Released by the Department of Finance
under the Freedom of Information Act 1982

FOI 24-25/091 - Document 14H

June 2023

Attachment C – Firearms risks to the community

Without a National Firearms Register (the Register) the following public safety risks will continue to endanger the Australian community. The following case studies highlight how the Register would contribute to improved public safety.

National firearms tracing

Under existing manual processes, jurisdictions can experience a delay of up to 37 days in identifying the location of firearms. International and interstate movement of firearms also cannot be reconciled in a timely fashion, a vulnerability that is being actively exploited by serious and organised crime. A Register will track firearms locations in near-real time, allowing illicit diversion to be identified and law enforcement to be notified of firearms risks before attending an address.

Case study – False export report

Throughout the early 1980s an Australian firearms dealer (now deceased) reported that 621 firearms had been exported to Papua New Guinea, but had instead diverted these firearms to the illicit market. This illicit diversion was only first detected in 2004 and, since this time, 64 of the 621 firearms have since been found on the illicit market. The Register would allow law enforcement to quickly identify this illicit diversion in near-real time, preventing the dealer from diverting firearms over the decade.

Case study – Interstate registration of firearms with an expired licence

South Australia is currently running a special operation to locate licence holders with expired licences that have actively registered firearms. The operation is ongoing and resource intensive. To date, several licence holders have been identified as moving interstate with their firearms without notifying the South Australia's Registry. The Register would provide jurisdictions with a near real time update of instances where licence holders have moved interstate and re-registered their firearms, allowing swift action to be taken where this occurs.

Case study – Records reconciliation

In early 2023, it appeared to South Australia Registry staff that there were over 100 firearms missing from a firearms dealer within the State, triggering an audit. The audit identified that the dealer had failed to notify the Registry of the firearms sales. The Register would have notified the Registry when the missing firearms were re-registered by other licence holders in near-real time and prevented the need for a resource intensive investigation resulting from an administrative error by the firearms dealer.

Released by the Department of Finance
under the Freedom of Information Act 1982

National licence verification

Individuals whose firearms licences have been cancelled can currently travel interstate and use their physical licence to illicitly obtain ammunition and firearms-related articles. The Register would address this vulnerability by creating a digital national licence verification service.

Case study – Wieambilla shootings

Nathaniel Train's firearms licence was suspended, but NSW Police were unable to locate him to seize his licence. Mr Train subsequently travelled to Queensland and used the physical NSW licence to purchase ammunition before the Wieambilla shootings. Once the Register is fully implemented, the dealer will be required to check the licence against a national verification service, which will prevent the sale of ammunition being in similar circumstances.

National information on firearms owners

Jurisdictions currently do not have timely access to national information on firearms owners, including licence suspensions or revocations from other jurisdictions. Individuals whose firearms licences are suspended or revoked often pose a high risk to themselves and others, and even small delays in sharing and actioning a suspension or revocation can have fatal consequences.

A Register would allow for near-real time sharing of this information and would notify all jurisdictions automatically when disqualifying circumstances arise, allowing for swift action to be taken.

Case study – Victoria shooting from firearm acquired after licence suspension

In Victoria, a licence holder had a permit to acquire a firearm. The licence was suspended on a Friday. However, on the Saturday, the person was able to acquire a firearm at a dealer due to the delay (lack of real-time update) in recording the new licence and permit status. The firearm was used that weekend resulting in a 12-hour siege. The Register will enable a dealer in any jurisdiction to check against a national verification service, preventing a similar firearm acquisition and resulting incident.

Case study – Interstate movement of firearms owner

A Northern Territory licence holder with registered firearms relocated to South Australia. The licensee had not notified South Australian authorities. The South Australian Registry was only notified through a phone call from their Northern Territory counterparts once the relocation was identified. These kinds of scenario present considerable risk to the community and frontline police, preventing law enforcement from identifying the interstate movement of firearms and their owners in a timely manner. The Register will enable greater intelligence and information sharing, including alerts and notifications for prescribed high risk events enabling improved identification of risks and greater ability for jurisdictions to respond quickly.