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NEWSLETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF JOHN TINGLE MLC

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UPDATE ON THE HANDGUN GRAB – MEETING WITH NSW POLICE MINISTER

I attended a meeting with the NSW Police Minister, Michael Costa, this morning, to discuss the Federal Government's proposals for a ban on handguns.

The Minister had recalled the Working Party he set up last August to advise him on changes to the NSW Firearms Act 1996, which were due to have been introduced into Parliament about now, but, after Monash and Howard's move, will probably be delayed until after the election. He consulted me about membership of the Working Party and I nominated individuals from the major shooting organisations - people I knew would make a real contribution - not just be seatwarmers.

This morning, he called me to a private meeting, before the Working Party meeting, to go through some of the proposals which have been aired publicly since the APMC meeting in Darwin. He made it clear there had been agreement on virtually *nothing*, and that all the States had arranged to do was to meet again later to discuss it further.

Mr Costa and I discussed the famous "list of 250" handguns which has been in circulation, and which has been causing a lot of anguish amongst pistol owners. We discussed some of its anomalies, such as the highly selective list of standard revolvers, such as the S&W686 S&W66 etc., and he gave me the impression he was not impressed by it.

It turns out this list is *not* official. It was certainly prepared by the Federal Government, and is clearly a wish-list of guns they would ban if they had their way. But he said it had not been tabled at the APMC meeting, or given to, or discussed by the Police Ministers. Instead, it was circulated close to the end of the meeting, to senior officers accompanying Ministers to the conference.

At my suggestion, Mr Costa will write a letter - today - to all the pistol clubs he can reach, telling them what actually transpired at the Darwin meeting, and stressing that no agreement has been reached about anything at this stage. He will also write to me, today, in the same terms, and has authorised me to pass the letter to any interested party, and to present it at the series of meetings we are having to discuss the handgun situation.

He has also asked me to arrange a couple of large-scale meetings of shooters, which he is prepared to address, and take questions from.

We then attended the Working Party meeting. The people on that Party, while appointed as individuals, represent the NSWAPA, SSAA, NSWRA, NSWACTA, Smallbore, Collectors, Dealers, Armourers etc.

At that meeting, Mr Costa made a number of points:

1. The list of 250 handguns is unofficial and means nothing. But he would seek the advice of the Working Party as to whether there were any firearms on it that were irrelevant to competition, or otherwise undesirable which could, perhaps be banned.

2. He is not in favour of banning any matches just on the basis that they are not international events. In fact he sees no point in banning established matches.
3. Most of the changes suggested, affecting licensed pistol owners, are already in place in NSW law under the current Act, and will make little if any difference to NSW pistol shooters.
4. There may need to be some strengthening of laws on compliance with storage requirements, and while police will do this from time to time, he would like to see an arrangement where clubs took more of a hand in ensuring that their members were compliant.
5. The system of graduated access to handguns for club members - that is specified periods of qualification before some firearms could be owned - might need to be looked at, and possibly defined more clearly.
6. Clubs would probably be given indemnity if they notified licensing authorities that a member was not a fit and proper person to hold a firearm licence.
7. The States would not help finance any buyback.

Mr Costa also made it clear that the State and Territories were far from agreement on any of the proposals put forward by the Federal Government; and that if the Federal Government wanted things banned, it would have to say what and how, and, most importantly, convince the States as to "why."

I feel most of the people attending the meeting felt the Minister is genuinely trying to find a way to avoid unnecessary grief to pistol shooters and shooters generally in NSW; and he reasserted that he would take no actions without consulting the Working Party. It will meet again on November 19.

The further timetable is that the Senior Officers' Group, which is made up of Directors-General of State and Territory Police Ministers, will meet with the Federal Government in Canberra on November 20; and as soon as possible after that, will report to their respective Police Ministers. The Police Ministers will then report to the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments on December 6, which is where the concrete decisions will be made as to what, if anything, is to be done to meet the Federal Government's push to ban handguns.

I believe that the situation is brighter, after this morning's meeting, but let me emphasise that there is absolutely no room for complacency. Even with the positive attitude of Mr Costa, the Federal Government is likely to put massive pressure on the States to go along with their proposals, if only to save face for John Howard, now that he's made such a big noise about banning handguns.

This still calls for tight co-operation between shooting groups, and a determination by pistol shooters that they will not give up without a fight. I am appalled to hear some clubs saying, already, that "the whole thing has been sorted out"; and "they're not going to take any of our guns"; and "if you have a gun that can be used in any competition, you'll be all right."

None of this is true. It's not all over. It's just beginning, and in NSW, today's meeting was just the first step in a long process which climaxes with the COAG meeting on December 6, and will certainly not be resolved finally until after the March 22 State election, when we see what new firearms legislation turns up on the books. In the meantime, keep your powder dry!



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