spike in gun crime.

To my fellow law abiding firearm owners, and to anyone who truly values personal freedoms and fact based decision making, I say this: The fight for reasonable firearms laws will be generational struggle, but united, we have a strong and growing voice that will not be silenced."