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## Thousands die with barely a murmur, but mention guns ...

**There's no justice nor worthwhile effect in victimising sports shooters for the crimes of others, writes Lisa Oldfield.**

Statements from the anti-gun lobby supporting the removal of weapons from law-abiding Australian citizens - most particularly the International Action Network on Small Arms and the Coalition for Gun Control - are emotive and completely without factual basis.

No reasonable person can confuse guns used by criminals as having any relationship to firearms owned by licensed, law-abiding sporting shooters. The nonsense dribbled by the anti-gun lobby is misinformation which unjustly and dishonestly scapegoats legitimately licensed shooting enthusiasts without benefit to the community.

Australians are killed in many ways. Indeed, some 2500 Australians kill themselves every year. The 400 or so Australians killed as a consequence of drink driving annually, the more than 500 who fall to their death each year, the hundreds who drown and the untold numbers who die through medical accident or malpractice are all important. But nothing gains a headline like the handful who are shot, because it seems the thousands who are killed by other means are somehow accepted.

Those who tug at our emotions about guns would have us believe that the murder of about 60 people each year by criminals using guns would miraculously stop if all guns were banned, but evidence worldwide makes it clear this is the stuff of fairytales.

Marijuana is banned: does this mean no one is smoking it? Heroin is banned: does that mean you can't buy it? Ecstasy and cocaine are banned: are those substances not available? It is illegal to speed, yet speed cameras are making a fortune. Despite the laws, recreational drug use is at an all-time high. Similarly, it can be argued that road laws have done little to impact on fatal accidents. When politicians and lobbyists speak of banning guns they should go straight to simply banning crime, because the effect will be the same - none at all.

Of about 300 murders in Australia each year, generally less than 20 per cent involve the use of a firearm. The Australian Bureau of Statistics makes it clear annual murder trends have remained unchanged despite John Howard spending \$500 million buying back 642,000 firearms from the community.

I have heard it said that this unprecedented expense was justified if it saved a single life, but did it save anyone? How many lives would that \$500 million have saved had the money gone to hospitals or medical research? What advances would have been made in cancer research or children's diseases if they had been the beneficiaries of \$500 million of taxpayer funds?

The vast majority of murders are committed not with guns, but with knives, blunt instruments and other means. Perhaps we could ban knives and blunt instruments, except history tells us that murderers would then use their bare hands. It is ridiculous to blame legal ownership of guns for what are broader and unrelated social problems.

The flaws in the debate on the legal ownership of handguns for competition purposes are clearly exposed by the experience in Britain. Following a tragedy involving a handgun, the authorities banned private ownership. At enormous cost, 200,000 guns were removed from the community.

Figures published in the British Hansard on crimes committed with handguns in Britain during 1999-2000 show those crimes have increased more than 40 per cent despite the ban. In that year there were 3685 crimes committed with handguns despite the fact that no ordinary citizen in Britain owns a handgun - so much for bans.

The Monash University incident was the first time in five years that a crime had been committed with a licensed handgun, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology, whose statistics also show that the increase in handgun-assisted murder is exclusively the result of killers with unlicensed guns.

The message is clear: bans do not work because criminals do not hand in their guns. Experience everywhere shows that despite the wholesale removal of guns from law abiding communities, criminals will still procure guns to commit crimes.

All law-abiding shooters support heavy penalties for those who use firearms for criminal purposes, but there is no justice and no positive effect in victimising sports shooters for other people's crimes.

Lisa Oldfield is the spokeswoman for the Firearm Dealers Association.