



Australia's National Firearm Agreement

Thirty-five people were murdered and 18 people injured by a lone gunman in and around the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania in April 1996.

What has come to be known as the Port Arthur Massacre, Australia's deadliest mass shooting to date, prompted nationwide calls for tighter regulation of gun ownership.

This led federal and state governments to introduce strict gun laws under the National Firearm Agreement adopted in May 1996.

History of the agreement

The Australian government has little direct power to regulate guns beyond deciding what guns were allowed into the country.

Individual states and territories regulated private gun ownership, which led to inconsistent licencing, background checks and types of guns allowed before the National Firearm Agreement.

The National Firearm Agreement changed this by setting uniform gun laws and minimum safety standards each state and territory agreed to implement.

While the agreement was not enforceable, states and territories implemented most of the uncontroversial measures.

In 2002, further reforms strengthened the agreement by introducing the

National Firearm Trafficking Policy Agreement to address illegal gun possession and theft.

And then the National Handgun Control Agreement introduced some restrictions on handgun availability in 2003.

In 2017, the Law, Crime and Community Safety Council agreed to update the National Firearm Agreement to combine the 2002 agreements and reaffirm its commitment to strict gun regulation.

National Firearm Agreement

The agreement affirmed gun ownership and use as a privilege conditional on the overriding need to ensure public safety. All guns must be registered.

The agreement banned fully automatic and semi-automatic firearms, such as those used in the Port Arthur massacre.

The agreement limited the availability of non-military semi-automatic rifles and shotguns to primary producers, professional animal pest controllers and some clay target shooters.

The agreement implemented a buy-back amnesty that resulted in the surrender of 700,000 firearms, which police destroyed (about a third of all guns in the country at the time).

The agreement set up a registration and licencing system to include:

- a 28-day wait before being granted a firearm licence to allow for proper checks
- a fit and proper person requirement
- a permit to buy every gun
- a genuine reason/need to own a gun, with self-defence not being a valid reason
- uniform gun and ammunition security and storage standards
- compulsory safety courses
- nationwide firearms registration
- record all sales and all sales through a licensed gun dealer.

Gun Safety Outcomes

The National Firearm Agreement has led to fewer mass shootings (four or more dead) and a lower rate of gun-related deaths (murders and suicides).

However, growing political pressure from gun lobbyists on states and territories has led to weaker gun laws and the loss of core measures under the agreement to protect public safety.

And there are now 3.7 million guns (legal and illegal) in private hands in Australia, as many as at the time of the Port Arthur Massacre.

Who does not comply?

No state or territory has ever fully implemented all National Firearm Agreement measures.

In fact, state and territory governments have steadily weakened gun control and undermined the agreement's intentions:

- all states and territories allow minors to possess and use guns

- unlicensed shooting is permitted at shooting clubs
- the recommended gun licence term of one year is exceeded: Qld (5-10) TAS (5), NSW (5), VIC (5) and NT (5)
- Semi-automatic firearms are permitted for reasons outside the agreement in NSW, SA, TAS, Qld and VIC.
- handguns are permitted for reasons outside the agreement in VIC, NSW, NT, Qld, SA and WA
- storage safety rules have been weakened in Qld and SA
- ammunition possession and storage has been weakened in NSW, Qld, SA, VIC, SA and WA
- the 28-day cooling-off period has been relaxed in NSW, NT, WA and TAS
- WA has weakened gun sales recording
- a National Firearm Registry has *not* been set up.

Future of Australia's gun laws

Departures from the National Firearm Agreement are continuing to erode Australia's gun control standards.

Australians must stay alert and continue to advocate for strict gun laws to protect community safety.

Gun Control Australia

Gun Control Australia represents the will of most Australians who support uniform, effective and sensible firearms laws and policy.

For more information visit:

www.guncontrolaustralia.org