

17 June 2020



Arms Bill improved but problems remain

The changes made to the Arms Legislation Bill improve the legislation but do not ultimately solve the compliance burden that will be imposed on law-abiding hunters and shooting ranges.

The Game Animal Council agrees with the establishment of an independent authority to take over firearms licensing and administration from the Police. This is something the firearms community has long advocated for and can, if done properly, provide greater integrity to the licensing system and free the Police to focus purely on enforcement.

Further amendments to the Bill include useful provisions that will make it easier for those involved in farming and forestry to use prohibited firearms for animal control.

We are also pleased the GAC's advice that the new Arms Advisory Group be appointed by and report to the Minister of Police rather than the Commissioner of Police has been included. This is appropriate as it is the Minister who is responsible for the Act.

It is disappointing, however, that the firearms registry remains in the Bill.

We recommended as part of our submission that a registry be considered only following a truly independent assessment into whether it would achieve its stated objectives of increasing public safety and reducing criminal access to firearms.

The GAC welcomes the amendment that will see both the legislation and firearms registry reviewed after three years.

This is appropriate given the impact that the changes will have on legitimate firearms users.

With regards to shooting clubs and ranges we remain concerned that unnecessary compliance will make it more difficult to operate small rural-based volunteer-run facilities and therefore make it challenging for hunters to access safe places to practice and improve their firearm skills.

Finally, we note the practical amendment to the Bill that means that overseas visitors will be exempt from requirements to inform their health practitioner that they have been issued a firearms licence.

The Bill has progressively improved since its introduction last year. The Select Committee process ironed out some major issues and the latest amendments have sorted out a few more. However, the fundamental problem remains that it still places unnecessary compliance on legitimate firearms users without doing anything to address the issue of firearms being illegally used or falling into the wrong hands.