



Liberal Democratic Party

Policy on Firearms

The Liberal Democratic Party supports the right to own firearms. Gun ownership, by itself, harms no other person. It says nothing about what might be done with a gun and cannot morally justify criminal penalties. However, as with any right, there are associated responsibilities. Failure to meet these may warrant criminal penalties.

The right to own firearms is fundamental, thus preceding the authority of government. Consequently, while it may be restricted in the case of individuals, within certain limits, it must not be removed on a collective basis. In particular, it is not a privilege to be granted or denied by governments.

Most gun laws are ineffective on both public health grounds and in terms of genuine crime control. Making gun ownership illegal does not stop gun ownership or misuse. It merely affects gun owners who are law-abiding and least likely to use their guns in crime. Disarming the law-abiding is irrational when the lawless cannot be disarmed.

Australians have a right to decide how best to protect themselves, their families and property. Many have relied on guns in their homes to sleep more comfortably for over two hundred years. Indeed, firearms may be the only means by which people such as women, the elderly and infirm can hope to defend themselves against rapists, robbers and murderers.

There is evidence to suggest that, where gun ownership is high, crime involving actual or threatened violence is reduced. Conversely, when gun ownership is reduced, violent crime increases. Australia's experience since 1996 and the Great Britain's since 1997 provide clear confirmation of the latter point.

The police do not provide security in the home, business or street. They arrive after the crime to take reports and do detective work. The poorer the area, the riskier it is for peaceful residents. Only armed, law-abiding citizens can be present in sufficient numbers to prevent or deter violent crime before it starts, or to reduce its spread. A criminal is more likely to be driven off from a crime by an armed victim than to be convicted and imprisoned for it. Thus, widespread gun ownership will make the community safer.

Ownership of firearms is also the only practical means by which the people can retain any semblance of ensuring that governments remain their servants and not vice versa. Although the ballot box and peaceful protest will always be the preferred means of removing unsatisfactory governments, history is full of examples where those options were denied.

As Thomas Jefferson put it, *"What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?"*

... Or as another US President, Woodrow Wilson, put it, *"Liberty has never come from government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of government. The history of liberty is the history of resistance."*

Firearms are also legitimate sporting implements, used in a wide range of regional, national and international competitions apart from the Olympic and Commonwealth Games. Indeed, shooting is one of the original sports of the modern Olympic Games, commencing in 1896.

It is not legitimate to curtail the sporting activities of one group of Australians while encouraging others, simply because the tools they use have the potential to be used for harmful purposes. Many sporting implements have similar potential, as do a vast array of everyday items.

Firearms contribute to positive environmental outcomes in the hands of hunters. Hunters using firearms are remarkably effective at reducing populations of pest animals such as foxes, pigs, goats, wild dogs and feral cats. These animals have been responsible for enormous destruction of Australian native fauna, with some small marsupial species probably extinct as a result, and pose a threat to agriculture in some areas.

Similarly, hunters contribute to positive environmental outcomes by helping to develop and preserve wetlands which concurrently accommodate species that may be hunted (particularly ducks), while also providing a haven for protected species.

The responsibility of those who own firearms is to only use them for non-coercive purposes or to protect themselves or others from coercion. Those who use firearms for coercive purposes, whether actual or threatened, may have their right to own them limited or removed.

Specific firearm policies:

- Sport, hunting, collecting and self-defence are all legitimate reasons for firearm ownership.
- Firearm ownership should be subject to possession of a licence. However, all adults over 18 years of age have a right to a licence unless it is removed because of a history or genuine prospect of coercion.
- Those who wish to carry a concealed firearm for self-defence are entitled to be issued with a permit to do so unless they have a history or genuine prospect of coercion.
- All genuine sporting uses of firearms are legitimate.
- There should be no registration of long-arms.
- There should be no additional prohibitions on semi-automatic firearms.
- Individuals and organisations have a right to establish facilities that involve the use of firearms. This includes shooting ranges and hunting reserves.