

Australian gun control advocates call for federal intervention to save firearms pact

From the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/26/australian-gun-control-advocates-call-for-federal-intervention-as-states-bow-to-firearms-lobby>

Report finds the national firearms agreement is ‘haemorrhaging’, with more than 50 breaches of the code by states and territories



Protesters in Sydney's Hyde Park on Saturday march in solidarity with victims of US gun violence. On Monday gun control advocates called for a referendum to make gun control laws a federal responsibility. Photograph: Danny Casey/AAP

[Gun control](#) advocates have called for federal intervention – and even a referendum – after commissioning a damning report that shows states and territories have trashed the historic 1996 national firearms agreement.

The agreement, which led to the surrender and destruction of more than 1.1m firearms, was signed by all states and territories after the Port Arthur massacre, and after threats by then-prime minister John Howard to hold a constitutional referendum on the issue.

The report by Gun Control Australia (GCA) found more than 50 breaches of the code by states and territories. Each jurisdiction had walked away in some way, the report found.

Australian gun lobby invests in rightwing parties in push to weaken reforms

GCA is now calling for a referendum to make gun control laws a federal responsibility and to prevent the “wreckage” of the 1996 agreement.

The organisation’s chair, Sam Lee, said the referendum was needed after “years of political pressure” by the gun lobby.

“The national firearms agreement is haemorrhaging because the states and territories are legislating it away in return for gun lobby votes and funding,” Lee said.

Last week, former deputy prime minister Tim Fischer [told Guardian Australia](#) he was “deeply concerned” about the emergence of an NRA-style gun lobby in Australia.

His comments came after it was revealed the home affairs minister, Peter Dutton, was considering establishing a committee [to allow gun importers to review proposed changes to firearms regulations](#) for “appropriateness and intent”.

Lee said the [election-eve revelations in Tasmania](#) that the Liberal government had plans to further water down gun laws in the state where the Port Arthur massacre occurred, were “a further nail in the coffin” of the 1996 agreement.

“If the states aren’t going to comply then [the agreement] is fairly useless,” Lee said.

She said Tasmania was already in breach of the national agreement by failing to ban prohibited firearms for competitive shooting, not complying with conditions related to self-loading (category D) weapons, and for allowing children as young as 12 to possess a firearm.

Concerns about children and firearms feature prominently in the GCA-commissioned report.

Despite the national agreement restricting gun licences to people over 18, every state and territory allows minors to possess and use firearms. Western Australian has no minimum age for club shoots.

New South Wales now allows the use of silencers, a breach of the 1996 code. It also allows semi-automatic weapons for use by people whose occupation is not pest control and has no legal limit on the amount of ammunition that can be purchased.

In Queensland gun owners can be licensed for 10 years, double the time limit in the national agreement, and a licence is not mandatory for the purchase of ammunition.

Tim Fischer warns 'NRA-inspired' firearms lobby targeting Australia's gun laws

In Western Australia, gun owner safety training is not required by law, except for handguns, and firearms sales are not limited to licensed dealers.

“Western Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales either do not, or only obliquely comply in legislation with an NFA requirement for an effective national firearm registry, a goal now delayed for over two decades,” the report says.

Lee said the report, which detailed 50 examples of noncompliance, showed the states “cannot be trusted to keep us safe”.

“Yes, we have have a great national firearms agreement, but that agreement means nothing if the states fail to comply with it and continue to erode it,” Lee said.

The Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia (Sifa) said in a statement the firearms agreement was not binding on states and the call for federal intervention was “quite extraordinary”.

“Sifa’s view is that any move to undermine the firm foundations of our federation – which have underpinned more than a century of political stability and nationhood – is to be questioned, particularly when such a move is suggested by a secretive special interest group that has never revealed its funding sources or membership,” the statement said.

“Sifa notes that the national firearms agreement is neither law, nor binding on the states. We also note that over the last two decades, Australian state jurisdictions have worked tirelessly to protect the safety and security of their citizens, supported by exemplary standards of behaviour modelled by Australia’s million licensed firearms owners.”

The federation said it supported a national, integrated, digital system of licensing and permitting that would remove paper-based compliance and allow jurisdictions to access real-time information on gun ownership.