



Australasian College for Emergency Medicine

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30 October 2019

Committee Secretariat
Finance and Expenditure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington, New Zealand

By email: gunlawchanges@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Finance and Expenditure Committee,

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM, The College) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for submission in response to the Arms Legislation Bill (the Bill).

ACEM is the peak body for emergency medicine and has a vital interest in ensuring the highest standards of emergency medical care for all patients. ACEM is responsible for the training and ongoing education of emergency physicians and the advancement of professional standards in emergency medicine in Australia and New Zealand.

Emergency physicians are part of the dedicated frontline team of first responders who care for gunshot trauma victims to save their lives, when they present to hospital emergency departments. As emergency specialists, our Fellows and trainees in emergency medicine in New Zealand are trained and accustomed to responding to traumatic and highly stressful events, including gunshot trauma injuries which occur on a monthly basis. Mass casualty events such as the 15 March 2019 terrorist attack in Christchurch, and the response of healthcare professionals, underline the importance of emergency care.

Nothing like the terrorist attack of 15 March 2019 must be allowed to happen again. The experience is traumatic and will have a long-lasting impact for all affected by it; this includes the families and friends of those who tragically did not survive their injuries, despite the most strenuous efforts of medical teams, as well as those who did survive, and first responders.

Gun ownership, injury and mortality

ACEM notes that there is a recorded increase both in the rate of overall homicide, and the number of gun-related deaths and injuries in New Zealand. Mortality data from the [Injury Prevention Research Unit](#) at the University of Otago shows that between 2005 and 2015, there were upward trends in the number of fatal and non-fatal gunshot-related injuries in New Zealand, with gunshot injuries increasing by 26% between 2005 and 2015. In 2015, there were 58 deaths related to firearms (a rate of 1.24 per 100,000). This compares unfavourably with Australia, which in 2016 had 238 gun-related deaths (a rate of 0.96 per 100,000).

In New Zealand, there is a huge gap in available data regarding the number of privately-owned firearms across the country. At present it is not known how many legally owned firearms, let alone illegally owned firearms, there are in New Zealand, as the Arms Act 1983 does not require registration of arms and the New Zealand Police do not hold such records. [Estimates](#) by the New Zealand Police suggest that there are approximately 1.2 million privately-owned firearms in New Zealand as of 2016, representing an increase of approximately 500,000 firearms in 1997. As of 2018, there were approximately 66,000 military-style semi-automatics, pistols and restricted weapons in private ownership.

Gun Control in Australia

In contrast to New Zealand, firearm ownership is heavily controlled and regulated in Australia. Following the Port Arthur massacre in 1996 the National Firearms Agreement was implemented, which included a ban on semiautomatic and self-loading rifles and shotguns, strict and comprehensive licensing and permitting criteria, and restrictions on the trade of firearms. As a result of the regulations people seeking to own and use firearms must apply for a licence, demonstrate gun safety competency and show a genuine reason for owning a firearm. All licences included rigorous background checks, a 28-day waiting period and registration on a national gun ownership register. Licence owners are required to renew their licence every 5 years to ensure ongoing compliance with safety and regulatory requirements. According to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the number of firearm deaths in Australia nationally dropped from 516 in 1996 to 238 in 2016.

Military-style arms

The Hague Convention of 1899, at Declaration III, prohibits the use of expanding bullets in warfare. Expanding or hollow-point bullets fall under “weapons intended to cause unnecessary suffering”. Hollow-point bullets are designed to expand and fragment on impact inflicting considerably more damage and lethality than full-metal-jacketed bullets. Military combatants are required, to this day, to use full-metal-jacketed projectiles. There is a dissonance between international law and New Zealand law, where ammunition that is illegal for use in modern military conflicts is legal in New Zealand’s domestic arms market. While there may be a legitimate purpose for hollow-point bullets in some applications, access to these types of ammunition must be tightly restricted given their potential to cause extreme harm or death.

High-capacity magazines and the use of hollow-point bullets inflict extensive internal damage and suffering to victims of firearms shootings. That should not be allowed to happen again. There is no need for any civilian to have access to military style weapons, large capacity magazines or ammunition like hollow-point bullets. We fully support legislative measures to ban military style semi-automatics, assault rifles and high capacity magazines. We also support all measures to limit or remove civilian access to hollow-point bullets, considering the extensive damage caused by multiple fragments of a single bullet inside a patient’s body. Firearm magazines are currently unregulated and do not require a licence to purchase. As with firearms and ammunition purchase of magazines should be restricted to gun licence holders.

ACEM Position

We support the Government’s assertion that it is a privilege, not a right, to own and use a firearm. With that must come the necessary gun law reform, regulation and responsibility as a fundamental issue of public and personal safety of the utmost urgency. We believe the proposed gun law reforms are in everyone’s interests: they will protect communities, families, patients and first responders. Mass shootings and terrorist attacks are made possible by access to high-capacity magazines and military style-rifles. While such events are not a regular occurrence in New Zealand, the events of March 15 highlight the need for stronger gun control in New Zealand.

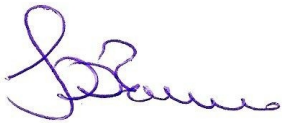
ACEM supports the establishment of a national registry. However, for health professionals to be able to report on any persons of concern who may own or use a firearm, access to the registry would be required. Without that access, it would not be possible for health professionals to know if a person of concern held a firearms license.

Following the announcement of the Arms (Prohibited Firearms, Magazines, and Parts) Amendment Act 2019, ACEM voiced its support by way of a [media release](#) for any legislation that strengthens gun control, registration and licensing. We consider the Bill to be another step in the right direction for addressing the issue of inadequate gun control in New Zealand. Strengthening gun control, registration and licensing makes people safer.

ACEM is willing to support the Committee in its deliberation of the evidence provided to it following the request for responses to the Arms Legislation Bill. On behalf of ACEM, Dr John Bonning (ACEM President-elect), Dr André Cromhout (ACEM NZ Faculty Chair) and Dr Dominic Fleischer (Clinical Lead, Christchurch Hospital) would welcome the opportunity to provide an oral submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee and respond to any questions from an emergency medicine perspective.

If you have any queries regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Helena Maher, Manager – Policy and Advocacy by phone (+61 3 9320 0448) or email (Helena.Maher@acem.org.au).

Nā mātou noa, nā



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