



Peace Movement Aotearoa

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Urgent action: Semi-automatic weapons and other gun control measures Immediate moratorium on semi-automatic weapons pending further change

Sunday, 17 March 2019

The news today that there is [“panic buying” of semi-automatic weapons](#) of the type used in the Christchurch mass shootings on Friday in response to the Prime Minister’s statements that gun laws will change, prompted us to bring forward this action alert which was due to be published later this week.

There have been decades of warnings about the likely consequences of NZ’s totally inadequate firearms legislation by ourselves and others, and now finally it seems - at the cost of so many lives - something will be done.

The key issues with gun control here include: there is no overall register of firearms so no-one knows how many firearms there are, nor who has them, although it is generally estimated that there are at least 1.2 million guns; and even if someone has a firearms licence, there is no record of how many or what guns they have except for a limited number of “restricted” weapons. AR-15 semi-automatic rifles - reported to have been used on Friday - can be legally obtained by anyone with a standard firearms license, then easily modified by changing the ammunition magazine.

The comprehensive Thorpe ‘Review of Firearms Control in New Zealand’, which followed the Aramoana mass shooting, made a number of recommendations in 1997 - including that all firearms be individually registered to their owners, in addition to owner licensing; a buy-back of military-style semi-automatic weapons (MSSAs / assault rifles); the permanent disabling of all restricted weapons such as privately held machine guns; and stricter provisions for licence vetting, licensing, and gun storage - none of these recommendations have been actioned. There have been several enquiries and reports since (most recently in 2017), and again, little change has been made.

This is in part due to the rise of the gun lobby, led by organisations such as the Sporting Shooters Association that was established in 1992 “to protect the rights and privileges of NZ licensed firearm owners” and to campaign against any “legislation that attempts to restrict the ownership of firearms”. Their influence can be seen in the comments of assorted

politicians about “respecting the rights of legitimate licensed firearm owners” in recent years (more examples are [available here](#) , and in last year’s debate around firearms in schools (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/firearms-in-schools-submission-points/1659608080753221> and <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/1663824750331554>)

As you may be aware, firearms enthusiasts have reacted strongly against the Prime Minister’s statement, already moving to oppose "knee-jerk legislative changes" while ignoring the fact that most of the victims of mass shootings in Australia and New Zealand have been [shot and killed by licensed firearm owners using legally held guns](#).

Clearly there are many things that need to change to prevent mass shootings in future, but equally clearly as the Attorney General said yesterday: ‘if you had less fearsome weapons it would make a difference’.

Changes to the firearms legislation are not a knee-jerk reaction - they are twenty two years overdue.

What you can do

This afternoon, public health firearm’s researchers at the University of Otago, Wellington, released a list of the changes that must be made, and we have copied the full release below with their permission - the list of actions (immediate and longer term) are highlighted for your convenience, please use them in your letters / phone calls / visits to politicians, in letters to the media, and on social media. **The key point is that there must be an immediate moratorium on sales, imports and advertising of semi-automatics while further changes are decided.**

Contact details for all politicians are available at <https://www.parliament.nz/en/mps-and-electoralates/members-of-parliament> and we suggest at the least you convey your views to the Prime Minister, leaders of all the political parties, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, as well as to your own MP.

Otago researchers call for urgent law change

Sunday, 17 March 2019

Firearms law changes promised by the Prime Minister are long overdue, according to experts in the Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, Dr Marie Russell and Dr Hera Cook.

They believe it is time for the gun lobby to stand aside. And they are calling for an urgent and immediate moratorium on sales and imports while changes are in process, to prevent a run on gun purchases by people predicting this will happen.

“Many New Zealanders are, like us, worried about the number of firearms in New Zealand,” says Dr Russell.

“Firearms imports number many thousands each year. But we don’t actually know how many guns there are in New Zealand. Estimates range from 1.2 million to two or three million. Along with countries in North America, New Zealand is one of the few places where owners don’t have to register each weapon, except for some limited categories of firearm.”

The researchers believe immediate action is needed to stop sales and importation of semi-automatic firearms. It is likely that some firearms enthusiasts are expecting a ban or restrictions to be imposed and will be racing to purchase these items.

For this reason, and to reduce the increase of stock to dealers from imports, they recommend the following:

- 1. An immediate moratorium on sales, imports and advertising of semi-automatics while changes are decided.**
- 2. Within a limited period of time, removal of semi-automatics from dealers to police custody.**
- 3. Within a limited period of time, checks by Police on the owners and storage of all semi-automatics and pistols. Police know who most of these people are because these types of firearms currently must be registered – unlike other firearms.**

Looking to the longer term, legislation should include:

- 4. A ban on all private ownership of semi-automatic firearms in New Zealand.**
- 5. An amnesty or buy-back with compensation to owners of banned firearms.**
- 6. A register of all firearms.**
- 7. Three or five-year licensing of firearms owners (currently 10 years).**

To achieve lasting change in the firearms laws, the researchers believe that concerted action is needed:

- 8. An all-party commitment to these basic gun control measures.**

“For too long, firearms policy has been dictated by an active and influential gun lobby, whose vocal members have dissuaded governments from making meaningful changes. More than 20 years ago, the gun lobby ensured that recommendations of the detailed 1997 Thorp Report were not adopted. Firearms groups have generally resisted any change, apparently on principle,” says Dr Russell.

Firearms owners comprise about 5 per cent to 6 per cent of the population. Their activities are subsidised by the tax payer. For example, while each licenced firearms owner must pay \$126.50 once every ten years for a standard A Category licence (to own rifles, shotguns etc.), the actual cost to NZ Police of administering the entire licensing system is over \$11 million per year. More than half of this is paid by the taxpayer. The cost to Police of administering firearms imports is entirely absorbed by the Police budget: no fee is charged for administering applications to import firearms, restricted weapons or firearms parts.

“Because taxpayers are subsidising firearms owners, it’s time for taxpayers to have more of a say in firearms policy and law,” according to Dr Russell.

“Current systems are not working: and we are thinking about the 50 or so gun suicides that occur each year, as well as the people shot this week in Christchurch.

“Open arming of the police has been discussed recently. Overseas research suggests that when Police are openly armed, there are more shootings, both accidental and intentional, with ethnic minorities more at risk of police shootings. There are fears that Māori are more likely to be targeted.”

With thanks to the public health researchers, Dr Marie Russell and Dr Hera Cook.

This alert is available online:

- on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/urgent-action-semi-automatic-weapons-and-other-gun-control-measures/2116628215051203>
- Tweet, <https://twitter.com/PeaceMovementA/status/1107177519638175744>
- formatted for printing, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/firearms170319.pdf>