

Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria)



A fair go for responsible people

Longarm Firearms Categorisation Proposal

Foreword

The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia was formed in 1948. At the time, its prime purpose was to foster the skills of firearms use in the community, against the prospect of another world war. We now concentrate on firearms safety and licensed shooters' interests. The Association currently has more than 180,000 members Australia-wide, with 37,500 in Victoria.

SSAA Victoria has developed a proposal to more accurately categorise longarms. Importantly, this categorisation proposal concerns only sporting longarms and does not seek to alter the categorisation of military longarms. The proposal also addresses recent issues relating to the categorisation of shotguns, in particular the lever-action firearms that have been commonly available in Australia for over a century.

The SSAA Victoria position is that if the Government adopted this proposal, there would be no tangible increased risk to community safety. If adopted, the proposal would also reduce administrative costs because some firearms would no longer require registration and others currently requiring a genuine reason plus a genuine need, would require only a genuine reason.

It is the SSAA Victoria position that the distinction between firearms owners who use legally-held firearms and criminals who misuse illegally-held firearms, must be strongly reinforced. The Victorian Government must communicate the distinction to its agencies, the community and the media. In support of communicating the distinction, sports shooting organisations should continue to promote prohibited persons legislation, which prevent unlicensed and prohibited individuals from gaining and holding firearms licences and using firearms.

In relation to the registration of firearms, it remains to be demonstrated that crimes have been solved or prevented through the use of firearms registration as it currently operates. We suggest States and Territories would be better served if they were to follow the New Zealand or Canadian models and redistribute funds from registration to appropriate law enforcement measures especially in areas of drug dealing, organised crime and juvenile misbehaviour.

Australian politicians need to understand that the present registration system is a very poor use of resources because:

1. Legally owned and registered firearms are rarely used in the commission of a crime.
2. Registration has an unproven role in the prevention or detection of crime.
3. Criminals operating outside the law do not comply with any licensing or firearm registration requirements.
4. The ongoing maintenance of State and Territory registries places a (probably ineffective) serious financial and staffing impost on Government and law enforcement agencies.

If the current registration system is maintained, this proposed re-categorisation of sporting longarms is likely to help simplify its operation and work to the benefit of administrators, end-users and ultimately the general community.

As concerns current firearm categories (**see Appendix A*), there are a number of inconsistencies. In some instances the current categorisation guidelines are neither reasonable nor logical. For example, there is clear evidence that the current categorisation deprives legitimate sportsmen and women access to sporting longarms that would facilitate their participation in lawful and legitimate activities.

Additionally, in this proposal, firearms are classified principally by the criteria of magazine capacity and reloading speed. In the case of the latter, the descriptor of 'semi-auto' is misleading and should be replaced with the correct term, 'self-loading'. This term accurately reflects the firearm's mechanical function and is used worldwide, as in 'Self-Loading Rifle' (SLR).

Further, a number of sporting longarms are at lower levels of the criteria. They cannot hold more than one cartridge and/or have low levels of muzzle energy or are extremely slow to reload. These firearms do not warrant registration. For example, while paintball guns come under the legal definition of a firearm, they have very low muzzle energy and consequently, no capacity for penetration. We suggest they are an adult toy. Therefore there is little or no benefit in maintaining their registration. Consequently, the SSAA Victoria proposes the following.

Categorisation Proposal

No Registration

1. Paintball guns
2. Single-shot air guns and air rifles of 5mm calibre or less with max. 13 ft./lbs. of energy.
3. Muzzle-loading firearms, single and double barrel, regardless of year of manufacture.

Rationale

Due to their low energy, a high percentage of air guns and air rifles are an inconsequential danger to the community. The 13ft/lb. ceiling is the current British standard to which air powered firearms are not registerable. Likewise, paint ball guns also very have a low energy rating and should be excluded. Muzzle loaders are used by black powder enthusiasts. They were generally used between 1700 and 1850 and typically take two minutes to load. They are generally single shot and unwieldy to use. Due to the inability to be reloaded quickly, they pose little or no threat to the community. In addition, the deletion of the items listed above would reduce the associated workload at firearms registries.

Registration

Category A

1. Multi-shot air guns and air rifles, 5.56mm calibre and larger with greater than 13 ft/ lbs of energy.
2. Shotguns including pump and lever-actions with a magazine capacity no greater than five rounds.
3. Rimfire rifles (not self-loading).
4. Centrefire rifles with a magazine capacity no greater than three rounds (not being self-loading).
5. Combination firearms, shotgun and rifle combinations including centre-fire and rim-fire.

Rationale

Lever-action shotguns were first produced in 1887 and pump-action shotguns a few years later in 1893. The lever-action shotgun – irrespective of magazine capacity – is currently a Category A firearm. We suggest it should remain so, but magazine capacity to be limited to five rounds. The pump-action shotgun is similarly a manually operated mechanism. For consistency it should be reclassified to Category A.

**See Appendix B and Electronic Visual Description*

Centrefire rifles with a magazine capacity up to three rounds (not being self-loading), combination firearms, shotgun and rifle combinations, including centrefire and rimfire, should also be reclassified from Category B to A. This is because the firearms safety and law test is the same for both Category A and B firearms and the only differences in the application process are genuine need and the firearm details.

Category B

1. Centrefire rifles (non-self-loading) with a magazine capacity greater than three rounds.
2. Centrefire rifles, self-loading with a magazine capacity no greater than three rounds.
3. Rimfire rifles, self-loading with a magazine capacity not greater than 10 rounds.
4. Shotguns, lever and pump action with a magazine capacity greater than five rounds, but less than 10 rounds.
5. Shotguns, self-loading with a magazine capacity up to three rounds.
6. Smooth bore, black powder cannon for ball (as it currently is).

Rationale

Sporting self-loading longarms are currently used internationally for lawful target shooting and hunting. Self-loading actions provide major practical advantages, particularly recoil reduction for women, young and disabled shooters.

Further, self-loading .22 rimfire rifles and centrefire rifles are the international standard for the destruction of pest animals and target shooting. These rifles also provide the same advantages as above.

The three-shot limitation equates to the three-barrelled modern shotguns and drillings (first designed in the 1890s) available today. **See Appendix C*

Category C

1. Shotguns, self-loading with a magazine capacity greater than three rounds but less than 10 rounds.
2. Rimfire rifles, self-loading with a magazine capacity greater than 10 rounds.
3. Centrefire, self-loading firearms with a magazine capacity greater than five rounds but not more than 10 rounds.
4. Tranquillizer guns.

Rational

Sporting-specific, self-loading centrefire rifles with larger capacity magazines are used world-wide for hunting as well as Shooting Competitions, including IPSC and other target events.

Category D (no alteration suggested)

1. Shotguns self-loading with a magazine capacity of more than 10 rounds.
2. Shotguns pump-action with a magazine capacity of more than 10 rounds.
3. Centrefire self-loading rifles with a magazine capacity of more than 10 rounds.

Category E (no alteration suggested)

1. Machine guns that are not handguns.
2. Tear gas guns or projectors.
3. Shotguns or rifles with a length less than 75cm measured parallel to the barrel.
4. Cannons that are not black powder and ball firing.
5. Mortars, bazookas and rocket-propelled grenades.

Category H (no alteration suggested)

1. Rimfire and centrefire handguns.

Appendix A

The following is an excerpt from the Firearms Act 1996, part one – Preliminary, pages five to eight.

Category A

- (a) an airgun;
- (b) a rimfire rifle (other than a semiautomatic rimfire rifle);
- (c) a shotgun (other than a pump action or semi-automatic shotgun);
- (d) any combination of a shotgun and rimfire rifle;

Category B

- (a) a muzzle loading firearm;
- (b) a centre fire rifle (other than an automatic or a semi-automatic centre fire rifle);
- (c) any combination of a shotgun and centre fire rifle;
- (d) a black powder, ball firing cannon;

Category C

- (a) a semi-automatic rimfire rifle with a magazine capacity of no more than 10 rounds;
- (b) a semi-automatic shotgun with a magazine capacity of no more than 5 rounds;
- (c) a pump action shotgun with a magazine capacity of no more than 5 rounds;
- (d) a tranquilliser gun;

Category D

- (a) a semi-automatic rimfire rifle with a magazine capacity of more than 10 rounds;
- (b) a semi-automatic shotgun with a magazine capacity of more than 5 rounds;
- (c) a pump action shotgun with a magazine capacity of more than 5 rounds;
- (d) a semi-automatic centre fire rifle;
- (e) any other firearm prescribed for the purposes of this category;
- (f) any other firearm that is declared under section 3A(1) to be a category D longarm;
- (g) any other firearm that is declared under section 3B(1)(a) to be a category D longarm;

Category E Longarm

- (a) a machine gun that is a longarm;
- (b) a tear gas gun or projector;
- (c) a shotgun or rifle with a length of less than 75 centimetres measured parallel to the barrel;
- (d) a mortar, bazooka, rocket propelled grenade or similar large calibre military firearm designed to fire an explosive or projectile or any other similar prescribed firearm;
- (da) a cannon which is not a black powder ball firing cannon;
- (e) any other firearm prescribed for the purposes of this category;
- (f) any other firearm that is declared under section 3A(1) to be a category E longarm;
- (g) any other firearm that is declared under section 3B(1)(b) to be a category E longarm;

Category E Handgun

- (a) a machine gun that is a handgun;
- (b) any handgun prescribed for the purposes of this category;
- (c) any other firearm that is declared under section 3A(1) to be a category E handgun;

Appendix B

(Reference Data)

1. Model 1893/ 1897 - Slide Action Shotgun

Reference: "The Winchester Handbook" 1981. ISBN 910156-04-2

Author: George Madis

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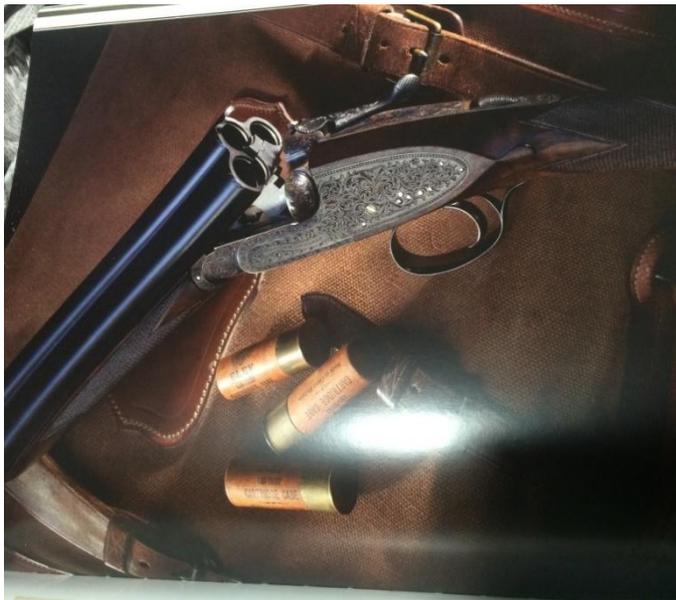
2. Model 1887 - Lever Action Shotgun

Reference: "The Winchester Handbook" 1981. ISBN 910156-04-2

Author: George Madis

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Appendix C



Westley Richards 3 Barrelled Gun
(C1911)

Electronic Visual Description

Lever Action Shotgun: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winchester_Model_1887/1901

Pump Action Shotgun: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winchester_Model_1897